Chapter 11

Developing an "internal research supervisor": Reflections on the pedagogy of postgraduate research supervision in the helping professions

Tanya Graham
Psychology Department
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa

Francine Masson
Social Work Programme
University of Wolverhampton
England
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

What is an internal supervisor? And how is this clinical concept relevant to postgraduate research supervision? The internal supervisor is a concept developed by Patrick Casement (1985; 1990) used in clinical therapeutic supervision to refer to the development of the reflective capacity of trainees in the helping professions. In the helping professions, such as psychology and social work, establishing a secure helping relationship is a central part of the helping professional's competency, and facilitates the helping process. The core of the helping

professions is a relational process that serves as an incubator for the client's development (Skovholt, 2005). The development of an internal supervisor with self-reflective capacity is crucial for trainees in helping professions, as this will serve to guide them in their independent practice with clients. This is cultivated by supervisors through their own relationship with students, and thus supervisors also draw on their own internal supervisors to assist them in the supervision process. This chapter argues that the clinical supervision insights and capacities of academic staff in the helping professions are a useful adjunct to their research supervision competencies. These capacities can be extended into the research context and aligned with relational models of research supervision to enrich the supervisory relationship in a postgraduate research context, in the helping professions and beyond.

Through extending the concept of an "internal supervisor" to the postgraduate research supervision relationship, we provide insights into strengthening reflective supervision capacity in the PGDip (HE) (hereafter the PGDip). We argue that the Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision (SPS) course can be used to facilitate the development of an "internal research supervisor" who can observe the supervision process and how it unfolds in a more sensitive, complex, and theoretically informed manner. This enhances the development of reflective capacity of the supervisor and allows supervisors to draw from a range of supervision approaches and techniques to foster a unique research relationship with each student, whilst adhering to research goals and objectives, thereby enhancing research processes and outcomes. The chapter considers ways of incorporating the knowledge and reflective techniques learnt in the SPS course within the supervisory process, to ensure that an individualised and developmental environment is created for each student. This is crucial in developing the researcher-practitioner identity of professionals and strengthening understanding of the role of research in professional practice, as well as building supervision skills and capacities of research supervisors in the helping professions. Beyond this, the concept of an internal supervisor is also useful to those outside of the helping professions, to those

who can utilise insights from relational models of supervision to enhance the supervision process.

The supervisory context

In this section, we reflect on the broader postgraduate research supervision context, to illustrate how we as supervisors have integrated our theoretical understandings of research supervision within a specific higher education and disciplinary milieu. The academic landscape is faced with many contemporary realities. Higher education is emphasised by the neo-liberal paradigm and as Singh (2017:55) explains, "higher education is part of the knowledge economy, a producer of knowledge and skills for economic competitiveness". Thus, across the world, universities face the challenge of dealing with the pressures of increased student enrolments, whilst balancing the need to maintain the quality of education, ensure adequate throughput, meet the globally competitive standards of higher education, and contribute to the growth of knowledge economies (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011). To succeed in the current climate of global socio-economic change, universities must seriously consider and implement strategies to ensure growth and development in postgraduate research (McCallin & Nayar, 2012).

This fundamental shift in understanding of what higher education institutions are about has had many consequences for all the role players involved in higher education. Academics must review traditional notions of higher education and postgraduate supervision attributable to the massification of higher education (Frick et al., 2014). Furthermore, as the "mantra of publish or perish" becomes entrenched, so it becomes essential that academics engage in a culture of research. These kinds of broader institutional changes have shifted supervision relationships, models and learning experiences, in ways that will have an impact on the quality of research products and research learning processes, and subsequent levels of research in higher education and the "real world."

The research supervision of postgraduate students is a key responsibility of academics in any research-intensive university (Blose et al., 2021). The increasing socio-economic pressures and

demands in the higher education landscape require academics to successfully supervise larger numbers of postgraduate research students. Along with increasing student numbers, requirements to conduct research and publish, research supervision is often viewed as another responsibility for the often overworked and overstretched academic. Yet, the importance of the supervisory relationship should never be underestimated in the research process. Furthermore, the pedagogical approach of the supervisor is a significantly influencing factor for a successful outcome of the research process (Van Biljon & de Villiers, 2013). This supports the growing emphasis on supervisory practices at universities.

When considering the context in which we supervise, we need to be aware of many factors which are likely to influence the supervisory process. Frick et al. (2014) question how one can push and challenge the boundaries of postgraduate supervision. Supervision boundaries are still governed by so many variables including international and national factors, geographic, cultural, institutional, and personal aspects. These authors compare how academic boundaries are like national boundaries in that they also colonise and govern the nature of research that is undertaken.

Since the implementation of the Higher Education Policy Framework (DHET, 2019), postgraduate supervision has gained significance within the academic sphere. South Africa seeks to increase its enrolment of postgraduate students to compete more meaningfully in the global knowledge economy. The National Development Plan (NPC, 2014) addresses the issues of doctorate throughput and highlights the need for South Africa to produce more than 5,000 graduates per year, with a strong proportion of these graduates needing to be from the Science, Engineering and Technology Faculties. Furthermore, 75% of academic staff at universities should have PhDs and 25% of university enrolment should be postgraduate. To accomplish these targets, universities need to have an embedded culture of research and develop centres of excellence (NPC, 2014). Various national strategies and funding initiatives have been linked to the fulfilment of the National Development Plan. One such initiative focused on improving the academic qualifications of academic staff. The universities have had to comply with the Higher Education Act No.

101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997) which was recently amended in the Higher Education Amendment Act No. 6 of 2016 (RSA, 2016). Winberg et al. (2015) note that the South African higher education system has experienced substantial growth in postgraduate enrolments in the years following the advent of democracy. However, the Council for Higher Education records that while there has been an exponential growth in applications, the number of graduations has remained low (Council for Higher Education, 2009). This disparity has raised numerous questions for the academic sector, which need to be explored. Efforts to increase the number of postgraduate students have been hampered by numerous constraints and it is important to understand what the factors are that contribute to these low throughput rates.

One cannot dispute that the history of the South African academic landscape changed in October 2015 when large numbers of students protested the increase in fees and the #FeesMustFall movement was birthed (Booysen, 2016). The need for inclusive and participatory learning environments was highlighted as a key concern, requiring supervisors to be more reflective and aware of the power relationships in supervision. Failure to acknowledge what is happening on a macro level and only after focusing on and maintaining our own current practices, may result in inadvertently perpetuating the status quo. The #FeesMustFall movement highlighted the levels of social exclusion which are still occurring at our universities decades after political freedom was achieved.

Higher education has traditionally been elitist and was reserved for specific sectors of society: those who were perceived to be bright and possibly for those who had greater opportunity to access (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Despite changes in higher education policy over the last two decades and the move to promote more inclusive educational opportunities for students from all racial groups, Bozalek & Boughey (2012) highlight the disjuncture that still exists. These authors argue that current education practices and policies still benefit some and harm others and that the notion of social justice in the higher education system needs to be questioned. We cannot ignore that overcoming the legacy of our discriminatory past is likely to be a lengthy and

complex process as the fabric of a discriminatory society are slowly unwoven. Winberg et al. (2015) argue that academics need to be sufficiently aware of how the current education system, which is still trying to address problems from the past, does not adequately prepare students for Higher Education. They explain how financial disadvantage, academic under-preparedness and under-performance form part of a vicious cycle which prohibits students from understanding the "cultural capital" required to ensure academic success. McKenna (2010) speaks about "cracking the code" of academic literacy and challenges how academics and supervisors often fail to help our students understand what is required from them in higher education. Academics cannot therefore embrace a "one size fits all" approach to supervision as we need to examine what the experiences, barriers and challenges are of our students so that we can appropriately assist them. This situation calls on us to examine ourselves and to see in which ways we, as supervisors, promote social exclusion and to instead ensure that our supervisory practices promote creative learning opportunities for students.

Grant (2003) suggests that there are multiple layers to the relationship between the student and supervisor and these include institutional expectations and discipline-specific requirements. Pressures placed on universities means that they are increasing their targets for postgraduate students and the obvious consequence is that academics have more postgraduate students to supervise. Winberg et al. (2015) believe that the increasing "pile up effect" of the growing enrolments means that academics are burdened with unrealistically high numbers of postgraduate students to supervise. To meet these increasing demands, Frick et al. (2011) suggest that academics should engage with more alternative approaches to postgraduate supervision and challenge the traditional approaches which are time consuming and not necessarily all that developmental.

Supervisors need to be aware of all aspects of the academic environment that may influence the supervisory process. When reviewing how we supervise, we need to look beyond our candidates, ourselves as supervisors and include the context in which supervision occurs, not only institutional context but

also the societal context. Colonialism and apartheid have left endemic scars on our society. Institutional, relational, individual and knowledge boundaries need to be reviewed and realigned to meet the demands of the diverse student body (Frick et al., 2014). Because of the increase in international and interdisciplinary research, universities and supervisors need to become more sensitive to the needs of their students. For instance, many international students may have specific challenges which include the up-front fees required by many universities, obtaining their student visas in time before classes begin and the lack of family and social support in a foreign country. If we are not aware of the structural challenges that our students face, whether they are international or local, we shall not be able to effectively help them to become independent researchers. An approachable and supportive supervisor can have an indelible influence in helping students to overcome many practical barriers, whether it be through linking students with appropriate resources or creating a learning environment that is respectful and a place where they can feel that they belong. Andriopoulou and Prowse (2020) advocate that the supervisory relationship extends beyond developing the student's educational and research needs and often includes a level of pastoral care and support.

The pedagogy of postgraduate research supervision

Like their international counterparts, universities in South Africa have a strong emphasis on research outputs and the increased enrolment of postgraduate students. Supervisors in South Africa face ever-increasing pressure to support postgraduate students in the timeous completion of their research. While a discussion of the South African context provides the point of departure for our discussion of postgraduate supervision in this chapter, the challenge of managing growing numbers of students, and the resultant pressure on supervisors is a widespread global issue. As a result, increased attention has been afforded to pedagogies of effective supervision and supervision practices have come under greater scrutiny.

With the substantial social and economic implications of unsuccessful completion, there has been increased focus

on postgraduate supervision practices. Supervision has been identified as a fundamental factor in the success of postgraduate students (Van Biljon & de Villiers, 2013). Many developed countries provide formalised university-wide supervisory training to new supervisors, followed by in-house progressive training over extended periods of time (Sidhu et al., 2014). However, this is often not the predominant status in many South African universities, where new supervisors are often left to draw on their own experiences of supervision and research, with the assumption made that one can supervise research if one can conduct research (Blose et al., 2021). Realising the need to better equip supervisors, some universities have incorporated more formal training programmes for academics. The inclusion of the SPS course presented at Wits University as a PGDip elective is one example of this, which has been implemented in South Africa. This course examines alternative supervision models, thereby introducing academics to the pedagogy of supervision and the variety of different approaches proposed. This serves a significant role in connecting the research experiences of supervisors and understanding their role as supervisors with different conceptual frameworks. Mechanisms that introduce supervisors to using alternative approaches, as well as the different forms of integration that may be possible, may provide a way of improving the effectiveness of supervision with a diverse student base across a variety of contexts. Manathunga and Goozée (2007) suggest that many supervisors often repeat the master/apprentice approach to supervision which they experienced as a student. Moreover, Lee (2007) emphasises how the untrained supervisor will repeat or avoid uncritically repeating the way they were supervised. Not knowing differently, supervisors often replicate their own experiences of supervision with their supervisees, without optimising the pedagogic value of supervision and understanding the range of supervision approaches that exist. Equipping academics with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective supervisory processes is an essential responsibility of each university (Blose et al., 2021). While there are overarching commonalities at different year levels, each discipline also has its own unique standards and set of expectations around postgraduate research and supervision. Often these are discovered

experientially by supervisors as they engage in the supervision process as students and academics.

These elements can be developed further if supervisors become more aware of the pedagogic aspects of supervision. Wisker and Robinson (2012) identify potential areas where problems in supervision may arise; namely, the learning process (how the student is engaging with the learning process), personal and professional (how the student maintains not only the supervisory relationship but also all other relationships (personal and professional) in their life and institutional (adhering and negotiating the rules of the educational context of the institution). When managing the supervisory process, one needs to be aware of potential problems that may arise at all levels.

Developing the capacity to conduct postgraduate research is therefore an extraordinarily complex form of learning, which also has unique dimensions in comparison to other forms of learning. The supervisory relationship is one that is not always straightforward (Wisker & Robinson, 2012) and often requires deep reflection from the supervisor and the supervisee. As Grant (2003:175) explains, "Good supervision is central to successful graduate research". For "good" supervision to occur, the blend of pedagogical and personal relationships skills needs to be understood. Grant (2003) challenges the supervisor to engage with the pedagogy of supervision and to question the notion of expert and novice. Although the supervisory relationship can be fraught with many complexities, the ultimate objective of the supervisory process is to facilitate the student's growth so that they can transform into an independent researcher.

Johnson et al. (2000) believe that postgraduate supervision processes are more "private" than any other form of teaching and learning, and as a result that pedagogic principles have remained unscrutinised and unquestioned. The development of the pedagogy of supervision is crucial to developing skilled supervisors. Supervision of research has many facets and different models have been proposed that address the role of the supervisor in relation to the supervisee. Variations of supervisory practices in these models often emerge from the supervisor's own notions of research and its purpose (Qureshi & Vazir, 2016).

Thus, each model emphasises distinct aspects of the supervision experience and this is a critical component of the PGDip (HE). Drawing from the knowledge and insight gained during our own learning process, we reflect on the role of the course in enhancing our own supervision practice, specifically within the context of postgraduate research supervision in helping professions.

Interfaces of research supervision and helping professions

Our experience of postgraduate supervision draws from primarily supervising a particular kind of student, specifically within the helping professions of Social Work and Psychology at Honours, Master's and PhD levels. Supervision is embedded in the helping professions and is one of the processes through which students learn and find support in the work that they do. Therefore, the concept of supervision is an integral part of professional development. Postgraduate students in the helping professions are faced with the Herculean task of navigating the intensive emotional demands and challenges of their own development as emerging professionals, while still being required to complete a research project within a limited period.

In social work and psychology, students complete a research project at Honours level, which constitutes about 25% or more of their degrees. At Master's level, the research thesis constitutes 50% of professional degrees. Despite the sizeable proportion of marks allotted to research in these disciplines, the primary emphasis in professional postgraduate training programmes is on fostering clinical expertise. In both professions, students are primarily trained for developing their professional skills, and the development of research competence, while important, is not the most significant consideration of professional training. Once selected into a professional programme, students are often highly motivated to practice as helping professionals and develop their professional identity. Because of the extensive emotional resources that this requires, they often relegate research to the periphery of their focus while studying. This sets up an artificial distinction and tension between practice and research. However, many professional programmes have increasingly moved away

from an exclusive practitioner model in favour of training researcher-practitioners. This has required supervisors to consider and demonstrate the value of research for therapeutic practice work and promote research-driven praxis. This has also necessitated the development of creative ways of finding dynamic intersections between the two.

The Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision course

We found that in-depth theoretical grounding required to reflexively engage with and draw from different supervision models as a specific contribution that the PGDip Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision (SPS) module offers to supervisors, which is not currently provided by other supervision guidelines and offerings in higher education contexts. As supervisors in the helping professions, we particularly engage with the intersections of theoretical models of supervision with our development as supervisors of postgraduate students in the helping professions.

With funding from the Dutch government through collaboration between NUFFIC (Netherlands Organization for Internationalization in Education) and researchers from various South African tertiary institutions, the SPS course was developed in response to the need to improve supervision capacity (Maistry, 2017). It has subsequently been offered to staff at numerous South African universities. The SPS course is an intensive and engaging 30-credit short course, which at Wits University is included as an elective in the Postgraduate Diploma in in Higher Education. This chapter's authors attended the course as part of the PGDip (HE). We were already established academics and experienced supervisors, each with 20 years of professional and academic experience as lecturers at Wits, when completing this course. We had each supervised numerous students in their research and therapeutic clinical work in the MA Community-Counselling and MA Occupational Social Work programmes, respectively. Both programmes carry a professional accreditation and lead to professional registrations (as counselling psychologists and occupational social workers). Both require compulsory coursework and practical clinical work to be completed, along with a research report. Though we had previously successfully supervised many

students for research in these programmes, we felt that we gained immensely from the course, in that it consolidated our skills in a unique way. Its comprehensive discussion of the different facets of supervision was integral to strengthening the meaning that we derived from our own supervision experiences, and further enhancing our existing skills. This led us to insights in how we could extend the clinical concept of an internal supervisor in therapeutic supervision into the postgraduate research supervision context.

Of value in facilitating our understanding of supervision was the theoretical knowledge on supervision models provided in the course. In particular, the discussion of different models of research supervision was a theoretical area of supervision that was developed in the course and that we did not have prior knowledge of. This offered us a way of integrating our supervision experiences as students and supervisors within a sound conceptual framework that we had not previously encountered. Various models of supervision exist in the literature (Qureshi & Vazir, 2016). Five models of supervision were proposed and discussed in the SPS course. These models are summarised in Table 11.1, drawn from Lee (2007; 2008).

Table 11.1: Summary of models

Concept of research supervision held by supervisor	Most prominent activity	Knowledge and skills needed	Student reaction
Functional	Rational movement through tasks	Directing, project management	Organised Obedience Efficient
Enculturation	Gatekeeping	Diagnosis of deficiencies to be remedied Nurturing Disciplinary insight	Apprenticeship Role modelling
Critical Thinking	Evaluation Challenge	Argument Gently Socratic or constructive controversy	Constant inquiry Curiosity Fight or flight

Concept of research supervision held by supervisor	Most prominent activity	Knowledge and skills needed	Student reaction
Empowerment	Mentoring and Supporting student in constructing knowledge	Facilitation Analysis and reflection Capacity-building	Personal growth Reframing knowledge Self-confidence
Relational	Supervising according to experience Relationship-building	Emotional intelligence A range of experiences to draw from Interpersonal competence Relational skills Insight	Emotional intelligence Personal awareness Relational competence

In this section, we consider the alignment of supervision models with disciplinary norms, supervisor characteristics and student needs, and explore how supervision competence can be facilitated by enhancing existing supervision programmes. We briefly expand on these models in Table 11.1 before we reflect on them in relation to our own disciplines and supervision approaches. The functional model has a primary focus on the rational progression of the student through a series of defined tasks. The supervisor is required to be more directive and organised, and to manage the student's progression in defined time frames. The supervisory role is more managerial in nature and focused on the successful completion of pragmatic tasks that are broken down into smaller components. The directive nature of this model necessitates an elevated level of compliance from the student, as there may be little room to challenge the nature of the tasks or sequence of events (Lee, 2007). Some students may thrive on the inherent logic and organisation of this model and may particularly respond if they have a need for external structure and are goal-oriented. This model may especially suit disciplines that place a high value on logic and large research projects in which supervisors are lead investigators directing a series of specific well-defined projects.

The enculturation model has a primary focus on gatekeeping, in which the supervisor has privileged expertise and access to disciplinary norms and standards. The supervisor guides the student as an apprentice, who learns through guidance, role modelling, nurturing, and addressing deficits (Lee, 2007). Here, the supervisor actively fosters access to a disciplinary culture, and guides the student along the path to conducting research in a manner that meets the specifications of a discipline. The supervisor's position and role are key to unlocking access to disciplinary knowledge and expectations and decoding acceptable ways of being and doing through the lens of the discipline. Here, the student becomes habituated into what the discipline expects from them through the supervisor's support and learning from their mistakes (Lee, 2007). However, if the apprentice model of supervision is encouraged then students may become over-dependent on supervisor's feedback and will not develop the confidence and ability to critically engage with the material (Manathunga & Goozée, 2007).

The critical thinking model values the development of the student's academic argumentation skills. The supervisor's focus is on critically evaluating and challenging the student to strengthen the arguments and assumptions supporting their research. This is achieved through Socratic questioning and critical dialogue (Lee, 2007). The supervisor encourages the student to actively challenge established knowledge and to critically interrogate its epistemological basis. This helps the student to master the craft of constant inquiry and develop their own ability to critique their own and others' work (Lee, 2007). This model may be particularly well-suited to disciplines that value contested forms of knowledge, and active intellectual engagement with developing an academic argument and assisting students in developing a sense of their own positionality in relation to knowledge. However, Manathunga and Goozée (2007) believe that critical analysis skills may be difficult to define even by experienced academics.

The empowerment model's primary focus is on the empowerment of the student through mentoring in the supervision process. Here, the supervisor encourages the student's progression towards independence and supports the

student's personal growth and capacitation through the process of constructing knowledge. This is achieved through the supervisory activities of facilitation, analysis, and reflection (Lee, 2007). Here, the student will learn to reframe their understandings, develop insights into appreciating different perspectives, and develop greater confidence in their own contribution to knowledge creation.

The relational model draws on the supervisor's relational capacities and experience in supervising a range of different students, and types of supervision. Here, the supervisor uses their own emotional intelligence, relationship-building skills, insight, and judgement to build rapport with the student, and create a sound working alliance as the foundation of the research supervision process (Lee, 2007). The supervisor is warm, containing, and versatile, and aims to understand the student and build a unique and meaningful relationship with them. The relationship between supervisor and supervisee is a primary concern in facilitating the progression through research, as this underlies the engagement with research tasks.

Helping professions, such as psychology and social work, are aligned as disciplines with the focus on the relational dynamics of supervision. Thus, relational models of supervision have an immediate disciplinary synergy with the therapeutic skills that are a central focus within training programmes. But it is imperative that the supervisor is also aware of alternative approaches to supervision (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2014). The knowledge of alternative models of supervision allows supervisors to find their own ways of situating themselves and developing their own approach, whilst also being able to adapt to different student needs. While they may have preferences, awareness of the different models and their foci can assist supervisors in integrating different skills and foci and contextualising these within their own disciplines.

The internal (research) supervisor

In this section, the concept or notion of the internal supervisor is explained, and the authors consider extending its application from the supervision in clinical practice to research supervision. Clinical

supervision is an integral part of the professional development of trainees in the helping professions. Clinical supervision not only aids effective therapeutic intervention, but also facilitates the therapist's own self-reflective and self-monitoring capacities in practice (Bell et al., 2016). The concept of an "internal supervisor" has been used extensively in psychotherapy to describe how the supervisory relationship is internalised by the trainee, and functions as an internalised reflective, evaluative, and supportive mechanism guiding future professional practice (Bell et al., 2016). Here, the external supervisory relationship becomes introjected as an internal thinking function. This function becomes a psychological resource on which the trainee can draw to adapt to different situations in clinical practice to ensure competence and effectiveness.

A social worker and psychoanalyst by training, Patrick Casement (1985, 1990) first proposed the concept of the "internal supervisor" in his books *On Learning from the Patient* and *Further Learning form the Patient.* Here, Casement (1985; 1990) describes the idea of an internal supervisor as drawing from pre-existing conceptualisations of ego functioning as differentiated between the observing and experiencing ego. The internal supervisor is part of an observing ego function and represents a part of the ego that is dissociated from the rest of ego functioning, and thus can observe itself while also experiencing the external world. Placing emphasis on the supervisor-supervisee relationship as one that is of primary importance and unique to each supervision dyad, is central to Casement's (1985, 1990) concept. For Casement (1985, 1990), the relationship between supervisor and supervisee forms the basis of a working alliance in which further development is enabled. The quality of this relationship is an integral part of any effective helping relationship, including the supervision relationship. This concept is aligned with Bowlby's (1973) concept of secure attachment, as well as attachment-based notions of internal working models that are developmentally created through the matrix of relationships established in early life (Bell et al., 2016). An internal working model is a relational template established in early life that subsequently constitutes a frame of reference that is applied to other subsequent relationships. Bell et al. (2016) argue that the concept has further commonality

with other seminal psychoanalytic concepts, such as Donald Winnicott's (1965) concept of "holding". Winnicott (1965) postulates that a mother's capacity to hold her infant, physically and emotionally, is integral to fostering a creative and generative mental space in which development can occur. This becomes the prototype for a therapist's capacity to hold the emotional world of the client in psychotherapy (Winnicott, 1965), and by extension, the supervisor's capacity to hold the emotional experiences of the supervisee in clinical training (Casement, 1985). Experiencing a holding relationship and environment fosters the ability to hold the challenging emotional and intellectual experiences that are evoked in research, as the two are intertwined.

Also based in psychoanalytic theory, Melanie Klein (1946) argues that the concept of projective identification is central to an infant's early development and relational capacities in later life. Through the unconscious mechanism of projective identification, a mother can understand an infant's overwhelming unconscious projections, as an early form of communication and thereby respond to these. Wilfred Bion (1962) extends these ideas and described the mother-infant dyad as the "container-contained". For Bion (1962) the act of containment occurs when a mother can emotionally recognise, process, and respond to the overwhelming projections of the infant's experience, and return these to the infant in a more manageable form that can be internalised. For Bion (1962), it is this process which can change overwhelming emotional experiences into purposeful cognitive activity and a process of thinking (Bion, 1962). Thus, Bion (1962) argues that mental life and the capacity for thinking is developed in this containing relationship. Containing relationships therefore play a crucial role in fostering psychological growth (Casement, 1985) and meaningfully integrate the emotional and the cognitive experiences of infants in early life. In containment, a mother meaningfully links raw unprocessed experiences for the infant. These links between internal phenomena and reality are then internalised, and then can be thought about. Containment is therefore a precursor of thinking. This dyadic process becomes the model of the clinician and client, as well as supervisor and supervisee, in the context of clinical practice.

In clinical supervision, the concept of an internal supervisor becomes symbolic of a dynamic and rich interaction between supervisor and supervisee in which a developmental mutual learning milieu is created. The supervisor provides containment for the trainee fostering the capacity to think about clients in a meaningful way, allowing the trainee to internalise the relationship. A containing internal supervisor who organises supervision experiences into processed, meaningful thoughts and ideas that foster the development of mental life and psychological growth. The internal supervisor is orientated towards the past, present and future, and can thus facilitate ongoing reflection on the meaning of client and supervision experiences, and the bearing that they have on navigating different relationships and situations.

The centrality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee in clinical training has immediate synergies with relational models of research supervision in the helping professions. Relational models of research supervision, which are intuitively based on the prototype of early relational models, can draw more explicitly from these ideas.

Casement (1985) argues that the origins of the internal supervisor in clinical work are rooted in the student's first experiences of being a client. Attending their own personal therapy is recommended as part of the curriculum of professional training in many helping professions. In psychology, for instance, Master's students in professional clinically oriented training programmes (Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology) are required to attend their own personal therapy on a weekly basis throughout the two years of their Master's-level training. In social work, students are not required to be in their own personal therapy, but this is highly recommended, given the emotionally evocative and taxing nature of client work in the helping professions in South Africa.

Recognising the importance of the experience of being a client for their own process of learning to be a therapist, many qualified clinicians in private practice continue with their own personal therapy throughout their professional careers to further their own personal development and their competence as

therapists. This suggests that the capacity to experience oneself on both sides of the helping relationship fosters insight into reflective capacities necessary for effective helping. If we apply this line of argument to the research context, then the origins and development of an internal research supervisor, also lie in our own experiences of being postgraduate students ourselves and being supervised in our first research projects and continue to develop from this based on an integration of experiences from both sides of this relationship. Academics can usually vividly recount their own research supervision experiences as students throughout the course of their studies, favourable and unfavourable. Some of these memories of past supervision may be recalled with mixed emotions and differences in perspective; however, all are instrumental in fostering an internal concept of a supervision relationship. Without the requisite conceptual tools, supervisors may be limited in their full appreciation of the pedagogic value of these early research supervision experiences. As postgraduate students (and supervisors) encounter diverse supervision experiences, the concept of the internal supervisor becomes increasingly complex and multidimensional. As supervisors, we often limit our own understandings of these varied encounters as experiential knowledge that is not necessarily theoretically grounded. As in client work, the integration of theoretical knowledge of the supervisor is crucial to deepening understandings of clients and the complex psychological processes that occur in client relationships. In the SPS course, we were encouraged to reflect on our own experiences as students and supervisors, which fostered the necessary reflection on the nature and quality of the supervision which we had received and offered. In addition, we were exposed to theoretical understandings of the different supervision requirements at a policy and institutional level, to provide a macro-level context of the higher education sector in which to orient our experiences.

We have found that numerous factors that influence the supervisory process need to be considered. As Boughey et al. (2017) explain, the research process is not only about how two minds approach a research project but that tantamount to this process is the way in which these two individuals with distinct characteristics, experiences and expectations engage with each

other. Therefore, supervisors need to be aware of their own identities, values, sociocultural and educational backgrounds, and how this will factor in and will influence the supervisory relationship and process. Likewise, the personal characteristics and relational capacities of the student and supervisor play a role in this relationship. Eagle (2017) advocates that the personality of the student will have a profound effect on the supervisory process and that rigid personality types may lead to complex and relational difficulties in the supervisory relationship. Although one cannot dispute that the supervisory relationship will be affected by a student's personality, in the same tone the supervisor's personality will influence the supervisory relationship. Furthermore, considering the power that the supervisor wields in the relationship, the supervisor's personality can clearly influence the learning environment. The professional skill set of supervisors in the helping professions can be useful in assisting these supervisors in understanding and dealing with the personal dynamics that enter the research supervision context.

While relational skills of helping professionals are useful in research supervision, professional boundaries also need to be maintained in the research relationship to ensure that emotional safety is retained. Thus, it is useful to think about the research supervision relationship as a distinct type of professional relationship. Here, the supervisor's role is to focus on establishing a working relationship as a foundation of engaging in research. The supervisor will focus on the generation of research skills and find ways of empowering the student to negotiate the emotional and intellectual challenges that the research process evokes. Dunbar-Krige and Fritz (2006) emphasise that supervisees are in a vulnerable position as they need to not only successfully engage in a research process but also need to learn to effectively interact with the allocated supervisors. Consequently, the supervisor must create an inclusive and participatory learning environment and essential to this process is the establishment of expectations and boundaries. It is therefore imperative for the supervisor to explore the supervisee's expectations of the supervisor and the supervision process. Integrating a relational focus as a foundation with some of the other tasks and imperatives highlighted by the other models of supervision that were discussed earlier

strengthens the overall supervisory framework. Integrating the insights from different models within a self-reflective relational approach offers greater versatility for the supervisor to respond to each student's unique needs. This is critical in serving a diverse student base in universities.

Implications for the pedagogy of postgraduate supervision

In this section, we consider the broader pedagogical implications of specific disciplinary interfaces with postgraduate supervision models presented in the SPS course. We discuss how the course could potentially be taught and adapted through teaching and learning strategies to enhance an advanced level of supervision skill and capacity in the helping professions. We also consider the implications of our experiences for the development of supervision capacity in different disciplines. In its current form, the course is offered in a generic manner to academics from different disciplines. This is immensely beneficial as it allows academics to gain from the different supervision approaches that are used across the university and explore how these may interface with their own disciplines. We felt that this expanded our consideration of different supervision approaches and served as a useful resource to integrate with our own experiences of supervision. Therefore, it assisted in drawing from and consolidating an "internal (research) supervisor" through adding a theoretical lens to connect our supervision experiences as students and supervisors. Academics in all disciplines can benefit from the deepening reflexivity cultivated from developing an internal supervisor, and the skills involved in building a strong supervisory relationship with postgraduate students. This aspect of the SPS course can be further developed and may particularly be useful for junior academics who have limited supervision experience or as a foundational supervision skill. However, given the fact that the supervision of students from different disciplines may be more aligned with some supervision models than others, it may also be useful to tailor advanced postgraduate supervision training courses to types of disciplines, whilst retaining aspects

of the cross-disciplinary benefit received from an introductory postgraduate supervision training course.

Conclusion

Academics have been pressed to respond to a range of major changes in the academic landscape globally and in South Africa. As a result of these developments, academics need be more skilled and more reflective in how they engage with students in the process of supervision and knowledge creation. They need to increasingly think about how to adopt and implement strategies to attract and retain students in postgraduate programmes, as well as ensure that those who enrol in programmes successfully complete their degrees. While this may initially sound straightforward and easily attainable, the supervisory process is inherently far more complex than many may initially anticipate. If supervisors are not reflective and do not engage in ensuring the creation of inclusive and participatory learning environments, throughput rates of universities and the educational future of the country may be severely compromised. Therefore, supervisors need to be aware of the context in which they supervise and the practices and processes with which they engage. We have found that the SPS course offered as part of PGDip (HE) can play a significant role in this process. In our experience, the knowledge gained in this course has augmented and deepened our existing postgraduate supervision skill set, and pointed to directions in which we can creatively contemplate the links between the theory and practice of supervision. Here, we were able to think about the development of our own "internal (research) supervisors" by connecting the theory of supervision with our own experiences as postgraduate students and supervisors of students in various professional contexts. This in turn, has opened new understandings of how the supervision relationship can represent potential space that reflects on past, present, and future. Using these insights, the SPS could emphasise these aspects to a greater extent, and the potential foundation that they can create in combination with other models. These insights could also be used to enhance the development of future advanced postgraduate

supervision training courses and aligned with existing knowledge in disciplines to continue this trajectory.

References

Andriopoulou, P. & Prowse, A. 2020. Towards an effective supervisory relationship in research degree supervision: insights from attachment theory. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 25(5):648-661. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1731449

Bell, T., Dixon, A. & Kolts, R. 2016. Developing a compassionate internal supervisor: compassion-focused therapy for trainee therapists. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 24(3):632-648. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2031

Bion, W.R. 1962. Learning from experience. London: Karnac Books.

Bitzer, E.M. & Albertyn, R.M. 2011. Alternative approaches to postgraduate supervision: A planning tool to facilitate supervisory processes. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25(5):874-888.

Blose, S., Msiza, V. & Chiororo, F. 2021. Developing a supervisor identity through experiential learning: Narratives of three novice academics working in a South African University. *Journal of Education*, 82(2021):28-43. https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i82a02

Booysen, S. 2016. *Fees must fall: Student revolt, decolonisation and governance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. https://doi.org/10.18772/22016109858

Boughey, C., van den Heuvel, H. & Wels, H. 2017. Listening to our contexts. In: McKenna, S., Clarence-Fincham, J., Boughey, C., Wels, H. & van den Heuvel, H. (eds.) *Strengthening postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media. https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357322/01

Bowlby, J. 1973. *Separation anxiety and anger. Volume 2 of attachment and loss*. London: Hogarth Press.

Bozalek, V. & Boughey, C. 2012. (Mis)framing higher education in South Africa. *Social Policy & Administration*, 46(6):688-703. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2012.00863.x

Casement, P. 1985. *On learning from the patient*. London: Tavistock.

Casement, P. 1990. *Further learning from the patient: The analytic space and process*. London: Tavistock.

CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2009. *Higher Education Monitor No. 8: The State of Higher Education in South Africa*. Advice and Monitoring Directorate: Council on Higher Education.

DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training). 2019. *Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa*. DHET. [Online]. Available at: https://www.dhet.gov.za/Policy%20and%20Development%20Support/Policy%20Framework%20for%20Internationalisation%20of%20Higher%20Education%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf

Dunbar-Krige, H. & Fritz, E. 2006. *The supervision of counsellors in South Africa: Travels in new territory*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Eagle, G. 2017. The role of personality styles in the supervision process: Responses and strategies. In: McKenna, S., Clarence-Fincham, J., Boughey, C., Wels, H. & van den Heuvel, H. (eds.) *Strengthening postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media.

Frick, L., Bitzer, E. & Albertyn, R. 2014. Candidates, supervisors and institutions: Pushing postgraduate boundaries - An overview. In: Bitzer, E., Albertyn, R., Frick, L., Grant, B. & Kelly, F. (eds.) *Pushing boundaries in postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media. https://doi.org/10.18820/9781920689162

Grant, B. 2003. Mapping the pleasures and risks of supervision. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 24(2):175-190. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300303042

Johnson, L.A., Lee, A. & Green, B. 2000. *The Ph.D. and the autonomous self: Gender, rationality and postgraduate pedagogy*. Sydney: Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.1080/713696141

Klein, M. 1946. Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27:99-110.

Lee, A. 2007. Developing effective supervisors: Concepts of research supervision. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(4):680-693. https://doi.org/10.4314/sajhe.v21i4.25690

Lee, A. 2008. How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(3):267-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802049202

Manathunga, C. & Goozée, J. 2007. Challenging the dual assumption of the 'always/already' autonomous student and effective supervisor. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(3):309-322. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510701278658

McCallin, A. & Nayar, S. 2012. Postgraduate research supervision: A critical review of current practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(1):63-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.590979

McKenna, S. 2010. Cracking the code of academic literacy: An ideological task. In: Hutchings, C. & Garraway, J. (eds.) *Beyond the university gates: Provision of extended curriculum programmes in South Africa*. Makhanda: Rhodes University.

Maistry, S.M. 2017. Betwixt and between: Liminality and dissonance in developing threshold competences for research supervision in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(1):119-134. https://doi.org/10.20853/31-1-841

NPC (National Planning Commission). 2014. *National Development Plan 2030: Our Future - Make It Work.* NPC. [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf

Qureshi, R. & Vazir, N. 2016. Pedagogy of research supervision pedagogy: A constructivist model. *Research in Pedagogy*, 6(2):95-110. https://doi.org/10.17810/2015.38

RSA (Republic of South Africa). 1997. Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. *Government Gazette No. 18515*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a101-97.pdf

RSA (Republic of South Africa). 2016. Higher Education Amendment Act No. 6 of 2016. *Government Gazette No. 40548*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201701/40548act9of2016higheducationamendmentact2016_1.pdf

Sidhu, G.K., Kaur, S., Fook, C.Y. & Yunus, F.W. 2014. Postgraduate supervision: Comparing student perspectives from Malaysia and the United Kingdom. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 123(2014):151-159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1409

Singh, S. 2017. Finding a Supervision Niche: The importance of disciplinary process. In: Mc Kenna, S., Clarence-Fincham, Boughey, J., Wels, C. & Van Den Heuvel, H. (eds). *Strengthening postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media. https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357322/09

Skovholt, T.M. 2005. The cycle of caring: A model of expertise in the helping professions. *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 27(1):82-93. https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.27.1.mj5rcvy6c713tafw

Van Biljon, J.A. & de Villiers, M.R. 2013. Multiplicity in supervision models: The supervisor's perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27(6):1443-1463. https://doi.org/10.20853/27-6-307

Winberg, C., Ntolo, N. & Ncubukezi, T. 2015. 'Don't leave before you understand' supporting masters candidates in business studies. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 3(1):1-20. https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v3i1.37

Winnicott, D. 1965. *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. London: Hogarth Press.

Wisker, G. & Robinson, G. 2012. Picking up the pieces: Supervisors and doctoral "orphans". *International Journal for Researcher Development*, 3(2):139-153. https://doi.org/10.1108/17597511311316982