

Keynote

From Experience to Expertise: Shaping Supervisor Identity through Dialogue

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‘Think Piece’

The development of a supervisor identity can be understood through the lens of dialogical self-theory (DST) (Hermans, 2021) emphasizing the dynamic interplay between internal and external voices within the self. Supervisors were once doctoral students themselves, and their internal voices as former students play a significant role in shaping their current supervisory identities and supervisors' past doctoral experiences influence how they understand and enact their supervisory roles. Evidence from previous research provided evidence of the extent to what former students recalling both supportive and challenging aspects of supervision, continue to inform their current practices (González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2019).

However, the notion of supervisor identity is far from fixed. How do supervisors balance the competing voices of their past experiences with present institutional demands? What happens when individual positioning clashes with structured policies? We know that researcher identity is multifaceted, involving dynamic positioning and repositioning across personal, social, and institutional contexts. Internal voices often reflect personal struggles and achievements, while external voices—such as institutional expectations and those driven by peer collaboration and feedback—interact with these internal narratives, sometimes harmonising but often conflicting (Castelló et al., 2021).

Supervisory identity emerges from this complex negotiation between stability and fluidity, shaped by both personal history and institutional roles. External voices, such as formal policies and collaborative expectations, often impose structured frameworks, creating tensions when individual positioning regarding guidance and supervision responsibilities diverges from institutional norms. How can supervisors reconcile these tensions without compromising their values?

Could reflective practices help supervisors recognise their inner dialogues and address these conflicting voices? How can we help supervisors uncover their internal voices as former students and identify how positive and negative experiences shape their current practices? This process could involve cultivating a meta-position, where supervisors reflect on their experiences from a broader, detached perspective, enhancing self-awareness and flexibility in their practices, not only with supervisees but also with other supervisors and researchers. Furthermore, some evidence shows that actively positioning and repositioning in response to evolving supervisory contexts can result in more effective management of contradictions and tensions, increasing the ability to integrate multiple voices and perspectives, thereby fostering a more holistic and adaptive supervisor identity. We must discuss such evidence critically to develop a supervisor and researcher identity that connects with responsible research and innovation in diverse and uncertain academic and non-academic contexts.

References

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