
A pedagogy of supervision: 'knowledgeability' through relational engagement

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Abstract

This article is a response to a debate on the nature of postgraduate thesis supervision. I was an initial participant in this debate, having published an article on the topic in 2005. In this response article I offer an exposition of what I term a 'pedagogy of supervision' (PoS), which I suggest as a way of addressing the debate's silence about the link between the personal or subjective dynamics of students' thesis work and their knowledgeability acquisition processes during the supervision process. Based on my personal supervision experiences, I present three engagement moments – habitus engagement, knowledgeability engagement and data-analysis engagement – as a way of substantiating a productive PoS approach. The article is an argument for understanding supervision work as leveraging students' intellectual knowledgeability through active relational mediation, which I suggest is more likely to secure the student's ability to produce a thesis that makes a knowledge contribution to the chosen field of study.

This article is a response to a debate about the nature of postgraduate thesis supervision that crystallised in the pages of the *Journal of Education* and *South African Journal of Higher Education*. This debate was picked up in an edited book published by my department entitled *Debating Thesis Supervision: Perspectives from a University Education Department* (Fataar, 2012a), which consolidated the articles and provided space for the various authors to respond to criticisms and emerging themes on this hitherto under-researched area of postgraduate work. The debate was sparked by University of KwaZulu-Natal academic, Wayne Hugo, who wrote his 2009 article in response to two unconnected articles on postgraduate supervision by myself and my departmental colleague, Yusef Waghid. Fataar (2005) focused on the relational dynamics between supervisor and supervised, while Waghid provided an exposition of supervision as critical friendship (2005).

Hugo's (2009) article was a response to what he perceived as a silence in both our arguments, i.e. the epistemic dimension, by which he refers to "the very

real need for students to submit to the rules, processes and realities of academic communities as a precondition to finding their academic voice within it” (pp.705–706). Hugo’s article is a welcome addition to Fataar’s and Waghid’s contributions, turning as it does to the intellectual insertion of students into existing communities of scholarship and their theoretical or conceptual entailments. Nelleke Bak (2011), then a member of our department at Stellenbosch University, now Director of Postgraduate Studies at the University of Cape Town, wrote a critique of our three positions, suggesting that each of our arguments has inherent risks, an appreciation of which would bring the supervision process into sharper definition. Following on these articles, each of our responses in the *Debating Thesis Supervision* book, in turn, provided an additional platform for explanation and elaboration of our earlier positions.

This debate has brought a number of constitutive properties of supervision to academic notice. It lays the basis for deeper theoretical and empirical work, especially in the context of demand for an increase in doctoral thesis output, which is currently trumped by the stringent performative requirements by which academic work now gains legitimacy and recognition. The focus on the complex formative dynamics involved in the production of academics, in this case through a consideration of thesis supervision, is informed by the need to reinsert a more progressive development orientation into academic work. More specifically, this debate has highlighted the interplay between subjective or relational dimensions in the authority relations that govern the process, the importance and necessity of the epistemic induction dimension, and the intricacies of developing a student’s informed voice, while avoiding captivity by one set of theoretical tools or academic gurus (Bak, 2011, p.1058).

In my response to the debate (see Fataar, 2012b) I argued that a productive next step for this debate would lie in what has emerged in recent literature as a ‘pedagogy of supervision’ (see Green, 2005) with reference to the pedagogical transfer dynamics involved between supervisors and thesis students. This, I believe, takes the debate to the pedagogical heart of the supervision issue, i.e. a conceptual focus on the constitutive dynamics that inform the nature and extent of ‘student learning’ in the thesis-writing process. The emphasis on ‘critical friendship’ by Waghid, the ‘supervision relationality’ focus of Fataar, and Hugo’s epistemic induction turn get to student learning but I would suggest shadows the pedagogical or learning dimension. They never get directly to a consideration of the pedagogical

conversational and transfer mechanics of what I will argue is a key constitutive locus of successful supervision. It is here that the epistemological veracity of thesis work is established, risks taken, the authority of the supervisor asserted, the informed voice of the student cultivated and established, and where s/he learns to ‘speak back’ with growing autonomy in order to establish the degree of academic independence necessary for making a creative academic contribution to the chosen field.

Towards a pedagogy of supervision (PoS)

In my response in the 2012 book I suggested that although “relationality, dialogicality and epistemic induction” (Fataar 2012b, p.102) are constitutive dimensions of supervision, they are not sufficient or exhaustive. The focus has to shift to an explanation of the pedagogical engine of supervision, that is, the nature and complexity of the pedagogical or knowledge transfer practices involved in supervision, which I will develop here around the relationship between knowledgeability and relationality as key to supervision pedagogy. As I explained, a ‘pedagogy of supervision’ involves working with scholarly identity processes, based on an acute awareness of, and sensitivity to, the ontological dimension of doing research, involving being and becoming, alertness to the student’s conceptual capacities, learning styles and modes of intellectual processing. I suggested that,

Productive thesis pedagogy leverages these as assets worthy of working through and building on, as opposed to a deficit view of students in need of unidirectional advice and instruction. It is to a conceptual elaboration and empirical exemplification of such a pedagogy of supervision that I think the debate on the modalities of effective supervision should now turn (2012b, p.103).

One key assumption is that a PoS proceeds on the basis of a recognition that teaching and learning in education generally are based on an attempt to close the pedagogical gap between students and their intellectual and cultural capitals (in Bourdieu’s sense), on the one hand, and their acquisition of the educational or intellectual capital or knowledge of the school or university, on the other. Pedagogy therefore always involves a capital alignment process between home or community and school or university, and in the case of this article the alignment practices between supervisors and thesis students. This is particularly pertinent in contexts such as South Africa, where the expansion of university education over the last two decades has meant that many

students are black and first generation whose cultural capital backgrounds are largely un- or mis-aligned with university knowledge-acquisition expectations. This is typically expressed in my department, where most of our postgraduate thesis candidates are first-generation, black and part-time students who have chosen to study at a former Afrikaner institution that has historically catered for Afrikaner students, based on Afrikaans as medium of instruction and whose institutional arrangements have been attuned to this cultural orientation. Currently, alignment adaptation processes are mediating sites and spaces in the university unevenly and in staccato fashion. My department, for example, has been reasonably successful in its attempts to establish a responsive intellectual infrastructure attuned to student needs that bridges the gap between the university's adapting institutional culture and the specific requirements of students (see Departmental Review Report, 2012). This is an on-going challenge and preoccupation. Such an orienting intellectual platform is meant to underpin our efforts to provide a supporting and enriching academic environment and culture necessary for our students' thesis work.

The argument for a PoS in a South African context such as our university and department is based on making educational, cultural and infrastructural alignments that provide genuine and inclusive access to a changing student profile. This involves not only Wayne Hugo's call for awareness of epistemic induction into knowledge networks, but also simultaneous engagement with the personal subjective dimensions of thesis students as they engage in their thesis work. Referring to Hugo's exemplifying case, yes, we see Brenda's insertion into a specific network or reference community and her exposure to a set of analytical tools. But we do not get to understand her intellectual and personal engagements that would explain how Brenda takes to her learning in the supervision context as she mounts her network entry and take-up of the analytical tools on offer. In other words, an explanation of the engine of the supervision relationship process, the constitutive dynamics between Brenda the student and Hugo as her supervisor, is missing. The question I am interested in is who Brenda is and how she mounts her research learning as she subjectively engages and mediates her thesis learning processes, and how she personally encounters and mediates the supervision process that gets her into a position to acquire the knowledgeability that is required to accomplish her thesis work.

Nelleke Bak's prescient warning about the implied relativism of a constructivist position notwithstanding, a PoS is based on subjective

engagement and mediation of the knowledge dimension of thesis work. This is not to encourage the student to develop a doctoral voice outside the “accepted practices and rules that constitute disciplinary communities” (Bak 2011, p.1055), nor is it to ignore their induction into what Bak highlights as “two distinct but equally necessary processes – socialization and individuation” (p.1055). Bak’s call for doctoral supervision to be organised around developing the student’s ‘informed disciplinary voice’ is precisely enabled through the supervisor’s ability to facilitate the acquisition of such thesis expertise at the intersection of the student’s subjective mediations, on the one hand, and the knowledgeability dimension, on the other. A PoS therefore locates itself at the leveraging point of this interaction, getting students to develop their knowledgeability through an active mediation by the supervisor of the student’s personal approaches to thesis work.

Lingard explains that the quality of pedagogical alignment is an important social justice issue in education (2005). He favours a view of pedagogy as involving in the broadest sense “an implicit human characteristic in relationships between the mature and neophyte members of a culture, as something which was social and collective in character, and something which was as much about social learning as cognitive gains” (Lingard 2005, p.166). The emphasis here is on learning as both social and cognitive, or as Wortham (2005, p.715) explains, “when students and teachers [supervisors] discuss subject matter, at least two processes generally occur: students become socially identified as recognizable types of people, and students learn subject matter”. The combined focus is on the imbrication of the social or subjective and the knowledge immersion dimension of the supervision process. The focus is thus on the ways in which supervisors work at the intersection of the student’s personal approaches and the impact of these on her learning adaptation to the knowledgeability necessary for thesis work.

Given this intersecting locus, a PoS is based on the view that supervisory pedagogical activity involves an authoritative relationship between the supervisor and supervised, on the one hand, and knowledge transfer practices central to thesis work, on the other. Relationality and knowledge are both accommodated. A PoS, therefore, focuses on the formative interaction between the two aspects, involving a dynamic and iterative process captured by the notion ‘knowledgeability’, in reference to the academic or scholarly comportment and know-how that a thesis student comes to acquire during the thesis-writing process. Knowledgeability is thus a referent for the intellectual capability to do a thesis. The supervision process, I argue, ought to be based

on an active facilitation and acquisition of such a knowledgeability that would place the student in a position to mount the thesis process successfully.

This PoS focus is situated in a growing body of international literature on doctoral supervision (see, for example, Manathunga, 2005, Lee and Green 2009, Hopwood, 2010). Green (2005, p.151) views postgraduate research supervision as a “problematic issue, practically and theoretically”, and therefore in need of on-going research. Green presents supervision as a distinctive kind of pedagogic practice, what he explains as a practice implicated in the production of identity as much as in the production of knowledge. Consonant with my concern for a PoS focus on the imbrication of knowledge and relational subjectivity, Green places the analytical spotlight of research supervision on “the psycho-social dynamics of struggle, submission and subjectification, including the role and significance of fantasy” (p.151). He explains that supervision has to be understood as a “[pedagogical] practice producing subjects, as directly and indirectly implicated in the socio-symbolic work of subject formation, or the discursive construction of subjectivity: the *constitution* of the academic subject” (p.151). A PoS focus is precisely intended to capture a productive view of supervision pedagogy as a discursive practice where,

Subjects are formed as an ensemble of knowledges, capacities, identities and dispositions through the interplay of specific social relations and social practices, mediated by language. This is always a fragile ensemble, a provisional settlement, with various degrees of durability. Moreover, this must be understood as necessarily a *relational* subjectivity. Academics, graduate students and their discourse / disciplinary communities are implicated in social/symbolic networks and circuits of identification and citation, repetition and renewal, learning and forgetting. . . . Doctoral pedagogy is as much about the production of *identity*, then, as it is the production of *knowledge*. At issue is the (re)production of specific research identities (Green, p.162).

Elaborating on the centrality of subject formation in the supervision process, Johnson, Lee and Green (2000, p.136) discuss the form of personhood assumed by the pedagogical practices of supervision. They identify gender problematics as intricately connected to this enterprise. They are particularly concerned with the “seemingly unproblematic status of autonomy or independence as the goal of a postgraduate pedagogy” (p.145). Instead of viewing the student as already possessing innate capacity and skills to accomplish the thesis work and therefore requiring only a light supervisory touch, they signpost a view of the goal of autonomy as that of research learning and skills development. In other words, “the autonomy sought of the

student can be recognised as a set of capacities, a mode of conducting oneself, that can be learnt – and taught [during the supervision process] – rather than a capacity which already exists in the individual” (p.145). Johnson, Lee and Green go on to suggest that the supervisor no longer needs to be a ‘master’ but a teacher of particular skills, ways of thinking and writing. I would suggest that a PoS resides precisely in the types of pedagogical processes and relationships between supervisor and student that optimise the student’s opportunity to learn, where she is able to acquire conceptual skills and intellectual capacity, i.e. the necessary knowledgeability or intellectual capability that will enable her to mount the thesis process with productive intent and creative capacity. In this respect, Franke and Arvindson argue that “research supervision can be regarded as a knowledge and relational process which takes place in the encounter between student and supervised” (2011, p.8). In this process the doctoral student is given the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be able to work as an independent researcher. This is carefully crafted within a mediating set of dialogical processes, in terms of which the supervisor leads the student to an engagement with her unfolding academic subjectivity, unlocking the student’s required knowledgeability for productive thesis work.

Three supervision pedagogy moments

I now go on to discuss elements of what I think a developing PoS approach should entail. I draw briefly on three key pedagogical moments based on emerging themes in my own supervision work. Each of these moments is meant to exemplify a key element of a PoS approach. Viewing these as (non-linear) ‘moments’ is meant to bring attention to the dialogicality of the supervision process. This involves a view of learning as conversation, surreptitiousness and art. But it is neither without deliberative knowledge transfer intent nor authoritative mediation by the supervisor. As I argued in my 2005 article, the authority of the supervisor is key to the conversation and learning process. This authority is established and continually negotiated during the supervision process. As I suggested, establishing one’s role as a supervisor has to be based on the supervisor’s “willingness to understand the specific ways in which they (students) come to the process, displaying awareness of their personal and intellectual requirements, and facilitating their immersion into the necessary repertoires” (Fataar, 2005, p.57) of thesis work. In the discussion below I throw the spotlight on a PoS as authoritative

mediation, based on some of my approaches to 'align' the students' subjective orientations with the knowledge dimension of their thesis work. I will show how a PoS, by engaging the students' personal stances and approaches with regard to various intellectual dimensions of their work, is able to establish the necessary knowledgeability or 'know how' for productive thesis work.

The habitus engagement moment

This moment involves active mediation of students' intellectual approaches early in their thesis work, often while doing their proposals, but even later on. Based on a shift similar to the ones made by the two students described in my 2005 article, this moment involves shedding a normative orientation to thesis work for an analytical one. As I explained, this shift allowed them to take on a scholarly comportment which enabled them to ask appropriate research questions (2005). The focus was on how the supervision process, through dialogue, reading, intellectual mapping and active mediation by myself as supervisor, enabled the students to bring their intellectual projects into view. Building on this focus, the habitus negotiation moment is a referent for the intellectual immersion processes that students are inducted into which facilitate the acquisition of a thesis or scholarly comportment.

Relational engagement, I argue, is paramount in the student's entry into thesis work. Such engagement has a collective group socialising dimension and a personal individualising dimension, the latter encompassing one-on-one dialogue between the supervisor and student. The socialising dimension involves the student's entry into a postgraduate student community where they are inducted into the academic conversations of their student peers and academics. This forms the students' community of practice within which they initially participate peripherally but later become fully immersed in the community's academic discoursing. Facilitating entry into this community has to contend with the students' personal approaches to academic study. These communities have recently emerged in universities as one important vehicle for facilitating thesis throughput. In the case of my department our students are practising teachers, district officials or educational workers. Most of them are registered for part-time study. They are invariably committed to processes of educational improvement.

Thesis supervision has to contend with the ‘field’ effects of their practice-based professional identities. Their educational practices at schools or district offices represent complex interactions with their own structures, rules, preferences and discourses (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Fields, according to Bourdieu, have their own rules, *modus operandi* and sense of autonomy. The students bring the field effects from their professional sites into the academic field of doctoral study at the university, where they now have to negotiate the structures and discourses of the academic field of the university. Nonetheless, their practice-based professional field effects never disappear. A PoS supports the student’s navigation between the practice-orientated discourses of their professional practice and induction into the academic discoursing of the thesis research community at the university.

Our students choose to do academic study as an expression of their commitment to change and improvement at their educational sites. This choice is often made in the context of their having become somewhat disillusioned and distanced from the trajectories of change at their schools and educational places of work. They express exasperation at being ensnared by a crisis management culture at their workplaces and an accountability regime that stifles their creativity. The move to becoming a doctoral student is simultaneously redemptive and a search for understandings that can improve practice. Both are in play in their emerging scholarly habituses. The supervision process has to engage both by working from within the possibilities and constraints of their habitus positions. Their scholarly identity has to emerge out of their professional habitus, not alongside it or removed from their everyday educational concerns. The moment of habitus engagement recognises the impact of their professional field effects on their approaches to the thesis work, which is invariably characterised by their commitment to social improvement based on a desire to contribute to practical improvement at their educational sites. Examples of these commitments are students’ desire for leadership improvement, effective curriculum implementation, or improving student discipline. An effective PoS mobilises a conversation that leverages ‘readerly’ understandings of these issues. In other words, it is through encouraging focused reading and mediated conversation on these issues that an interpretive language or a language of description begins to emerge. Acquiring academic perspective facilitates the shift from a practice improvement orientation to an academic orientation towards their practice. Supervision as habitus negotiation is therefore not intended to alienate students from their practical concerns. Rather, rooted in these concerns, it aims to insert an academic language that connects directly

with the student's interests, turning them into an academic enquiry orientation to thesis work.

This view draws on Reay's explanation of habitus as the "sedimentation of history, structure and culture in individual dispositions to practice" (2004, p.333). As individual disposition, the habitus develops a 'feel for the game' – in this case the feel for becoming a doctoral student during the thesis process. This disposition emerges in relation to the complex interaction of habitus and field over time. Reay points out that it is important to recognise that while a field, such as the practice-based professional contexts of these students, does not dictate behaviour in a preordained manner, each individual is "open to infiltration and influence by a number of (disparate) forces of various influences and power" (p.333). Supervision mediation ought to proceed on the basis that thesis students are able to undergo an adjustment in their habitus centred on their immersion in the context of an academic field at university.

My department facilitates this habitus engagement by, for example, leveraging the university to become more responsive to the specific demands of part-time students, especially in making its support services available to these students after hours and on weekends. Our deliberate organisation of what we call 'soft academic infrastructure' to support thesis work entails, among other things, organising research days and weekends throughout the year in which we provide a combination of workshop-type opportunities for the acquisition of research skills, academic literacy, and exposure to theoretical and methodological conversations led by academics or students who are at an advanced stage of their thesis work. These research days are held every eight to ten weeks. They generate enormous enthusiasm and camaraderie, exposing students to a range of intellectual orientations, student peer work, and the personal struggles and delights associated with immersion into novel explanations and complex theoretical frameworks.

This type of academic community runs on what Collins refers to as a strong affective dimension that gets generated while the students are exposed to the academic discoursing of the group. Collins argues that such academic communities are made up of "formal ritual chains which bind members in a moral community, and which create symbols that act as lenses through which members view the world, and as codes by which they communicate" (2000, p.22). He suggests that these chains are defined by two elements, namely 'emotional energy', which refers to the interactive relational processes inside the ritual chains that imbue participants with the energy to focus on their

academic immersion, and ‘cultural capital’, which is the academic ‘know how’ of the specific community. The quality of these two elements determines successful academic immersion. Both have to be present. Their presence would more likely lead to an enhanced academic environment with positive consequences for thesis work, while conversely low levels of either would have a negative impact.

The platform for engaging the student’s academic habitus is provided by our department’s academic socialising activities. This provides the students with emotional energy, support networks and exposure to academic discoursing necessary for them to navigate the habitus shift required to adopt an analytical or academic comportment. An engaging supervision process facilitates this shift. But, operating in tandem, and intersecting with the collective socialising dimension of periodic departmental programmes and its soft academic infrastructural support, is the individualising intellectual-becoming dimension aimed at cultivating the knowledgeability by which thesis work proceeds (Rorty’s ‘individuation’ as pointed out by Nelleke Bak 2011, p.1055). Emotional energy and intellectual excitement are not enough. The supervision relationship must turn on the intellectual capacitation necessary for thesis work. It is to a discussion of this element of a PoS that I move to in the next section of this article.

The knowledgeability engagement moment

While habitus engagement is intended to shift students’ approaches to their thesis work from a normative to an analytical orientation, the knowledgeability moment refers to their scholarly or know-how acquisition. The intellectual capacity to accomplish the various dimensions of thesis work is the central focus of the authoritative interactions between supervisor and students. A productive PoS leverages such capacitation through dialogical interaction throughout the process. The supervisor’s leveraging is centred on the students’ emerging and evolving knowledge orientations and research questions. Mediating dialogue is intended to get students to do a range of strategic activities in the context of dialogue with the supervisor. What is central to this leveraging is the supervisor’s sensitivity to the students’ subjective or personal connectedness to the process, i.e. the personal basis on which they approach the knowledge dimension. A PoS is alert to personal or conceptual blockages that emerge during thesis work, and how, for example,

the personal dimension is implicated in choosing a particular knowledge focus, methodological approach or theoretical framework. Understanding the personal motivation for, and approaches to, the particular study she chooses provides the supervisor grounds for effective engagement. Working relationally through the personal dimension requires attentiveness to the peculiar nature of the student's conceptual, methodological and other challenges that emerge over time. It also involves understanding that knowledgeability capacitation runs through the personal investments students are prepared and willing to make while they work on their theses. The student's intellectual capacity is leveraged by working through the personal approaches at play in her thesis work.

The knowledgeability moment is a referent for engaging with the students' intellectual processes throughout the thesis process. Such engagement shifts and turns during the process, moderating at some points as students acquire their informed voice, and picking up in intensity at key moments of difficulty and challenge. Conceptual challenges or blockages are present throughout the process. Supervisors have to develop an ability to recognise and work with the specificity of these challenges as they emerge. At the initial stages the knowledgeability dimension is based on strategic academic reading by the student, facilitated by constant dialogue between the supervisor and the student. The nature, focus and extent of the student's reading and conceptual engagement change during the thesis process. I initially advise students to do some orientating reading that connects with their expressed areas of research. These might include reading newspaper articles or novels that connect with and highlight the conceptual and contingent complexities associated with their intended focus of study. Reading such popular texts provides the student and supervisor with talking points around the social nuances and complexity of such a focus, which in turn informs the way the student comes to understand the knowledge question that she might pursue. It also immediately gives them an idea of my own proclivity for working with students who are prepared to do research based on conceptually mapping such social complexity as it pertains to education. My subjectivity comes strongly to the fore as I seek to indicate the type of work I am prepared to supervise and the expected intellectual rigour of the ensuing process. Giving them my own scholarly work to read, which I also do early on, is meant to indicate the nature of the research that I am prepared to supervise as much as it is an indication of the expected qualitative engagement that they can expect during the supervision process. This is not a supervision straightjacket. It is based on setting the rules of the relational engagement about the knowledge

dimensions of the thesis work. The mediating authority of the supervisor is crucial to the student's knowledgeability enhancement.

The students' informed voice comes into focus during the development of the knowledge puzzle. Growth in the students' knowledgeability emerges with greater independence as they pursue the knowledge focus throughout the thesis process. It is deliberative engagement over the nature of the study and its analytical pursuit throughout that instantiates the student's autonomy and ownership of the knowledge contribution of the thesis. The primary concern of the supervision process is therefore to keep the student focused on the pursuit of the analytical thread that runs through the thesis work. Supervision dialogue centres on the links between the various components of the thesis, including the research questions, literature coverage, conceptual approaches, methodological preferences and data-processing modalities. Keeping the thesis work primarily focused on this thread requires deliberative and supportive engagement. Supplying advice that unblocks conceptual cul-de-sacs, suggesting further readings, advising students to get on with the data-processing work or writing are important supervisory activities that move the thesis work forward productively.

Keeping the dialogue trained on the research focus means supervisors have to be aware of the student's personal investments in this focus. My experiences with my doctoral students suggest that students invariably choose a focus that emerges from their practical concerns as educators which are filtered through their personal biographies. One of my students was motivated by the links between home, neighbourhood and school in explaining Grade 6 students' learning practices. Her interest was driven by her own schooling in impoverished circumstances. As a teacher she always made learning connections between her students' home circumstances and their classroom learning. This is where her interest in student learning as a thesis topic emerged from. My role as supervisor was to point her in the direction of literature that brought these school-home linkages to the fore. My own work on the 'spatialisation of education' was also at play in cultivating this student's focus. But it was her own pursuit of key conceptual literature focusing on students' learning connections across multiple spaces that brought her intellectual focus into view. The consequent multidimensionality and depth that she gave to the focus translated into her choice of ethnography based on deep immersion as her methodological orientation. Her emerging knowledgeability cultivated in mediated and supportive supervisory dialogue was driven by her personal investment in understanding the learning practices

of students as much as it was informed by her vigorous reading, mapping and intellectual processing of the intellectual dimensions that made her study possible and gave her the necessary intellectual capital to pursue her thesis to completion.

My supervisory task was to keep the student on task throughout her research immersion, the data-mining process and analytical work. I helped her identify and resolve conceptual challenges, keeping the study modest and focused, and suggesting ways of working with her conceptual tools. What motivated the student during this three-year process and kept her on track was a tenacious personal commitment to the study, initially driven by her own concerns for children who, like her, mounted their school learning in difficult circumstances. She became enthralled by the lives of the children she was studying, struggling at some points to establish the necessary distance to 'see' and enable the analysis. This was achieved through vigorous interaction during the supervision consultations. This enabled her to bring the analytical task into view. After she worked through the 'symbolic violence' that involved turning people's storied lives into data fragments, the student was able to get stuck into the data processing and emerging analysis.

Most of this type of thesis activity was entirely new to the student. She had never before engaged in ethnography or used theory in such as novel and unorthodox manner. She encountered many frustrations along the way, but her commitment never wavered even when at one stage I had expressed, via email, displeasure at her progress. She described receiving this email as a low point, but instead of sulking for too long she recommitted to the task at hand. Her thesis work had clearly unleashed a level of personal commitment that enabled her to stay focused on the myriad intellectual and other tasks required to accomplish her work. My task was to develop a dialogical approach based on understanding the personal and conceptual blockages that emerged from time to time, leveraging 'know-how' by providing insight into their potential resolution, and suggest new conceptual angles to resolves dilemmas.

This type of relational engagement secures the supervision process. It is based on awareness of the personal investments that students make in their thesis work, their commitments to particular orientations to the study, and the blockages and challenges experienced at various stages of their thesis work. The supervisor leverages a mediating dialogue that enables the student to develop the ability to work productively on the various elements of the thesis. As suggested, a PoS is trained on intellectual capacity leveraging that runs

through these personal investments. This is further illustrated in the discussion below on supervisory dynamics that emerge at critical points during the process.

The data-analysis engagement moment

The previous section focused on thesis knowledgeability dynamics during supervisory interaction. It advanced a view of the nature of relational engagement throughout the thesis process. This section is a discussion of one challenging occasion that arose during my supervision which played out during one of my student's struggle with data-analysis. Other examples of such challenging occasions have to do with identifying the knowledge puzzle, methodological problems that emerge during the research, the development and application of theoretical tools, and data processing. What makes these moments crucial in my experience is that they provide intellectual and knowledgeability transfer challenges that the supervisor has to confront. These are important dialogical moments that must be met with intellectual fortitude. The supervision process has to work productively through them to get the student's work back on track. Addressing them requires focused dialogical leveraging during the supervision process. It is my argument that intense subjectivity-orientated guidance by the supervisor provides the student with the platform to acquire the know-how to address such challenges.

During my own doctoral supervision experiences the data-analysis chapter invariably produces an impasse. I puzzle about my own role at play in this situation. It might be that the entire supervision process, especially from the start, has to be trained directly on developing conceptual reflexivity and intellectual capacity transfer about this important aspect, standing as it does at the heart of the knowledge contribution of the thesis. It is the ability of the student to write a successful data-analysis chapter that determines the intellectual veracity of the thesis. Every other dimension culminates in this aspect. It might be that the socialising dimension of thesis work and its intellectual individualising aspects need to focus more purposively on this thesis orientating and culminating skill.

I have come to understand that data-analysis is necessarily complex and daunting. It brings together the various elements of thesis work. The data-

analysis chapter answers the main research question of the study. It is based on the theoretical framework developed earlier on during the thesis-writing process and requires the student's know-how to be applied directly to a 'reading' of the data. It also has to stand in conversation with the essential literature and conceptual strands that are related to the study. The analysis cannot stand outside of these strands. But it has to aim for an intellectual distance that guarantees the thesis its independent knowledge contribution to the existing literature on a chosen topic.

The research data play a different role in the analyses process. Whereas during the data-presentation chapters the data are presented in themes and sub-themes in response to research questions, in the data-analysis chapter the analytical argument is primary. On the one hand, the data are meant to exemplify the argument, providing the empirical basis for the presentation of the argument. On the other hand, the argument cannot be unfolded if the data don't support it. In other words, the student cannot make an argument without data support, although the unfolding of an argument is primary. The data have a 'secondary' exemplifying role in the analysis.

The data-analysis moment can be regarded as the culmination of the student's display of his acquired knowledgeability capacity. Thesis supervision engagement is organised around the building of this capacity. The learning engagement throughout has to be trained on developing the student's capacity to do the required analytical work for the data-analysis chapter. In addition, it is arguably at this point that the supervision relationship is at its most intense and engaging. In my experience this is where knowledgeability engagement has to leverage the conceptual skills necessary for unlocking students' analytical skills and writing ability.

What is required is an understanding of complex personal dynamics at play for students during this stage. Having worked on their theses for two to three years or more, they begin to see the finishing line but are often frustrated by the enormity of the analytical task in front of them. It is often here that family and other personal dynamics begin to have an impact. Families are expected to make enormous sacrifices to support the student's doctoral work. My students often talk at this stage about the difficulty of having to manage their family's desire for them to finish the thesis. This is in addition to work-related pressures and the threat of additional financial challenges that extending their study might entail. Fatigue also plays a role in their attitude and mind-set at this crucial stage. It seems to me that the students' attitude to accomplishing

the analysis chapter in the light of these personal constraints plays a major role in their personal approaches to the complex task of writing the chapter.

One crucial difficulty that characterises their struggles with the data-analysis is their apparent inability to differentiate the analytical task from the data-presentation task. Some students end up writing another data-presentation-type chapter. They also struggle to operationalise their theoretical lenses to inform the analysis, often introducing additional theoretical work that destabilises the analytical pursuit entirely. Answering the research question is another difficulty and so is the over-use of data in the writing. They struggle to proceed with a light empirical touch. In other words, they are confused about the purpose and focus of the data-analysis moment, which translates into inchoate attempts at writing this chapter. This is notwithstanding the supervision dialogue that accompanies their initial attempts at writing this chapter.

In my experience the inefficacy of their attempts is always brought to the fore in the first drafts of this chapter. This is when I encounter the specificity of the challenge for each student, which provides me with a basis for the ensuing counteracting deliberation. What is required at this stage is an acute awareness of the nature and extent of the challenge that the analytical moment throws up. The initial draft is the mediating text for this deliberative engagement. The supervision dialogue is trained on clarifying the purposes of the analytical work. It develops an understanding of the form and intent of the analysis chapter. Getting students to see that answering the study's research question is the main aim of the chapter. Establishing the conceptual distinctiveness of the data-presentation and data-analysis chapters is crucial. I explained this distinctiveness to one of my students in an email thus:

Chapter 5 [data presentation] was a presentation of the data guided by your conceptual categories. What you successfully accomplished here was to present the data in response to these categories. This gave us a very powerful picture of the principals' positioning in their leadership field, their location in relation to their various capitals and their specific habitus formations in interaction with their school contexts [This student used Bourdieu's analytical categories]. Their practices and strategies were presented as an outflow of their field, habitus and capitals. This data was powerfully presented. It gave us rich and keen insights into how 'neoliberalism as discourse' impacted the leadership practices of these teachers, both the similarities and the differences. This chapter was comprehensive and complex.

However, chapter 6 [data-analysis] is a different chapter. It's different in form and substance. Here the key is to provide an analysis of the data presented in chapter 5, now explicitly informed by Bourdieu's categories – but fundamentally in response to the main

questions and sub-questions. In your current chapter 6 draft, this disappears almost entirely as a conceptual consideration.

I wrote this email after I received a data-analysis draft that resembled the data-presentation type work that he provided in the previous two chapters. What the draft chapter clearly demonstrated was the student's misunderstanding of the purpose, form and focus of an analysis chapter. It also alerted me to the probable lack of knowledgeability that prevented the student from accomplishing this chapter in an acceptable fashion. Providing insight into the nature of the work required at this stage and leveraging the requisite intellectual know-how became decisive at this stage of the thesis process. Vigorous interaction between myself as the supervisor and Jan Heystek, former member of our department as co-supervisor, and the student, ensured such a process. Coming to understand the nature of the student's approach to the writing as it was displayed in the first chapter draft and using this as the platform for engagement became the site of learning for the student. This particular student had until his doctoral work been immersed in his role as a successful school principal of a high school in a rural town. He did the entire thesis part-time in a very short time. It seems that his normative or practice-based professional orientation had crept back into his thesis thinking towards the end of the thesis process. He had not placed himself in a position to develop the analytical capacity to accomplish the intellectual tasks required for this decisive chapter. It is also likely that because of the speed at which he did the thesis work he had not retained or perhaps internalised the academic comportment that was necessary for him to accomplish the analytical chapter. I would argue that his was a case of doing a thesis on the basis of quick immersion grounded in enthusiasm, adaptability and a lively intelligence. The quick pace at which he was working counted against him acquiring the necessary depth of academic immersion that would have enabled him to do the data-analysis effectively. The supervision process revealed this 'lack' and proceeded vigorously to provide a knowledgeability platform to augment his intellectual capacity required for this leg of the work.

I went on in the email to explain some of the elements that he needed to concentrate on to get the chapter on track:

Get to understand what this chapter is meant to do. It is here where you set up the argument, where you frame and position the focus and tenor of the analysis, and where you inform your reader about the nature of the argument, i.e. the primary claim that the chapter (and hence the entire study) makes. This is where the hard work on your part will have to

happen. You have to work differently here with your data. Given your data presentation in chapter 5, what are the main lines of interpretation you will make? This is where the main challenge for you resides. Currently this chapter does not quite get to this. You must move beyond the descriptive to the interpretive/analytical. For this you have to bring your theoretical lenses into a careful consideration of your data. Given your use of Bourdieu's lenses (field, habitus, capitals, practices, strategies), what are the lines of interpretation that you can throw on your data? How will the argumentative line flow through the thesis and how will you use your data to exemplify your argument?

What this email imperfectly illustrates is the tone and content of the knowledgeable engagement during the supervision dialogue. It illustrates the basis on which the intellectual capacity transfer proceeded. The dialogue was meant to intervene in a particular orientation to analytical work. It was aimed at getting the student to step back, gain some distance from the data and the rest of the thesis work and come to understand what academic task is required for him to accomplish the data-analysis. We facilitated this shift by recommending books, articles and theses which we felt contained good examples of data-analysis. Vigorous discussion of some of these texts provided the student with conceptual clues about the required task. We also had energetic discussions about the argument that he then began to develop, the analytical lines he identified, and the logical flow of the chapter.

The form of the analysis chapter emerged out of deliberative dialogue during the supervision process. We choose an engaged and active leveraging approach that attempted to build recognition and capacity for the task at hand. The student worked extremely hard on turning this knowledgeable engagement into intellectual capacity to write the chapter. He spent time to read voraciously, mapped the chapter exhaustively, engaged in in-depth dialogue with us as his supervisors, and conversed with other academics and peers to understand how he needed to proceed. In the process he came to escape the limitations associated with his quick academic immersion, taking the necessary steps to capacitate himself to accomplish the analytical task. The supervision process succeeded in laying a deliberative relational basis for his evolving knowledgeable, which secured his thesis work.

The section illustrates a PoS at work in providing an understanding of the supervisor's relational engagement with specific conceptual impasses that emerge during the thesis process. I suggested that working through the personal or subjective dimensions of such an impasse is an important element in breaking through. Deliberative and directed supervision is based on understanding the personal and intellectual dimensions of these blockages.

The example of one student illustrates how personal engagement with a student's particular personal orientations can lead to overcoming these periodic impasses. Supervision is focused on providing the intellectual grounds whereby students come to understand the conceptual tasks needed to complete the thesis.

Conclusion

This article is a response to a debate about the nature of thesis supervision that emerged from my department at Stellenbosch University. I wrote this article as a response to the current preponderance in the university sector for increased thesis *output*, which I believe obscures the complexity involved in academic work at this level. Each participant in this debate highlighted a number of constitutive elements in conversation with each other. This has led to a sustained critical conversation, rare in South African education scholarship, that staked out the complexity and multidimensionality of the issues at play. In response, I developed a perspective in this article that I call a 'pedagogy of supervision' that attempts to throw the spotlight on the productive engine of thesis work. I argued that the nature of students' scholarly becoming has to be brought into conversation with their intellectual acquisition capacity for thesis work. This, I suggested, points to the mediating heart of the supervision process. A PoS ought to focus on the socialising and individualising processes by which students come into their thesis work. A PoS is trained on the students' knowledgeability acquisition during these processes by specifically focusing on leveraging the subjective dimensions by which they engage with their thesis work.

In making an argument for understanding supervision as a acquisition through relational engagement, I developed three moments of engagement to exemplify one view of a PoS approach. I argued that socialising and individualising dimensions are equally important for inducting students' into their work. It is through these processes that the required emotional energy and intellectual capital are generated which keep students on track throughout the process. The individualising dimension of supervision is aimed at shifting the students' habitus orientation to their research from a practical or normative approach to an analytical orientation which would most likely secure the study's knowledge contribution. With regard to the second moment, I argued that supervision as knowledgeability engagement refers to

students' scholarly or know-how acquisition. I contended that students' intellectual capacity acquisition is a central focus of the supervision process. The supervisor's authoritative mediation of their personal approaches to the thesis is central to this acquisition. The final PoS moment is a focus on supervision dynamics at play in addressing periodic impasses that arise during the thesis process. The example I discussed illustrates the heightened supervisory engagement that is necessary for getting students to 'see' what the knowledgeability requirements are that would enable them to work through these difficult issues. Working with students' subjective orientations with regard to these difficulties would provide clues for robust interactive supervision work that would get students to engage more effectively with the task at hand.

This article has laid out the conceptual terrain for a pedagogy of supervision that connects students' knowledgeability acquisition to a relational mediation of their emerging scholarly subjectivity. Such an approach has a chance of generating a perspective on how supervision can enable students to produce theses that make a knowledge contribution, thereby securing the university as a site for quality academic work.

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