

'Walking our talk': Exploring supervision of postgraduate self-study research through metaphor drawing

L. van Laren*

School of Education
e-mail: vanlarenl@ukzn.ac.za

K. Pithouse-Morgan*

School of Education
e-mail: pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za

T. Chisanga

Faculty of Education
Walter Sisulu University
Mthatha, South Africa
e-mail: chisangat2000@yahoo.com

L. Harrison

Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
Durban University of Technology
Durban, South Africa
e-mail: lizh@dut.ac.za

T. Meyiwa

Education and Skills Development Programme & Faculty of Arts and Design
Human Sciences Research Council & Durban University of Technology
Durban, South Africa
e-mail: tmeyiwa@hsrc.ac.za

N. Muthukrishna*

School of Education
e-mail: muthukri@ukzn.ac.za

I. Naicker*

School of Education
e-mail: naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za

L. Singh*

School of Education

e-mail: singhl4@ukzn.ac.za

*University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban, South Africa

Abstract

The authors of this article portray their learning as a group of eight academics who met to examine the roles and relationships of supervisors of postgraduate self-study research. In the article, they represent how through a metaphor-drawing activity they were able collectively to rethink their experiences and understandings of becoming and being supervisors of postgraduate self-study students. They used a metaphor-drawing activity to gain further understanding of self-study supervision, while also learning more about how visual methods can assist in self-study research. Significantly, in their drawings the supervisor was portrayed as a partner working with the student during the supervision process, rather than as a provider of expert knowledge. Through collaborative interactions and sharing of their personal images of supervision of postgraduate self-study research with critical friends, they were able to reconsider their practices in a reflexive manner that provided insight into possibilities for enhancing their supervisory roles and relationships.

Keywords: critical friends, metaphor drawing, postgraduate research supervision, reflexivity, self-study, visual methods

INTRODUCTION

Self-study of educational practice – as a research genre and research community – has emerged from work done mainly in the area of teacher education and teaching (see, eg, Pinnegar and Hamilton 2009; Mitchell, Weber and O'Reilly-Scanlon 2005; Samaras 2011). Recently, public conversations about self-study research have expanded to include scholars working across academic disciplines (see, eg, Harrison, Pithouse-Morgan, Conolly and Meyiwa 2012; Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009a). What these self-study researchers share is a commitment to deepening their own personal and professional understanding, with the dual aims of making a difference to educational experience within their diverse disciplinary and institutional contexts and contributing to public conversations about teaching and learning (Pithouse 2011; Pithouse et al. 2009a).

In this article we offer an account of our learning as an interdisciplinary group of academics from four South African higher education institutions (HEIs) who met to examine the roles and relationships of supervisors of postgraduate self-study research. We use the medium of reflexive dialogues (Pithouse-Morgan and Van Laren 2012) to represent how, through a metaphor-drawing activity, we were able collectively to rethink our experiences and understandings of becoming and being supervisors of postgraduate self-study students.

SUPERVISION OF POSTGRADUATE SELF-STUDY RESEARCH

Supervision of postgraduate self-study research has been explored in the South African context in work done for a project in which we are co-researchers. The Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) project, funded by South Africa's National Research Foundation, aims to enhance and study the development of reflexive pedagogic, research and supervision capacity among academic staff at three South African HEIs. The project participants are staff-students (university educators who are undertaking postgraduate self-study research) and their supervisors. A diversity of academic and professional disciplines is represented, including Academic Development, Clothing and Fashion Design, Drama Education, English Language Studies, Mathematics Education, Photography and Teacher Development. TES project activities have included: twice-yearly inter-institutional workshops; regular research support meetings at the individual institutions; presentation and publication of collaborative papers; and participation in online classrooms.

Findings from the first year of this three-year project (see Harrison et al. 2012) suggest that staff-student and supervisor involvement in an inter-institutional, trans-disciplinary learning community of self-study researchers has challenged the more 'traditional apprenticeship model' (ASSAf 2010, 64) of supervision that has been prevalent in many South African HEIs (see also Backhouse 2011; Pillay and Balfour 2011). As Harrison et al. (2012, 20) explain:

One of the significant implications of our work in TES ... is that the supervisor has to engage and validate the staff-student's experience and authority rather than the other way around. We have found that when this dynamic is engaged in group settings, staff-students learn to challenge and validate colleagues' thinking, avoiding the kinds of tensions that arise where the supervisor is positioned as the sole authority (Sork and Chapman 1999; Chapman and Sork 2001; Bartlett and Mercer 2001; Grant 2003).

Another key discovery emphasised by Harrison et al. (2012) is that the supervisors reported greater enthusiasm and self-motivation among their students who are undertaking self-study research compared with other students. Linked to this is that staff-students and supervisors highlighted that they enjoyed being exposed to a range of innovative and creative research methods through the TES activities, and that they found these methods helpful both in their self-study research and in their educational practice.

These initial findings, based on an analysis of data generated by 'digital log books' (Lunenberg, Zwart and Korthagen 2010, 1282–1283) kept by TES participants, TES workshop evaluations, and the researchers' personal reflections and communications, suggest that supervising postgraduate self-study research is not just 'business as usual'. Supervising self-study researchers seems to require a rethinking of supervisory roles and relationships as well as research methods.

Thus far the *supervision* of postgraduate self-study research does not appear to have been explored extensively in higher education studies. However, Lunenberg

and Samaras (2011) conducted a study on *teaching* self-study research to a professional development group of teacher educators in The Netherlands and in a research methodology course for doctoral students in the United States (US). Based on their collaborative inquiry into their teaching of self-study research, Lunenberg and Samaras (2011) emphasise the need for teachers of self-study research to ‘walk their talk’ and model the self-study research practices that they are trying to teach.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Of particular significance for the current study is what Feldman, Paugh and Mills (2004, 974) identify as a central methodological feature of self-study research, which is ‘to be self-critical of one’s role as both practitioner and researcher’. Hence, in the article we aim to pay reflexive attention to our roles as supervisors of self-study research. As Kirk (2005, 233) explains: ‘reflexivity is a starting point for self-study, and a place from which relationships between the self and others can be explored’. Thus, reflexivity demands that we examine not only our roles as supervisors, but also the relationships through which we enact those roles (Harrison et al. 2012; Lunenberg and Samaras 2011).

Another noteworthy characteristic of self-study research is that even when conducted by an individual researcher, it should be ‘interactive’ (LaBoskey 2004, 847–849). This interaction, which can happen in diverse ways (such as interacting with colleagues, students, literature or multi-media texts), helps self-study researchers to ‘challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconsistencies, [and] expand our potential interpretations’ (LaBoskey 2004, 849). Likewise, Samaras and Roberts (2011, 43) explain that ‘self-study is personal *and interpersonal* [emphasis added] with learning, thinking, and knowing arising through collaboration and feedback from others’.

Samaras and Roberts (2011, 43) further emphasise the significant role played by peers, who serve as ‘critical friends’ in self-study research processes: ‘Critical friends encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to obtain alternative perspectives, and they work to help validate the quality and legitimacy of each other’s claims’. While it is thus recommended that all self-study research should have interactive or interpersonal elements, there is also a distinctive body of *collaborative self-study* research in which ‘two or more people intentionally [work] together as “co-scholars”’ to explore a shared self-study research question or topic (Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009b, 27). Indeed, as Pithouse et al. (2009b, 29) highlight, ‘more and more, [self-study] scholars ... are making the “what”, “how”, and “why” of this scholarly collaboration the focus of joint self-study research’. Likewise, in the article we aim to be reflexive about the process as well as the outcomes of our collaborative inquiry.

METAPHOR DRAWING AS A RESEARCH METHOD

We used metaphors to elicit and represent our experiences and understandings of the roles and relationships of supervisors of postgraduate self-study research. We took cues from McShane (2005, 6), who considers the metaphor to be a ‘creative linguistic and conceptual device’ that facilitates making use of imagination to describe and explore, using a different image, ways of ‘being, feeling or doing’. Furthermore, McShane (2005, 6) regards the use of metaphor as ‘an imaginative strategy that can transport with it other nuances and shadows that might not otherwise [be] articulated in the description of the lived phenomenon’. Patchen and Crawford (2011) highlight the significance of the use of metaphor as a reflexive mechanism. In the same vein, Storr (2012, 9) uses metaphors as a way of ‘taking stock of situations’ and ‘assist[ing] in envisioning how things might be different’.

Research that includes making use of metaphors in education-related contexts often involves classification of the metaphors according to basic theories of teaching. For example, early work on metaphors by Fox (1983) involved classification of theories of teaching as either transfer, shaping, travelling, or growing. In the literature on using metaphors there appear to be extensive lists for classifying theories of teaching; however, little use seems to have been made of metaphors to explore supervisory roles of higher education teachers who seek to use metaphors as a reflexive tool for enhancing understanding of these roles.

We decided to use metaphor drawing during our workshop for three reasons. First, we wanted to use a fun yet meaningful activity as a way of accessing our experiences and understandings of self-study supervision. Second, the metaphor-drawing activity facilitated sharing of meanings conveyed in the drawings and provided imaginative ways of reviewing our experiences and understandings. Third, as supervisors of self-study research students, we wanted to make use of this form of visual method to mirror the types of activities that we often encourage our self-study master’s and doctoral students to use for reflexivity in their research projects.

The value of using mental metaphor images can be extended by using metaphor drawings as a reflexive tool. The uses and benefits of these pen and paper drawings as a form of visual methodology is well documented (see, eg, Mitchell 2008). Through using accessible and inexpensive hand drawings of metaphors, critical issues can be explored in an unthreatening and playful manner (Van Laren 2007, 2011). Visual metaphors are known and used as ‘simple’ yet powerful ways of gaining deep insight into significant experiences, to represent, examine and better understand professional knowledge and practice (Tidwell and Manke 2009). Furthermore, Tidwell and Manke (2009) advocate the use of metaphor drawing in self-study research and suggest that the tangible drawn form of the metaphor also allows for working together as a collaborative group, where reflection on metaphoric representations assists in generating deeper understandings of practice.

Tidwell and Manke (2009) report that collaborative self-study using drawn metaphors makes the data more accessible for comments, questions and queries about

meanings conveyed, and these responses assist in seeing metaphoric representation from different vantage points. At our workshop it became evident that comments from others thus serve to extend the individual researcher's understanding of meaning conveyed by the metaphor drawing, and assist in developing further thinking about practice so that 'more complex and possibly abstract meanings embedded within [one's] own practice' (Tidwell and Manke 2009, 137) become available for reflexive inquiry. In our discussion at the workshop we agreed that it was fascinating and illuminating to hear a wide range of perspectives on each metaphor drawing.

OUR METAPHOR-DRAWING PROCESS

We commenced our self-study supervisors' workshop with a ten-minute PowerPoint session where Linda, who has used metaphor drawing in her own self-study research (Van Laren 2007, 2011), introduced the metaphor-drawing activity. She explained the meaning of a metaphor using the following definition: 'Metaphor is a creative linguistic and conceptual device that enables us to describe a way of being, feeling or doing in terms of another image' (McShane 2005, 6).

Linda described the link between metaphors and metaphor drawings by pointing out that a metaphor drawing is an imaginative way of describing a situation to give a vivid and interesting picture, but that these situations do not necessarily exist in real life. To further highlight the purpose of metaphor drawings, she explained that drawings are a method of assisting in the understanding of metaphors, and could thus be a useful way of visualising and analysing our personal experiences and conceptions of supervision. Linda showed a drawing of construction workers as an example of a metaphor drawing (see Figure 1). In this drawing the workers are busy with various tasks on a construction site. Each worker is occupied with a different task, such as: laying bricks; climbing a ladder while carrying bricks; pushing a wheelbarrow; walking along a scaffolding plank; or reading a building plan and giving instructions.

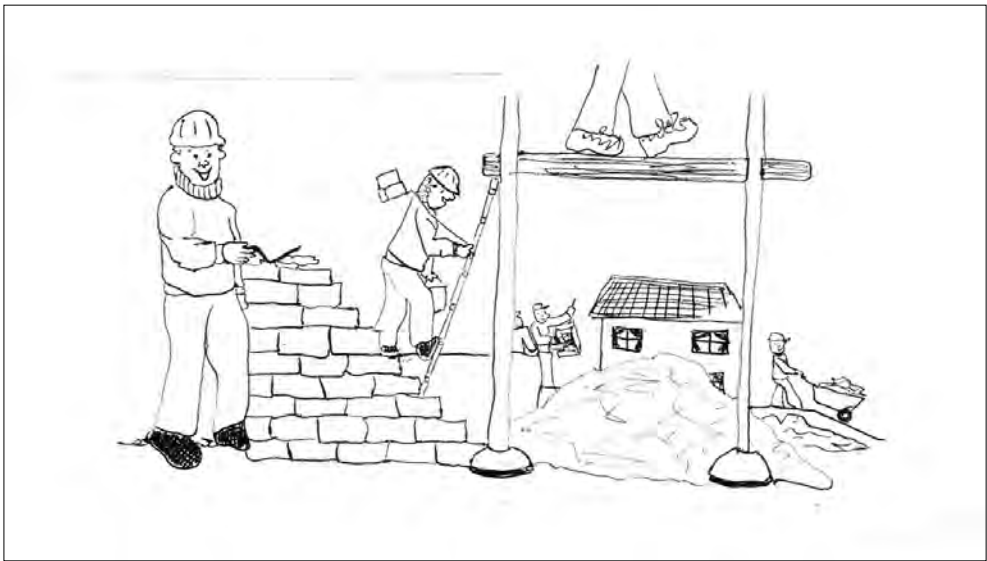


Figure 1: The construction site (Source: Johnston, Needham and Brook 1990)

We then had the opportunity to decide who or what in the construction site drawing represented the supervisor, the student and the supervision process, and to decide on a title for the metaphor drawing. The importance of not attempting to decide on a 'correct' interpretation was emphasised, as there are many 'correct' possibilities (Van Laren 2007).

After discussing this example of a metaphor drawing, we each used pen and paper to draw our own metaphor to illustrate supervision of self-study research. Using a pen instead of pencil facilitated quick drawing of the metaphor, because we could not dither and change what we had drawn but were forced to decide on an appropriate drawing without too much focus on picture perfection. Linda had emphasised that the content and message conveyed by the metaphor were more important than drawing ability. In our illustrations each of us showed how she/he thought the supervision *ought* to occur, and portrayed both the supervisor and the student/s. We each wrote down an appropriate title for our drawing.

Photocopies were made of all of the metaphor drawings so that each of us could examine, comment on and discuss the eight different drawings. Together we looked at each metaphor drawing in turn. First, we discussed our views on who or what represented the supervisor, the student and the supervision process. Only after the group members had shared their responses to a drawing was the 'owner'/'artist' of the drawing offered the opportunity to explain her/his meanings attached to the various parts of the drawing. Our reflexive dialogues highlighted that this process of starting with the group members' responses made available insights and interpretations that the 'artist' often had not been conscious of when doing the drawing. Through this exercise we equally demonstrated one of the conceptual bases of our collaborative

research project, TES, namely, reflexive *Ubuntu*, which advocates for the awareness and development of self in relation to others (Harrison et al. 2012, 17–19).

OUR METAPHOR DRAWINGS

Table 1 provides a summary of the group members, our academic disciplines, our years of experience in supervising postgraduate students and supervising self-study postgraduate students, as well as the metaphors we drew and discussed during the workshop. Our group consists of academics from a range of disciplines, with each group member supervising at least one master’s or doctoral student who is using self-study methodology. Because self-study research is a relatively ‘young’ genre within the South African context, such research tends to be supervised by very experienced supervisors who are either fairly new to this genre of research or by academics who have recently completed their doctoral studies using a self-study research methodology but are fairly new to supervising. Thus, these supervisors are all both novice and expert in some senses (see also Harrison et al. 2012). Similarly, the supervisory experiences of our group range from being beginner supervisors to well-established supervisors who have supervised postgraduate research students for up to 17 years; however, by far the majority of the supervisors are novices in terms of supervising postgraduate *self-study* research.

Table 1: Supervisors’ names and their academic disciplines, number of years’ experience in supervising postgraduates, number of years’ experience in supervising self-study postgraduates, and their metaphor drawings

Name	Academic discipline	Number of years’ experience in supervising post-graduate research	Number of years’ experience in supervising post- graduate self-study research	Title of metaphor drawing
Inba	Educational Leadership, Management and Policy	4	1	Game, set and match
Nithi	Social Justice Education	17	1	Weavers and weaving
Kathleen	Teacher Development Studies	6	6	Cultivation
Linda	Mathematics Education	4	1	Going on an ‘outride’ together
Liz	Academic Development	3	1	The race
Lorraine	Drama Education	4	4	Doing the ‘Dusi’!

Thenjiwe	Gender Studies, Indigenous Knowledges and Transformative Education	16	2	Soldiering on
Theresa	English Language Studies and Language Teaching	11	1	It's a two-way process!

For the metaphor-drawing prompt we considered how supervision 'ought' to occur, and so the ideas depicted in the drawings did not necessarily portray how we currently supervise postgraduate self-study students. In other words, the drawings depicted our views on what would be most appropriate for supervising self-study research. This activity pushed us to think harder both individually and collectively – a learning process that Meyer and Lesiuk (2010, 394) refer to as a form of 'subverting the ivory tower through critical dialogues'.

It was not our intention to classify types of supervision for ranking purposes, but rather to understand how the metaphor-drawing activity could facilitate reflexivity in order to enhance and challenge our understanding of our roles and relationships as supervisors. Furthermore, as mentioned before, the activity was not designed to focus on drawing creativity but rather to explore metaphor drawing as a reflexive tool that allows for collaborative learning about supervision. Coming as we do from a variety of disciplines, it was very helpful for us to share our understandings of the self-study supervision process in this way: recognising the disciplinary differences while acknowledging commonalities in our experiences of and views on self-study supervision.

WHAT OUR METAPHOR DRAWINGS DEPICTED

Table 2 summarises the wide range of ways in which the supervisor, student and supervision were identified in each of the metaphor drawings.

Table 2: Titles given to the metaphor drawings with a summary of who or what represented the student and the supervisor in the drawing and the supervision process that occurred

Title of metaphor drawing	Supervisor	Postgraduate student using self-study methodology	Supervision
Game, set and match	One of the partners in a doubles tennis match	The other partner in a doubles tennis match	The tennis players playing together as doubles tennis partners
Weavers and weaving	One of a pair of weaver birds busily building one nest together	The other one of the pair of weaver birds busily building the nest together	The two weaver birds building the nest together using the surrounding vegetation as building materials, and a group of critical 'weaver bird' friends sitting on a branch

Cultivation	One of the gardeners is bringing bags of fertiliser for a group of gardeners to use while cultivating plants	One of the gardeners in the group actively working together cultivating plants	The gardeners working collaboratively cultivating plants
Going on an 'outride' together	One of two riders, mounted on the smaller horse that has no bridle or saddle	The other rider, mounted on the larger horse that also has no bridle or saddle	The two riders going in the same direction with limited control over their horses
The race	One of a pair of athletes holding hands for encouragement during a running race	The other one of the pair of athletes holding hands for encouragement during the race	The pair of athletes taking on the race together
Doing the 'Dusi'!	One of a pair of canoeists paddling upstream during a race	The other one of the pair of canoeists paddling upstream during the race	The pair of canoeists who can choose two difficulty levels to complete the race, one level being more straightforward than the other
Soldiering on	The short, sad person walking on a path behind two other taller people	Each of the tall people walking on the path in front of the short, sad person	The people walking together in the same direction along a marked path
It's a two-way process!	One person facing and walking towards a group of people at the other end of a path	Each person in the group of people facing and walking towards the person at the other end of a path	A person and a group of people moving towards each other along a path

RETHINKING OUR SELF-STUDY SUPERVISOR ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

For the purposes of the article we selected drawings by Theresa, Kathleen and Liz as examples of the variations provided in the metaphors. Each selected metaphor was explored through the medium of a reflexive dialogue, which makes visible the interactive, collaborative nature of our inquiry. We constructed the dialogues using excerpts from transcripts of our audio-recorded conversations during the metaphor-drawing activity and written reflections that we emailed after the activity. We selected examples of how our metaphor-drawing discussions facilitated reflexivity and edited the extracts to make them more concise and more accessible to readers, as well as to enhance the 'flow' of the dialogues. Nevertheless, we tried to preserve the substance and tenor of our original conversations and written reflections (Pithouse-Morgan, Khau, Masinga and Van de Ruit 2012). The dialogues are interspersed with explanatory notes (which appear in italics) to present our interpretations.

The dialogues that follow make visible the collective interrogation of our metaphors that served an important function in facilitating reflexive possibilities

for rethinking our self-study supervisory roles and relationships. Through our group discussion we articulated and reconsidered our self-study supervision beliefs and practices; identified similarities and differences in the metaphor drawings; and commented on the usefulness of the metaphor-drawing activity in facilitating reflexivity. Through collective interrogation of our metaphors, we were able to extend the initial, originally intended meanings of each metaphor. This means that through discussion we deepened our thinking about metaphors, and this in turn permitted further reflexive possibilities for reimagining our self-study supervisor roles and relationships.

THERESA'S METAPHOR: A TWO-WAY LEARNING PROCESS

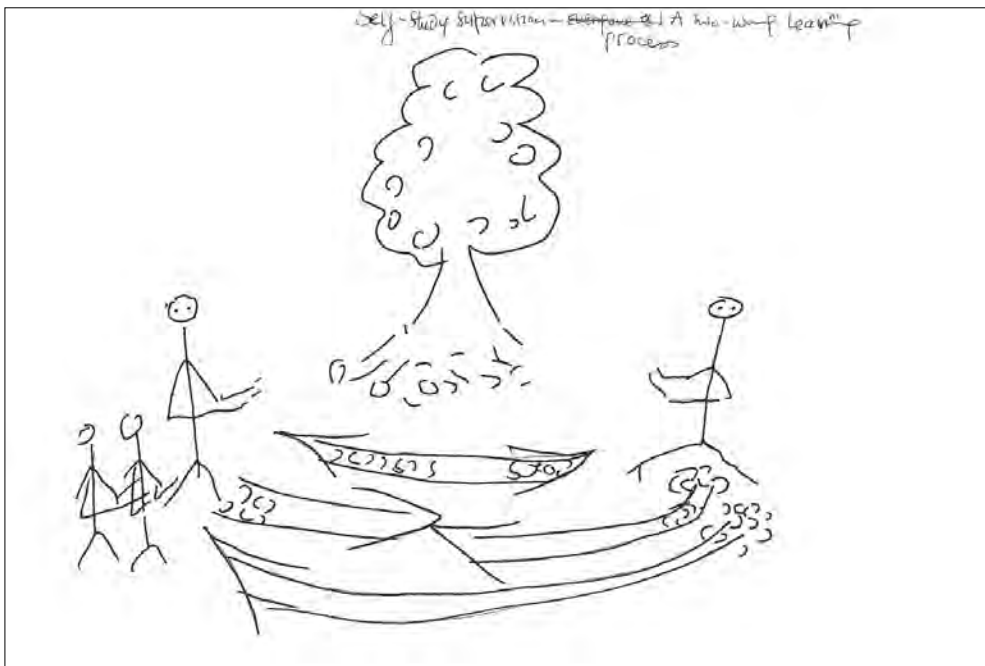


Figure 2: It's a two-way process!

Linda: Let's look at Theresa's metaphor drawing now.

Inba: I see a boat and a string. There is a group of people on one side of a bank and one person on the other bank. The supervisor is actually the boat that is going to take these people from one side of the bank to the other side.

- Linda: I see this [pointing to the single figure on the right hand side of the drawing] as the supervisor, these [pointing to the group of figures] are the students and they are learning from the supervisor through a two-way process and the tree is the self-study.
- Inba: The apples represent the methods in self-study. The ones that have fallen off have not been used.
- Liz: I can see it as a racetrack here [pointing to the two-way arrowed path].
- Linda: Shall we ask Theresa to explain what her metaphor represents?
- Theresa: My artistic ability is a problem! At the bottom of the drawing, it shows how the supervisor's role was providing knowledge to the students – this knowledge from the tree, which was only going one way to where the students are. I am just getting to the stage where I am beginning to appreciate that there is knowledge on both sides. This knowledge comes and meets somewhere in the middle ...
- Linda: So is the supervisor the person standing alone?
- Theresa: Yes, I think the supervisor is the person standing alone.
- Linda: And the students are on the other side of the tree of knowledge?
- Theresa: I am still gaining new knowledge about how supervision can be done differently from the traditional way. So the supervisor is still some distance away from this new self-study supervisory role.
- Liz: So, in an ideal world everybody would be sitting under the tree?
- Theresa: Yes. Quite firmly rooted, and it would definitely be a better world.

Theresa's drawing, shown in Figure 2, makes use of stick figures to represent the students and the supervisor. The group of students is placed at the left-hand side of a two-way arrowed path. On the right-hand side of the path is the supervisor. The tree in the background represents the 'tree of knowledge' that has fruit that the supervisor draws on during 'traditional' supervision. The supervisor, because of her/his past knowledge, uses these fruits. However, the drawing shows Theresa's insight that in self-study supervision there is a change in the supervision process, as both the supervisor and the students have knowledge that can be used during the process of supervision. In other words, the tree is deliberately placed in the middle to reflect the fact that at the end of the day, there indeed are 'fruits of knowledge' on both sides, and that a supervisor can also gain further insight and learn something new from the students during this process.

Our discussion of Theresa's drawing revealed her emerging understanding of how her established, more 'traditional' way of supervising students could be altered for her new self-study supervisory role. In her 11 years of experience, supervision had usually constituted a one-way process of providing knowledge and skills to her students. Now, through her drawing and the ensuing conversation, she had begun to articulate her self-study supervisory role as a learning process for the supervisor as well as for the student.

KATHLEEN'S METAPHOR: COMMUNAL GARDENING



Figure 3: Cultivation

- Liz: I think the supervisor is the person at the back holding those sacks – the sacks of manure!
- Lorraine: Is this person [pointing to the figure in the front, centre] holding another gardening implement?
- Kathleen: It's actually a hosepipe.
- Liz: Okay, then that must be the supervisor watering the plants. And all the characters are the community of scholars and the plants are the actual students.
- Inba: I am focusing on the sun between the clouds. To me, the sun signifies great ideas breaking through amongst the others.
- Linda: On some days the clouds are over the sun, but other days there are storms.
- Liz: The weather could be the supervisor too from the student's point of view.
- Kathleen: The supervisor was the one at the back with the bags of manure.
- Lorraine: With strong arms and shoulders!
- Nithi: I think they are all working together, the supervisor and the critical friends.
- Kathleen: I prefer working with a group of students. It doesn't always work out but my ideal is to have students working together – supporting each other through collaboration. But, just like with gardening, there are potential hazards and things can go wrong – there are pests and diseases and the weather is changeable.
- Thenjiwe: Tell me more about the students working with each other – will you have them doing workshops?
- Kathleen: My group supervision started out as a necessity, but generally now what I try to do is meet regularly as a group and only have one-on-one supervisory meetings

as necessary. Because the students get to know each other, they also start to arrange to meet outside our group meetings.

Thenjiwe: That is a good way.

Theresa: If you have enough students ... How focused is the group? Do you have a topic for the meeting?

Kathleen: It depends. I give them homework to do and then we usually work on something together in the meeting. It works particularly well with analysis, as they look at each other's work and give each other ideas. They also share readings and go to the library together. Students also contribute their ideas and skills to the group. In one of my groups I have three Technology teachers. They sometimes know things that I don't know. For example, one student taught us how to put alerts on Google Scholar.

Inba: I feel sharing here, among us, is very important because I am well below a novice in self-study research supervision. I always had that conception that supervision had to be done on a one-to-one basis and I always thought it was about what others take away from it, because it is somebody else's study.

Liz: I think this point is interesting because it has been worrying me about self-study philosophically: who the self that we are looking at is. The word 'self-study' almost implies that the self is unitary and unchanging, whereas Kathleen's situation fits more with the *Ubuntu* idea of knowing yourself because of the people around you.

Figure 3, drawn by Kathleen, shows a group of students together with their supervisor who takes a background position in the picture. The supervisor works collaboratively with the students during the growing of the plants, and through collaboration the group of students has opportunities to develop as critical friends. The supervisor provides the fertiliser to accelerate the collaborative learning process that occurs while the students are cultivating the plants. These plants represent the different self-study research projects of the postgraduate students.

Kathleen's metaphor drawing prompted lively discussions around making use of group sessions to supervise self-study students. Kathleen's explanation of how she supervises a number of self-study students in groups assisted our self-study supervisor group in discussing how we might rethink our own supervisory roles and relationships. Her self-study supervisory role is complemented by the roles played by students in the group meetings. As 'critical friends', the students in the groups support each other as they contribute and gain knowledge and skills in the group meetings. Significantly, Kathleen indicates that she also gains by being involved in group interactions and this enhances her capacity as a supervisor.

LIZ'S METAPHOR: THE MARATHON

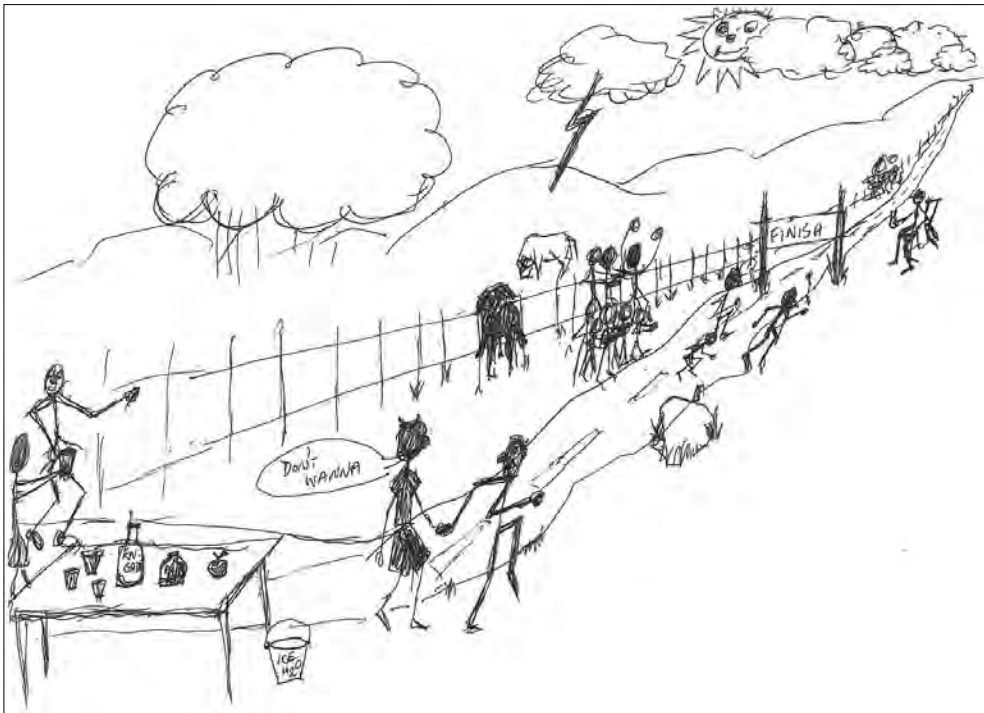


Figure 4: The race

- Liz: I was very ambivalent about who the supervisor was. I did see the student as the one racing, the athlete if you like. All the characters that are actually racing were students, because some are finishing, some are falling on the wayside. Others are trying to crawl to the end.
- Inba: Those [pointing to three figures on the left-hand side] are the critical friends cheering the students on.
- Liz: Yes, those were the critical friends, the supporters on the side. The iced water was the reality check. There is an apple on the table, which is for acknowledgement and when the student wants recognition and affirmation. The supervisor also needs affirmation.
- Inba: I like the weather feature because there are clouds as you are progressing through the race, but as you near the finish line you can see the sun.
- Liz: The weather was the changeability.
- Linda: The fence must mean something – to keep the vicious animals away?
- Liz: The fence was about boundaries.
- Linda: So who was that person at the end of the finish sitting on the side?
- Liz: At one stage the supervisor was the person sitting on the other side of the finish line with the towel. I think the supervisor took on different roles along the way. I'm not sure if it's me or the self-study methodology – but there is no comfortable

or accepted way of being a supervisor. I find myself being a parent, colleague and friend more often than I find a pattern of direction and action plans.

Liz's drawing, shown in Figure 4, shows the supervisor in a number of roles. In one role, the supervisor and the postgraduate self-study student are holding hands during a race. Each of two stick figures might be the supervisor. In other words, sometimes the more enthusiastic, active person is the supervisor and sometimes the enthusiastic person is the student. The supportive camaraderie suggested by the two stick figures holding hands shows that sometimes it is the supervisor who struggles to progress and says, 'Don't wanna!' in the race to finish, and at other times it is the student. Along the road there are other students also trying to finish the race, and a group of cheering critical friends supports them. Only when the student has finished the road race is the supervisor able to 'sit back' and relax.

Liz's detailed drawing portrayed how, from her recent experience in supervising self-study researchers, her understanding of her supervisory role kept evolving because of her students' particular needs. Liz indicates the importance of critical friends during the process of supervision, but these friends show their support from the 'sidelines' and are not directly involved in the supervision.

LEARNING FROM THE INTERACTIVE METAPHOR-DRAWING ACTIVITY

In this section, we present a reflexive dialogue that shows our collective thinking about what we had learned through the metaphor-drawing activity. This is followed by our interpretations of the dialogue (in italics).

Kathleen: What difference does this make?

Liz: It has been enlightening to be able to compare our strategies for supporting our students.

Thenjiwe: I am thinking that the exercise made us to listen to each other.

Kathleen: I also think that the drawing is significant. As academics, words and writing is what we do. We are fairly comfortable with that. Give us another medium and we have to think for a while.

Nithi: When you draw, you are conceptualising your thoughts. It is like interrogating your ideas.

Kathleen: And in discussing the drawing, you then see things in your own drawings that you did not see before.

Inba: When I put things down, I had a particular interpretation of it, and when I looked at it five minutes later I had a different interpretation.

Lorraine: Drawings reveal more than we sometimes know.

Liz: There are a couple of lines on the page that are illustrating this huge concept and they are all extended metaphors. I am wondering how using this kind of exercise could help my student write about her topic?

Inba: It helped me to reflect on myself as a supervisor and it helped me to think deeply about the student that I supervise as well. But how does what we have discussed

- in relation to supervising self-study methodology differ from, let's say, a case study? Would we as supervisors still feel the same way?
- Nithi: I think the emphasis on critical friends comes through in all the drawings.
- Inba: That will be one thing.
- Liz: I think we looked at the relationships of the supervisor very differently.
- Inba: In none of the drawings is the supervisor larger than the student. They are at the same level or sometimes the supervisor is smaller.
- Kathleen: There is also a lot of energy and action. The supervisors are in there getting their hands dirty. And there is a sense of supervisors growing just as much as the students.
- Liz: I think the majority of us were troubled. Thenjiwe's drawing with all the crossroads and mine with the sense of pulling along the uphill indicated feelings of depression, but they also all have elements of celebration.
- Thenjiwe: I want to talk about what Liz said; the drawings bringing out tension.
- Liz: From my experience of supervising students using more common research methodologies, there is a clear distinction between the researcher and the subject of her study. The subject exists outside her. It seems to me that students working with a self-study methodology have a dual challenge. Firstly, a distancing process needs to occur in order to refine the research question from the melange of lived experience. Secondly, the student using a research methodology of self is constantly living with her topic. She is never out of the field. Everything seems important. The challenge of delimiting the field of the study is daunting.
- Lorraine: But then again, in other forms of qualitative research you are exposed as a researcher. There is a revelation of you even if you do not say so explicitly.
- Liz: But is the researcher, and the supervisor working with that researcher, as vulnerable?
- Lorraine: I think the difference in self-study is the explicit part – you set yourself up to be looked at. I think that is one of the unique features of self-study. Your self, your beliefs and your values – so much of you is exposed.
- Liz: These challenges lead me into a space where I cannot be the authoritative supervisor. The constant challenge to validate and verify what counts as worthwhile knowledge is exhausting. Limits and boundaries are constantly being challenged; I find my students often become 'stuck' between our very regular meetings. My challenge is to help them focus on one issue at a time; more importantly from my point of view is knowing what the catalytic focus might be based on their lives and aspirations.
- Theresa: For me, stepping out of the straightjacket of traditional supervision into the self-reflexive type that puts me on the spot by asking that all important question: 'How can I improve my practice ...?', alongside the student, has been more than an eye-opener. The realisation that supervision is a process in which I as supervisor am as much a player in both teaching and learning as the student, and that our roles can at times be reversed if I keep an open mind and let the student make their discoveries, is amazing and a bit shocking in its simplicity of logic.

Using the metaphor drawing as a starting point we were able to share what we had experienced and felt while becoming and being supervisors of postgraduate self-

study students. Through translating our experiences and views into a different mental image, we articulated and recognised relationships that we could describe more vividly. It was thus possible to use metaphors to make visible complex ideas and personal theories that were sometimes difficult to describe in terms of real-life, concrete situations and examples. We were further able to distance ourselves from the 'real' situation of being a self-study supervisor through using a translated mental image, so that concepts that were sometimes difficult to pinpoint or communicate became available for discussion and interrogation. Through sharing our personal images of supervision of postgraduate self-study research, we were able to interrogate our understandings in a productive manner that provided insight into ways in which we could rethink and enhance our supervisory roles and relationships.

In our drawings, the 'traditional' supervisory role is challenged when self-study postgraduate students are being supervised. In most of the drawings the supervisor was not portrayed as a person in 'an ivory tower' who was placed at a separate, elevated level and distanced from the student. Fox's (1983) classifications of metaphors and links to personal theories that illustrate 'transferring' of knowledge or 'shaping' of students would be in line with more traditional supervisory roles (see, eg, Grant 2003). In the drawings the supervisor was not depicted as the provider of expert knowledge, but rather as the partner working with the student during the supervision process – a vivid illustration of the concept of 'walking our talk'. Thus, the metaphors provided insight into our perspectives on the epistemological and ontological orientations of self-study supervision. The drawings revealed a perspective in which knowledge is viewed as dynamic and socially constructed (Bruner 1996; Dewey 1963) and learning is understood in terms of relational and dialogic processes of becoming (Harrison et al. 2012; Mkhize 2004).

Fox's (1983) classification and associated personal theories that illustrate 'travelling' and 'growing' are related to facilitation of student learning. McShane (2005, 8) points out that 'facilitation suggests the notion of making an experience easier for someone else'. In our metaphor drawings, however, the supervisor was not illustrated as the sole facilitator of learning. The supervisor and the student were often represented as interchangeable people. Furthermore, the supervisor and the student were drawn as 'fellows' and partners during supervision.

The drawn images often highlighted challenges that are faced by supervisors of postgraduate self-study students. It is interesting that all the pictured metaphors contained the notion of 'effort', such as: battling the elements; travelling upstream or uphill; control within limits; and so on. It is significant that we all chose to translate what is commonly thought of as 'abstract thinking work' into metaphors of physical energy expenditure.

The shared responsibility of the supervisor and student during the supervision process appeared to make the supervisor-student relationship an emotional connection. Because both the supervisor and the student simultaneously lead and learn, both the supervisor and the student depend on each other for emotional as well as other support – a reflexive, *Ubuntu* kind of approach to research supervision which is akin to what

Liz referred to earlier as ‘knowing yourself because of the people around you’. If there is sharing of the process that is being led by the supervisor and the student, then nurturing and protection of the partnership is required. Furthermore, the role of critical friends was often highlighted as important in the self-study supervision process; the active involvement of critical friends in self-study supervision assisted in guiding the process as well as in supporting the supervisor-student relationship. Likewise, at our supervisors’ workshop, each one of us served as a critical friend in the discussion and reflection on the metaphor-drawing activity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The interactive metaphor-drawing activity provoked us to engage in a process of collaborative introspection on our experiences and understandings of becoming and being supervisors of postgraduate self-study students. Simultaneously, it prompted us to think deeply about how we could change some of our attitudes and beliefs in order to ensure an enhanced self-study supervision experience.

Research with such a focus has the potential to enable and encourage supervisors to acknowledge and reconsider the complex ways in which they make sense of what they do in the supervision process. This workshop provided sharing and learning opportunities for us to deepen and extend our understandings of postgraduate self-study supervision. Furthermore, through our discussions we were able to ‘trouble’ the assumption that knowledge and perception are definite qualities, which in a supervisory relationship are usually assumed to be solely endowments of the supervisor. Significantly, in our drawings, the supervisor was portrayed as a partner working with the student during the supervision process, rather than as a provider of expert knowledge.

Through collaborative interactions and sharing our personal images of supervision of postgraduate self-study research with critical friends, we were able to reconsider our practices in a productive manner that provided insight into possibilities for enhancing our supervisory roles and relationships. ‘Walking our talk’ in this workshop was, therefore, an enriching experience in itself.

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