

Supervising doctorates at a distance: Three Trans-Tasman stories

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This article describes the challenges of post-traditional, distance Ph.D. supervision and suggests pedagogical interventions to bridge the distance. This paper investigates the skills and understandings necessary for mediating the supervisor-supervisee dyad within faceless encounters (Kelly and Ling, 2001). Grounded in a literature review and using interview-based narratives, this paper describes a case study investigating the needs and experiences of three part-time, Trans-Tasman Ph.D. students, writing practitioner- or practice-led research (PLR) Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) by artefact and exegesis. While this small-scale study makes no major claims that results can be generalised, the results are pertinent to those involved in distance HDR supervision, particularly in PLR. Findings reveal the importance of proactivity, dialogue and mutual trust and the necessity of knowing which interactions, including e-moderated supervisions and fast-turnaround electronic communications, potentially help to bridge the gulf. As distance supervisions become increasingly commonplace, HDR supervisors need to build best practice models from shared personal and professional understandings of effective supervisory interventions in this mode.

Key words: doctoral supervision; distance supervision; artefact and exegesis; creative writing

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Introduction

This paper revolves around the post-traditional supervision experiences of three Trans-Tasman students enrolled in a Ph.D. by artefact and exegesis (A&E) in Swinburne University's Writing discipline. Their narratives are experiential stories with points of parallel and divergence. These parallels and divergences are apparent between and among the data, but also in reference to literature on doctoral supervision at a distance and an emerging body of work on the different trajectories involved in supervising in the A&E model. While the contexts of working at a distance and working in a non-traditional Ph.D. model distinguish the study environment of three students, the question of their identities as writers, researchers, scholars, teachers, students who have experienced supervision during Masters by thesis and their relationships to universities impact on the study too.

The globalised contexts of the supervisions discussed here are post-traditional in several ways. The A&E model brings its own distinctions in terms of what the multidimensional, hybridised supervisor/ supervisee relationship looks like. Moreover, because supervising at a distance involves recourse to technological modes of communication, the temporal and spatial aspects of supervision gain a new distinctiveness. Speaking of a post-traditional supervisor-supervisee relationship, Kelly and Ling (2001) write:

With the rapid technological advances which have caused boundaries to be blurred and broken and barriers between nations, hemisphere, and groups to be blurred and broken, relationships take on new meanings, and require new skills and understandings (p.71).

This paper investigates the nature of these “new meanings”, “new skills and understandings” within “faceless rather than facework encounters” (Kelly and Ling, 2001, p.75). Kelly and Ling suggest such dynamics bring challenges but also can result in “new forms of trust” and unique, mutually negotiated, dialectic narratives of supervising or being supervised (p.75). If, as Sinclair (2004) argued (p.6), “interventionalist” and “hands-on” approaches are associated with timely completion and candidate satisfaction, then what interventions are appropriate and effective in the context of supervising a Ph.D. by A&E at a distance? What does “hands on” mean in such a context?

Studying at a distance and working within the A&E model are not the only facets of diversity of my Trans-Tasman candidates. Evans (2007) reminds us that half downunder's Ph.D. candidates are part-time. Many of these are mid-career and in workplaces that influence their candidature and topic, as in British professional doctorates (Wikely and Muschamp, 2003). In Australia and Aotearoa, the student body of Ph.D. candidates includes 40 percent who work as academics and whose investment in writing a Ph.D. is related to their professional, workplace or community contexts (Evans, 2007, p.114) and the stage of their careers. They find they need a Ph.D. to move forward. Like many specialists of their generation in Aotearoa and Australia, they “stopped at M.A.”. These facets of part-time students apply to my three distance candidates. This study describes and discusses three particular supervisory

situations, each of which brings its own challenges born of its distinctiveness. They all, however, share the following salient characteristics:

- Supervision at a distance with annual face-to-face (F2F) meetings
- Ph.D. by A&E in practice-/practitioner-led research (PLR)
- Part-time enrolment
- Experienced authors, researchers and academics in their '50s working as tertiary teacher-researcher-practitioners.

Literature Review

I will limit my discussion to studies of the cultural practice of post-traditional supervision at a distance and those written by PLR researchers as salient to part-time distance supervision as to embodied supervisory pedagogy. This focus nevertheless interfaces with the research problematising the relations of the supervisor-supervisee dyad, as in the work of Grant (1999, 2003, 2010) or Manathunga and Goozee (2007). Grant (1999) attends to our unstable identities, the power imbalances within the dyad and the non-linearity of the research journey. Her insights are useful as supervising at a distance and operating within an A&E model clearly impact identities and suggest the journey will have a more “rackety” trajectory (1999) since the supervisor stands in relation to both created and researched texts. Manathunga and Goozee argue for a collaborative approach to enhancing research students' critical analysis in the Ph.D. trajectory given the multiplicity of functions in institutional expectations of supervisors' roles. We add to this their subjective layeredness (Grant, 2010), pointing further to the need for a collaborative approach. Other case and process studies where supervisors and supervisees examine practice suggest that this is a necessarily negotiable trajectory characterised by communicating clearly what is required (Perry and Brophy, 2001; Bartlett and Mercer, 2001; Harbon and England, 2006) and not just a shuffle between the roles of any master-mentor or instructor-facilitator dichotomy.

In the A&E model, such a journey, “agony” or a “three-legged race” for some due to the higher level of personal investment in the creative as opposed to purely academic project (Nelson, 2004; Dibble and van Loon, 2004), may not be unexpected; only different from those of traditional doctorates. Supervisors implement strategies to contain those differences, such as the use of a reflective journal to interface between the two parts of the higher degree by research (HDR), the mapping of the duration and landmarks of the candidature on a flexibly negotiable timescale or the establishment of common understanding of the examiners' expectations (Arnold, 2005). Williamson, Brien and Webb (2008) build a framework for best practice understanding the institutional, personal and industry-related dimensions and foregrounding the need to communicate the role of the exegesis. The HDR, they emphasise, is for both those seeking entrance to an academic community and writerly or industrial ones (p.8). A potentially three-headed hydra, it can serve the purposes of the traditional thesis, the professional one and the HDR by publication. Difficulties in national recognition of and institutional accommodation of these differences are the subject of many studies in the PLR journal *TEXT*, Nelson and Dibble and Loon (2004) included.

Supervision at a Distance

Most supervisors use increasingly sophisticated communication technologies such as emails; Elluminate, Skype, MSN messenger and other forms of teleconferencing; telephony and other voice-activated protocols; text messaging and mobile technologies and blogspaces whether students are distance candidates or not (Pearson and Ford, 1997; Sinclair, 2004). Even in embodied contexts, Sinclair (2004) reports 56% of supervisors reported meeting F2F with part-time candidates at least monthly and 42% reported they meet electronically with their part-timers at least fortnightly. Despite the strong uptake of communication technologies by full and part-time supervisors, Grant and Pearson (2007) remind us: “this does not obviate the need for supervisory assistance in navigating the path to successful completion” (p.14).

Post-traditional literature on distance supervision dates to before 1995. Much used is the term “tyranny of distance” (Harbon and England, 2006, p.89). A 1997 report (Pearson and Ford) predates professional and PLR Ph.D.s but identifies core “open” technologies and proposes strategies for quality practice blending flexibility and structure, codes of practice and professional discretion. Even in 1997 research into distance supervision was limited by not recognising the complexity of either Ph.D. study or supervision. The study, though, offers such general strategies as “negotiating blocks of time to make substantial progress” (p.59).

In 1995, Evans and Green described the socio-pedagogical relationship of supervisor and supervisee in distance doctorates as “absent presence”, geographically and temporally distanced. The use of technology to bridge space and time pushes the relationship into new ontological and pedagogical spaces leading to a reconfiguring of absent presence into “virtual presence” (p.5). Rethinking a pedagogical model based around negotiation rather than direction, interpretation rather than transmission and understanding academic power as more reciprocal and less hierarchical, they maintain, has three main advantages. It leads to more student autonomy, allows spaces where identities are negotiated and mirrors a change from teaching to learning. The supervisor mediates, facilitates and mentors, functions removed from the master-apprentice model. These ideas do not seem radical now with the philosophy of learner-centredness, the ongoing enquiry characteristic of action research and the need for Ph.D. students to become independent researchers having become tropes (Butcher and Sieminski, 2006; Grant, 2003). In their metaphor, the supervisor is the choreographer of a complex dance of constraints and possibilities (p.2).

Harbon and England (2006) use the metaphor of “flow” to describe the cultural practices in the working relationship between distance supervisor and supervisee that develops and relaxes as the candidacy matures, breaking down the tyranny of distance. In their case study, they explore their own supervisor/supervisee dyad, evidenced by a year’s supervision by email punctuated, as in my own cases, by annual F2F meetings. The forms of the emails evidence the range of texts and their functions. These include introductory e-mails and one-off administrative or research-related communications, reports *inter alia*, supervisory feedback and records of F2F meetings.

What emerges is a clear valuing of dialogue, a theme resounding through many other studies (Bartlett and Mercer, 2001; Perry and Brophy, 2001) and an ongoing focus on product, namely text, the writing up of the thesis. While PLR values process and practice as the ways to the artefact, it also requires a disciplined focus on production so the supervisor moves from directing students to fields of endeavour to critiquing their attempts. Critiquing, too, is a negotiated dialogue, requiring trust and leading to the co-construction of “new knowledge for new meaning and new meaning from new knowledge” (p.102). Together with a growing understanding of each other, facilitating dialogue, discussion, and reflective reading are the hands-on interventions emerging from this study.

Mort and Horsley (2007) interrogate assumptions around the superiority of actuality in learning by analysing the blended supervision model Lancaster University uses for supervising creative doctorates. They argue students and supervisors operating collaboratively in post-traditional, post-modern Virtual Research Environments (VREs) can co-create and negotiate knowledge in a way that reminds us of the naturally unfinished, demotic nature of text. They articulate the VRE’s variation on interpersonal interaction as:

its ability to exchange text across time and space with hitherto unheard of speed, or even to allow writers working on opposite sides of the world to simultaneously re-draft – synthesise, even secrete – a document in real time, one of them working at sundown, the other at dawn (p.39).

Acts of creation and reflection are thus made seamless and simultaneous. This intervention demonstrates the joy of the virtual creative/critical interactions of writers and readers (p.43). The virtual becomes more pedagogically effective than the actual, but the focus is once again on strategies to maintain dialogue, encourage reflexivity and control textual production.

Wikely and Mushcamp (2004) also investigate the pedagogical implications of working with students at a distance, albeit in professional doctorates. Indicating a lack of paralinguistic communication in emails, they argue the necessity of a VRE for decreasing misinterpretations and allowing the development of individual voices. Wikely and Mushcamp propose a tutor-mediated virtual community of practice to facilitate socialisation into the discourses of both the core discipline and the cultural practices of the professional doctorate.

Methodology

Case studies are “detailed contextual analyses of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships” (Soy, 1996) and relate to everyday experience. My main method is a straightforward single-event case study generating discourse involving three subjects’ freeflow responses to directed cues. I am also aware of my own creative implicitness and agency, to echo Bakhtin (1990) and the case study of Harbon and England (2006), in the research as a person who has also experienced supervision and whose educational philosophies, epistemological stances and understandings of ontology impact on the project. I select the text I produce and the analyses I derive. I feel, with Richardson (1994), that my

researcher and lived selves are one in this study; indeed I may have already impacted on the responses of my subjects due to the wording of my cues and my personal history of communications with them.

This Bakhtinian dialogic double-voicing allows me to relate the stories of my subjects and locate the themes in their discourse without having to bracket off my own story as a one-time supervisee and present supervisor. In isolating themes, I am less using the Glaserian grounded approach (Glaser, 1998) than one Sandelowski (1995) uses in analysing texts in nursing contexts. She describes a method of closely reading material, identifying key storylines to understand everyday practices and underlining key phrases “because they make some as yet inchoate sense” (p.73). This method draws on recognized word-based and scrutiny-based techniques of readerly observation. As to the study’s limitations, I make no claims for generality from this study, but in the spirit of autoethnography, uphold the themes of three stories as original insights into personal worlds that form a part of a larger social world (Muncey, 2010): that of the lived supervision experience.

Procedure and presentation

My three Trans-Tasman students wrote freely, cued by the following questions:

1. What did you think would be the advantages and challenges of being supervised at a distance?
2. What do you think you are missing that on-campus students might get?
3. What do you think are the supervision needs of doctoral candidates studying at a distance, and what are the best ways to meet them?
4. Comment on how the following modes of communication have or have not been useful, and try to identify why: e-mails, Skype, telephone, F2F meetings.
5. What actions or interventions would improve your experience of being a doctoral candidate studying at a distance?

I will present the findings here as themes related to these five cues and then discuss them in the light of issues raised in the literature review. All students empowered me to use their words with their permission. I have chosen to change their names to Selina (Christchurch), Carl (Auckland) and Lizabeth (Tasmania).

Findings

Advantages of supervision at a distance

All three supervisees stress the flexibility of remaining in their place of employment, family, communities and networks as the primary advantage. Lizabeth is grateful “there are no ‘block’ compulsory study periods which would require me to take annual leave”. Selina’s subject matter relates to identities constructed and maintained in Aotearoa, so access to subjects is crucial. Carl, an ‘independent writer anyway’ sees distance as *advantageous*, but understands the importance of the supervisor checking in every fortnight. He also writes:

the 'advantage' of distance is that I felt supported and encouraged, so that my 'personal creative zone' (which can become a 'lonely' place sometimes if one feels no one is interested) became a more positive worthwhile place to be.

Distance does not hamper the creative component and may in fact benefit it. In Carl's case, this is also true for the exegetical research:

... I don't think I could really benefit from having more supervision, or supervision nearer at hand. In fact, more frequent and closer supervision might actually get in my hair and slow up the creative A&E writing.

Challenges of supervision at a distance

None of the students identify worrying challenges associated with being supervised at a distance, although all three feel a potential for loneliness. The challenges the three identify are problematic independent of the mode of supervision. Selina writes:

I think my greatest challenge is an inherent part of my own personality, and not directly caused by physical distance... given the physical distance from the academic community... I can lose the sense of immediacy of what I need to be doing.

Not having access to a community of scholars and peers is challenging. Carl would also benefit from a community of peers or a supervision circle where methodology, theory and literature can be discussed. He misses "not being part of the crowd" but on the other hand, reflecting on his Masters' study, is happy not to get "sidetracked" by other students' concerns. Lizabeth observes: "What may be missing is the contact and extended discussions with other like-minded students, and research staff". Selina, too, feels she misses "regular interaction with fellow Ph.D. candidates" and feels distance makes gathering background reading more challenging. Further: "Distance students miss out on the ambiance of the campus and the identification with the university" (Lizabeth).

Gesturing to the idea that a discussion group would be helpful, Carl writes:

I have been quite challenged by my reading in modern theory, fields such as autoethnography, which are completely new to me. So it was a challenge trying to 'get up to speed' in all of this. But this difficulty exists whether I am in NZ, at a distance, or somewhere in Melbourne...the reading is the challenge, not the supervision of it.

Mid-career candidates who have been away from literature reviews and critical/cultural theories express anxiety about not being up to date, but realise this challenge is part of the professional development reason for embarking on the project.

The challenge of needing administrative support or feedback immediately is at the forefront of Lizabeth's thinking. She anticipates "challenges may occur if I require 'instant' replies of advice, or need my supervisor to review anything, but this has not occurred. In fact, my

supervisor was exemplary”. Clearly a supervisor’s availability by a variety of media can be pre-planned. Even with these media and a supervisor’s policy of availability at short notice, there may be challenges related to follow-up after distance consultations:

My supervisor gives me clear timelines and guidance and reference material; we have regular Skype catchups as well as email contact, but I do think the physical distance allows me to ‘drift’ somewhat. [Selena]

The issue is the need for closer follow-up to e-supervisions during the first year of the project.

The supervision needs of students studying at a distance

All three refer to the importance of the combination of (i) regular e-meetings for reflecting on practice and (ii) e-mail contact for niggles, blocks and methodology or reference enquiries. The pattern of regularity is connected to the negotiated mapping out of the candidature. Lizabeth indicates the importance of “memoranda of possible deadlines negotiated with the student to give them an idea of what is expected to keep them on track”. Selina’s comment mirrors those by Carl and Lizabeth:

Knowing there is a regular time to have contact with your supervisor: I can save up (write down) my questions or answers to questions and know I can discuss these at a given time.

The students have different levels of confidence as practitioners and researchers. This impacts on the needs expressed. Carl is “independent”, “self-motivated” and does not “need to be chivvied along” by supervisors. He is happy working within a broad, flexible framework of aims.

Selina maintains that some functions of the supervisor in an embodied Ph.D. will naturally be filled by empathetic others in her own workplace and support communities. She writes:

It is important to be able to talk to people in my day-to-day life about my interviews, what I’m thinking about them and how my analysis is developing. Ideally they would be able to meet me on a level of understanding that could enable me to go a step further, make more relevant connections, clarify my thinking in some way, or perhaps challenge me in some way.

For her, the Ph.D. candidature is a lived experience, not just an identity picked up and put down on research days or in anticipation of supervision meetings. She describes the serendipitous joy of meeting a retired professor and supervisor during the tragic Christchurch earthquake: she now has support literally on the ground. Distance doctoral students need peer conversation, and my three supervisees are lucky to be members of academic and creative communities where such conversations can and must happen.

Also important for Lizabeth is “notification of any new academic writing produced, writing festivals, or conferences that may be attended”, so she clearly sees the supervisor between the candidature and present and future imagined communities of writer-academics.

The usefulness of e-media and F2F meetings

All three candidates are inveterate e-mailers and keen to use this as the key medium of supervision, text transmission and feedback. “Email suits me and responses have always been prompt and helpful”, says Carl. Lizabeth writes: “Emails are handy because I have mine on all the time and messages are instantaneous... I am able to send and receive immediately, plus we have written records of what was said.” Selina, too, stresses the archival importance of emails and their e-attachments. Their importance as a record of supervisory moments is central to Harbon and England’s (2006) distance supervision. Clearly they are useful for auditing and quality control purposes too. Telephonic conversations are more ephemeral textually, although Carl identifies advantages:

I can see that Skype could be useful, but the phone calls I’ve had across the Tasman with [my supervisor] have been excellent... Phone calls are almost as helpful as F2F meetings, in fact. I often think a bit differently, and possibly more clearly, when on the phone, as there is less distraction. One is able to take notes continuously without needing to stop to make eye contact etc.... On the phone you can write without stopping.

Selina, however, likes Skype, not only because it is free, but also because it is:

more sociable, a more complete means of communication in that one can hear a familiar voice and stress and intonation patterns, and relate again to the whole person.

All three students value F2F meetings as leading to cultural capital, though Carl does not mind their being annual or biannual because “communication with supervisors is easy in this day and age.” He even goes as far as to say they might be distracting:

I suspect that, were I in or near Melbourne, we would meet up more frequently, but that this might NOT, in a strange way, assist my work, as I might get led up more and more byways and detours, chasing red herrings.

Distance supervision with the right blend of support and negotiation suits Carl. Here are Selina and Lizabeth:

Going to Melbourne or meeting [my supervisor] here in New Zealand are much more enjoyable, social occasions in which personal as well as social aspects of the overall supervisor/student relationship can be met.

F2F meetings in any account are the best because not only can discussion be extended, body language engenders real listening and speaking ability.

Interventions to improve studying at a distance

Interestingly, all three students, when asked about interventions they could imagine adding to the supervision experience, refer to e-community or online conferencing.

The idea of access to an electronic noticeboard or shared online reflective journal springs to mind. However, I do know from teaching experience that keeping up with online text is one more reason to be tied to a computer, and it tires me out. [Selina]

There is a facility of on-line conferencing, where people can speak and write alternatively. Everyone can see who is linked up, hear and read and it is private. [Lizabeth]

The other potential interventions mentioned are related to induction processes. Carl writes “I think I did expect some sort of introductory standard ‘reading list’ at the start of my enrolment, but looking back, I was given plenty of new titles and references to pursue”. Selina and Lizabeth both mention the need for institution-grounded or discipline-grounded materials related to practice-led or practitioner-led research, institution-specific knowledge of the library services available at a distance and style guides, and a clearer sense of what the exegetical expectations are. Lizabeth indicates how crucial it is to be supportive in the opening states:

I have heard [supervisors] say though that in the latter stages the supervisor should retreat and allow the candidate to ‘grow-up’ – at this stage in time I couldn’t cope with that, I like to know how I’m going.

Discussion

From these findings, a picture emerges of “hands-on” (Sinclair, 2004), dialogue-centred (Harbon and England, 2006), trust-building (Kelly and Ling, 2001) supervisory interventions that supervisors working at a distance can employ in PLR supervisions. Primary among them are the needs to set regular times for e-meetings and to negotiate workplans, potentially for the whole candidature. This offsets the non-linearity of PLR and also provides a pedagogical site for negotiation of schedule. Both the regularity of the meetings and the maps of the candidature can be revisited as the rhythms of work and life impact on candidatures, particularly part-time ones. In addition to a scheduled time, candidates express gratefulness for having email enquiries turned around swiftly, and to knowing supervisory support is available at short notice, regardless of the medium.

Telephoning and skyping are identified as effective media for the informational, directive and reflective supervisions that suit the early stages of PLR, and for discussing project planning, describing methodologies and creating literature reviews. They would be less effective for the workshop writing supervisions used in critiquing artefacts in F2F settings, although the VREs of the kind used by Mort and Horsley (2007) are applicable. Critiquing by email works, but can be static pedagogically. I suggest drafts be accompanied by a reflective self-evaluation,

and after the return of annotated drafts or a report on the drafts, I also ask students to reflect on which of the feedback suggestions they would like to apply and how they will apply them.

The need for peer and institutional support other than supervisory support is evident too, as all students feel the need to be part of a community of scholars, particularly others using practice-led or practitioner-led approaches. Missing out on university engagement is a significant theme, and this includes workshops conducted by the research centre and informational library inductions. While we can argue for making e-materials available, there are still solutions to investigate.

Firstly, the social potential of e-communities of scholars is valuable. A space currently exists for this on Blackboard, but is seldom used, due to its being managed by staff. There is a sense that it is ineffective because students may not speak with candour in such a context. More appropriately, a student-moderated e-community of practice exists on Facebook, and can be an effective way of sharing information about networking, conferences and competitions and for conducting some discipline-specific discussions with peers. In addition, there is the Australian Postgraduate Writers Network funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council which contains information about methodologies and research strategies and well as a bank of exegeses. Although online peer engagement might be partially effective, there remains a human need requiring more immediate engagement.

Secondly, there is a need for an inductive process relating institutional, library-related and discipline-specific information such as a field-related reading list and a house-style guide. The creation of a resource such as an induction kit that could take paper and/or e-forms could be supported by the enrolling institution or by external funding. To some extent, this can be handled with better use of existing web resources and making distance doctoral students aware of how helpful liaison librarians can be to locate electronic resources. While Swinburne uses online inductions for staff and researchers, there is no appropriate process for either the larger group 'doctoral candidates' or the more niche group 'practice- and practitioner-led research candidates'. Websites and online inductions would be informational but neither social nor holistically supportive, although national and discipline-specific online support groups of Ph.D. students exist. Encouraging those distance students whose learning style requires it to seek out local mentors and to make these interactions explicitly part of the supervisory loop is a solution. Rather than feeling threatened, supervisors should encourage distance students to use all resources they can. On-the-ground and human communication keeps distance students from 'drifting' between supervisory moorings.

Conclusions

In 1995 and 2001 Evans and Green and Kelly and Ling forecast distance supervision would recast relationships into new ontological and pedagogical spaces with new meanings such as "virtual presence" and would require new skills and understandings based around negotiation, interpretation and reciprocity. These skills would need to be "hands-on" and the understandings "interventionalist" in Sinclair's 2004 report. In an e-supervision context in

PLR, being hands-on is less about the innovative use of communication technologies than about being proactive, available for dialogue and to answer “niggling” questions and trustworthy especially when it comes to high-stakes critiquing of creative work and supporting students when they encounter milestones. The supervisor is the port where supervisees regularly moor to keep students from “drifting”, but other interventions to prevent drift, like having close-to-home F2F supervisory support and being part of embodied and online communities also need to be encouraged. To continue the nautical metaphor, the need for a good launch with a clear map will keep students on course, and improved inductive, information-flow and researcher support processes will play a role.

The most salient pedagogical interventions for distance supervision are those that build on trust and dialogue, utilising complete means of communication, usually a bricolage of emails, telephony, teleconferencing, occasional F2F meetings. Learning is co-negotiated via dialogic transactions with materials - ideas, theories, methodologies, creations, facilitated by the supervisor within a framework of reflective practice that empowers supervisees to see progress in their drafts/products. Mort and Horsley’s VRE (2007), may be useful here. Feedback provides anchorage points. As Lizabeth reminded us: “I like to know *how* I’m going” and not just *where*. Mutual trust is as important as knowing places for anchorage.

Distance supervision will not work for any candidate as it is, as Kelly and Ling (2001) emphasised, predicated on mutual trust. The three supervisees in this study share key traits making timely success likely: their academic and personal histories are known to the supervisor; they are experienced tertiary researcher-practitioners, working in supportive tertiary contexts and motivated by a professional development focus. They begin the project with a high degree of researcher autonomy. They have completed supervised research degrees before so have mapped out journeys previously and know the compass points. They are mature students. They are part-time enrolees. The needs they describe are as more related to the fact that the research territory, PLR with its exegesis, is new than due to any facelessness or tyranny of distance. If Matt and Horsley are right, distance, in fact, may help such students get a clearer run, lead them to seek out immediate resources closer to home, become not just autonomous but agential, and divert them from another inhabitant of the seas of the doctoral journey: Carl’s “red herrings”.

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