

EDUCATIONAL FUTURES: RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

# Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design

Brent Allpress, Robyn Barnacle,  
Lesley Duxbury and  
Elizabeth Grierson (Eds.)



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# **Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design**

EDUCATIONAL FUTURES  
*RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE*  
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# **Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design**

**Edited by**

**Brent Allpress, Robyn Barnacle,  
Lesley Duxbury and Elizabeth Grierson**

*Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University,  
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MICHAEL A. PETERS

## FOREWORD

### *Creative Practice, Creative Economy*

It is quite remarkable how the creative, design and expressive arts once marginal and marginalised have become central to the mission of the university. Indeed, under the ideology of the creative economy the so-called cultural industries have taken centre stage and in some senses displaced or eclipsed the role and place of the traditional humanities. The modern university was built around philosophy and literature. Kant talked of the “conflict of the faculties”, Hegel occupied the first chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1811, and Henry Newman crafted the Idea of the university around a body of literature. In 2010 The United Nations released its *Creative Economy: A Feasible Development Option*, which details evolving concepts of creativity, cultural and creative industries and aspects of the “creative economy”, its multiple dimensions and cross-sectoral linkages. Its first *Creative Economy Report* was released in 2008 concluding that the creative industries were among the most dynamic sectors of the world economy and offered new, high growth opportunities for developing countries. As Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and Helen Clark of United Nations Development Programme note in their joint Foreword to the 2010 report:

This report builds on the earlier analysis of its predecessor, with new and improved data, showing how creativity, knowledge, culture, and technology can be drivers of job creation, innovation, and social inclusion. It suggests that world trade in creative goods and services remained relatively robust at a time when overall levels of international trade fell. It analyzes the rapid growth in the creative economy sectors across the South and the growing share of creative sector trade which is coming from the South.

Which university or nation can afford to ignore the ideas and analysis behind this report? The ten key messages (summarised and truncated here) are (pp. xxiii–xxv):

1. Even in times of crisis “the creative industries hold great potential for developing countries that seek to diversify their economies and leapfrog into one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy”.
2. “The world economy has been receiving a boost from the increase in South-South trade”.
3. “A right mix of public policies and strategic choices are essential for harnessing the socio-economic potential of the creative economy for development gains”.
4. “Policy strategies to foster the development of the creative economy must recognise its multidisciplinary nature – its economic, social, cultural, technological and environmental linkages”.

5. “A major challenge for shaping policies for the creative economy is related to intellectual property rights: how to measure the value of intellectual property, how to redistribute profits and how to regulate these activities”.
6. “The creative economy cuts across the arts, business and connectivity, driving innovation and new business models”.
7. “The creative economy is both fragmented and society-inclusive. It functions through interlocking and flexible networks of production and service systems spanning the entire value chain”.
8. “Policies for the creative economy have to respond not only to economic needs but also to special demands from local communities related to education, cultural identity, social inequalities and environmental concerns”.
9. “In the aftermath of the crisis, the firmness of the market for creative products is a sign that many people in the world are eager for culture, social events, entertainment and leisure”.
10. “Each country is different, each market is special and each creative product has its specific touch and splendor”.

This is considered the new development mantra and its principles for the United Nations’ development programme. It is a powerful reassertion of the notion of the knowledge economy still couched within a theory of international trade and oriented towards a development paradigm and without the neoliberal recipe enshrined in the Washington consensus. Yet it also provides a philosophy and ethos for ‘development’ across the board and for developed countries.

It is in the context of this evolving understanding of development that the contribution of *Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design* edited by Brent Allpress, Robyn Barnacle, Lesley Duxbury, Elizabeth Grierson, from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, Australia can be appreciated. *Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research* makes clear the fundamental shift towards a model of applied practice-led research which, as the editors explain in their introduction, “offers an effective means to conduct research on knowledge both embodied in, and discovered through discipline-specific art, architecture and design practices”. And they themselves note the centrality of such a conception to the “creative economy”.

The shift can be contextualised as a response by the academy to global changes in knowledge generation. Today productive and creative forms of applied and situated knowledge are being validated for their contribution to innovation economies with universities and industry working in close partnership to forge a practice-focused research and innovation nexus.

The emphasis is on a form of creative practice harnessed to project-based knowledge work that encourages intensive knowledge exchanges between teacher and student (or should I say co-investigators or co-creators), and between university and industry where the emphasis is on *knowledge as enactment, knowledge as doing*. Yet the element of criticality is not to be forgotten in the market or in trading knowledges that demand an applied and entrepreneurial context. These are critical models of social and public entrepreneurship.

The emphasis on knowledge as a social practice has taken a long time to mature from its early formulations in the work of Wittgenstein and in Bourdieu, before it begins to get institutionalised in the doctrine of the reflective practitioner with Donald Schön and Chris Argyris in the 1970s, and accounts of “practitioner cultures”.

What this new collection does so well is to adopt a creative approach to the notion of supervision in art, architecture and design and to examine, as the editors phrase it, “emerging modes of postgraduate research and supervisory practice”.

This is a very astute and valuable contribution to the literature on supervision in the applied arena with a series of excellent discussions on creative practice-based research, pedagogical practices of supervision, creative writing and the creative work in process, “generative praxis”, distance supervision, doctoral exhibitions, supervision of designers, and a range of related issues and concerns. I particularly like the phrase of Linda Daley who talks of “Pedagogies of Invention”.

It is a path-breaking, path-finding book that will be of great assistance to all kinds of professionals and students across a wide range of disciplines and with important lessons for all doctoral supervision. It is an exciting and accessible book and a great achievement for a group of colleagues in a leading institution.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Brent Allpress** is the research coordinator in the discipline of architecture in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University. His teaching, postgraduate supervision and research focuses on contested and informing relationships between design practices and discourses, particularly in the context of emerging digital design technologies. He was the founding editor of the project-based design research journal, *Architectural Design Research*, an international first in the field.

**Dr Robyn Barnacle** is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Graduate Research at RMIT University where she runs a seminar series and course on supervision of higher degrees by research pedagogy and practice. She also leads, and is otherwise involved in a variety of other research projects and quality improvement initiatives in the area of research education. Robyn's research interests focus on research education and pedagogy, research practice and knowledge generation, ontology, embodiment and learning. She has published widely in these areas and supervises higher degree by research candidates in a range of fields, such as education and design. Robyn holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Monash University.

**Dr Catherine Cole** is Professor of Creative Writing and Deputy Dean, Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, NSW, Australia, and previously of RMIT. She has published numerous novels, non-fiction books, anthologies, poetry, short stories, essays and reviews. She is currently leading a research project on creative communities, which examines the role of UNESCO's Cities of Literature in conjunction with Melbourne, Iowa and Norwich. She has extensive experience of teaching in a number of Australian universities, and has been a Writing and Research Fellow at the University of East Anglia, UK, a resident of the Keesing Studio, Cité International des Arts in Paris, and an Asialink writer-in-residence in Hanoi, Vietnam. As a former member of the Committee of Management and the Executive of the Australian Society of Authors, Catherine has links with Australian writers, publishers and critics.

**Dr Linda Daley** is a senior lecturer in literary and communication studies in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University where, until recently, she was a Director for Higher Degrees by Research. She supervises candidates undertaking research degrees by project and thesis. Her recent publications focus on the intersection of continental philosophy with literature, photography and film, and with a particular emphasis on invention, pedagogy and sense-making.

**Dr Peter Downton** is Professor of Design Research, RMIT University. His research includes the production of knowing and knowledge through designing and making, models in thinking, and people's relations with physical environments. Having begun in 1974, he currently supervises Ph.Ds. covering aspects of design in architecture, fashion, industrial design, interior design, landscape architecture, and

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

other fascinating domains. His books include, *Design Research* (RMIT Press, 2003); *Studies in design research: Ten epistemological pavilions* (RMIT Press, 2004); and with Mark Burry, Michael Ostwald, and Andrea Mina (eds.) three books under the generic title *Homo Faber* (Archadia Press, 2007, 2008, 2010).

**Dr Lesley Duxbury** is the Deputy Head, Research and Innovation in the School of Art at RMIT University. She is an artist who uses print media to emulate and recreate experiences and perceptions of the natural environment, especially the atmosphere and its phenomena, and her current projects and publications address climate change action and mitigation. She has exhibited for over 25 years in Australia and the UK, with solo exhibitions in Melbourne, Perth and Sydney, and more than 50 selected group exhibitions in Australia, Korea, Austria and Hong Kong. She is the recipient of Australia Council Visual Arts Board funding (2011 and 1996) and has completed public art commissions in Perth (2004 and 1996). Her work is held in all major public collections in Australia.

**Dr Pia Ednie-Brown**, Associate Professor at RMIT University's School of Architecture and Design, is a design researcher, educator and theorist with a research practice, *onomatopoeia* (<http://onomatopoeia.com.au/practice/>). Based in the architecture programme and the Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory (SIAL), she has directed numerous creative research projects involving multiple disciplines across the arts and sciences. Her book *Plastic green: Designing for environmental transformation* (RMIT Press, 2009) offers an account of one of these projects. From 2009 to 2011 she led an ARC Discovery research project seeking to re-theorise innovation for contemporary design practices in terms of coupled ethical and aesthetic concerns therein.

**Dr Elizabeth Grierson** is Professor of Art and Philosophy at RMIT University, and for seven years Head of the School of Art (2005–2012). She is a research leader of RMIT Design Research Institute and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts UK, and has a long experience of supervising and examining postgraduate degrees. She was a practising artist and theorist in NZ for over 20 years, Visiting Research Fellow at University of Brighton, UK (1997–98), and since 2001 executive editor, *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural & Policy Studies*. Her books include, *Designing sound for health and wellbeing* (co-author, ASP, 2012), *A life in poetry: Nicholas Lyon Gresson* (ASP, 2011), *Doctoral journeys in art education* (ed., ASP, 2010), *Creative arts research* (co-author, Sense, 2009), *A skilled hand and cultivated mind* (co-author, RMIT Press), *Thinking through practice* (ed., RMIT Press, 2007), *The arts in education* (ed., 2003).

**Dr Philip Samartzis** lectures in the School of Art, RMIT University, and researches in the areas of sound art, acoustic ecology and spatial sound practices, with a specific focus on climate change and environmental sustainability. His Ph.D., *Surround sound in installation art*, examined the place of sound in contemporary art practice through a range of site determined sound art projects. In

2010 Philip was awarded fellowships by the Australia Council for the Arts, and the Australian Antarctic Division to document the effects of extreme climate and weather events on the human condition at Davis Station in Eastern Antarctica, and Macquarie Island.

**Dr David Thomas** was born in Belfast, N. Ireland. He studied art at the University of Melbourne, Monash University and RMIT University where he is an Associate Professor of Painting. His paintings, photopaintings and installations employ monochromes and painted reflective surfaces to address issues of the perception of time and space. His work is exhibited in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, USA and Europe, and is held in numerous private and public collections including the: National Gallery of Victoria; Australian National Gallery, Canberra; Art Bank; Museum of Modern Art at Heide; Chartwell Collection; Auckland Art Gallery, NZ; and Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany. He also curates and writes on contemporary art.

**Dr Laurene Vaughan** is an Associate Professor in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University and Research Leader in the RMIT Design Research Institute. She has melded a career of practising artist, designer and educator in Australia and internationally. Her current research is investigating the historical and cultural evolution of vernacular artefacts: their making and their meaning. Laurene supervises masters and Ph.D. students with a focus on research through practice. In 2011 she was awarded an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Citation Award for her sustained contribution to this teaching practice.

**Kevin White** is Associate Professor and Deputy Head, International Development, in the School of Art, RMIT University and has a major role in supervising doctoral candidates in the Asian region. He is a ceramic artist whose current research focuses on interpreting the porcelain traditions of Japan and the Japonisme seen in British ceramics of the nineteenth century. In 1978 he was awarded a prestigious Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho) scholarship for postgraduate research in ceramics, in Japan, studying under the late Professor Yutaka Kondo at Kyoto City University of Fine Art. He then worked for three years in the Kyoto studio of Mr Satoshi Sato, a member of the 'Sodeisha' group of contemporary ceramic artists. In 1985 he completed his Master of Arts at the Royal College of Art, London. His work is held in public and private collections.



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BRENT ALLPRESS, ROBYN BARNACLE, LESLEY DUXBURY  
AND ELIZABETH GRIERSON

# 1. SUPERVISING PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH BY PROJECT IN ART, CREATIVE WRITING, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

## SITUATING THE MODEL

This book offers insights into the supervisory practices of academics at RMIT University, in Melbourne, Australia, whose postgraduate candidates are undertaking research by project in art, creative writing, architecture and design. Over the past two decades there has been a decisive shift internationally in the focus of these disciplines towards an emphasis on applied practice-led research undertaken through project-based investigations. This model offers an effective means to conduct research on knowledge both embodied in, and discovered through discipline-specific art, architecture and design practices.

The shift can be contextualised as a response by the academy to global changes in knowledge generation. Today productive and creative forms of applied and situated knowledge are being validated for their contribution to innovation economies with universities and industry working in close partnership to forge a practice-focused research and innovation nexus. There is an increasing demand for research qualifications at master's and doctorate levels for exemplary art, architecture and design practitioners who are taking on professional leadership roles that bridge the academy and industry.

The modes of research supervision addressed in this collection can be understood in the context of broad socio-cultural changes in which creative and applied knowledge is defining and leading cultural, scientific, technological and creative economies. In this global condition of entrepreneurial knowledge enhancement and exchange there is a conspicuous emergence of new forms of knowledge and new ways of enacting, generating and communicating. To meet these demands the academy is adapting and reconfiguring its emphasis, approaches and applications, with research being positioned at the leading edge of economic enterprises. In this scenario research must adapt its formations to understand new physical and economic conditions and predict future patterns. Practice and project-based research is in a strong position to work with and understand knowledge as a practical action opening the way for creative research as a predictor and enabler of change. Activating this potential for critical speculation and effective responses to contemporary concerns calls for new methodologies and approaches to the

research task at hand, with a focus on applied practice through the materials themselves.

Urban concentrations of intellectual capital are becoming significant drivers of economic productivity in the current phase of globalisation. Australian media theorist, Ned Rossiter has argued that Richard Florida's (2002) analysis of this shift emphasises quantitative measurements of economic activity, but does not adequately account for the qualitative value of this economic activity (Rossiter, 2006). The research by project models of supervision being employed in art, creative writing, architecture and design disciplines offer strategies for supporting the qualitative improvement in practices across diverse fields of creative production.

This innovative approach to supervision was inaugurated in 1987 at the level of masters in the architecture discipline at RMIT with the introduction of a research by project model of postgraduate candidacy. This was offered as an alternative to the orthodox model of research by written thesis. Subsequently the model has been adapted and adopted by all of the design disciplines across the university at both the master's and doctorate levels. Also it has been taken up selectively by other key international institutions such as the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London in the UK, following the early involvement of academics from that institution as external examiners. There is a parallel lineage at RMIT of distinctive approaches to the supervision of postgraduate research by project in fine art and other creative fields such as creative writing. These diverse disciplinary approaches to supervision share common characteristics that can be contrasted with orthodox models of traditional thesis supervision.

Design researcher, Peter Downton argues that creative arts and design research by, and through projects involves methodologies and practices that are very different from more traditional postgraduate research models, which can be characterised as technical and scientific research for, and historical or critical research about art, architecture and design practice (Downton, 2003, 2009). Until recently, university regulations for the doctorate degree across Australasia have focused primarily on established science and humanities models of research. The shift to research by project supervision at RMIT recognises and reasserts the value of discipline-specific creative practices as distinct and effective modes of knowledge production. The strategies employed to supervise project-based methodologies and approaches support research outcomes relevant to these specific fields of practice that could not be achieved readily by other means.

In these models of Ph.D. supervision the research is undertaken primarily within and through a series of design projects or creative works. This embodied research is framed selectively through a written exegesis of around 40,000 words and relevant visual or other documentation and presented through a culminating exhibition and examination by a panel of experts in the field. Examinations in the design discipline also include an extended verbal defence by the candidate. This mode of research is of comparable scope to a traditional thesis and fulfils equivalent responsibilities to substantiate and make legible the candidate's

contribution to knowledge. This outcome is achieved through discipline-specific practices relevant to the field.

### AIMS AND LITERATURE

The aim of this book is to bring together supervisors from very different academic and disciplinary cultures of art, creative writing, architecture and design within the one institution to frame and open up dialogue and debate around these emerging modes of postgraduate research and supervisory practice. By so doing it is positioning forms of knowledge generation that have application in a wide range of fields and applied situations in global innovation economies.

Over the past two decades a collective body of institutional knowledge has accrued at RMIT around the implementation of a range of project-based research supervision models. This book seeks to capture, frame and make these approaches and insights available to broader academic communities that are undertaking or seeking to establish related models of such postgraduate research supervision.

While many supervisory concerns and responsibilities are shared across the different modes of postgraduate research by thesis and by project, this book seeks to foreground, frame and debate a number of particular issues, obstacles and opportunities raised through research by project supervision in the creative disciplines. Fostering and extending iterative cycles of production and reflection within a practice-led research context requires a clear sense of how project investigations may be framed and staged most effectively and what methodologies may be employed to achieve the best results in this process. Substantiating research primarily against qualitative criteria requires methodologies that are very different from many traditional science and humanities models of postgraduate investigation.

Increasingly, universities are requiring supervisors of doctoral degrees to demonstrate their suitability for the role by completing professional development programmes and courses. In the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and UK, for example, postgraduate teaching and learning qualifications may include modules on supervisory practice. At present, however, there is surprisingly little in print on this topic. Numerous volumes exist on traditional thesis research methods and practice and there are also a number of books written specifically for these research degree candidates. There is little literature, however, that is written by supervisors about their supervision practice in the art, creative writing, architecture and design disciplines.

*The Routledge doctoral supervisor's companion: Supporting effective research in education and the social sciences* (Walker & Thompson, 2010) addresses supervisory practice but its disciplinary focus is restricted to education and social sciences. *Supervising doctorates downunder: Keys to effective supervision in Australia and New Zealand* (Denholm, Carey & Evans, 2007) provides a useful resource to supervisors by addressing a broad range of issues from candidate selection through to thesis examination. However, while some of the issues that it addresses are generic and of relevance to all supervisors, such as issues of care, its

focus is the traditional written thesis doctorate. *Eleven practices of effective postgraduate research supervisors* (James & Baldwin, 2006), *The good supervisor: Supervising postgraduate and undergraduate research for doctoral theses and dissertations* (Wisker, 2004) and *Supervising the doctorate: A guide to success* (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2004) are books that provide a useful general guide to effective supervisory practice of candidates undertaking a written thesis but do not address the unique issues facing supervisors of creative practice.

There is a range of articles on research supervision in journals such as *Studies in Higher Education* and *Higher Education Research & Development*, as well as specialist disciplinary journals. While there are some articles addressing supervisory practice in art and design, they are few and are scattered throughout a number of journals. The advantage of this book is that it brings together the collective wisdom of experienced creative practice supervisors within one collection.

In deciding to undertake this project, as editors we sought to position this book on postgraduate supervision, with its many faces and approaches, challenges and potentials, alongside existing literature in order to situate a point of difference and add to current dialogue and discourses. While there is a growing body of literature on creative and project-based research, we found little that specifically addressed supervision practice itself as a pedagogical process. Hence the focus of our approach in this collection became clear. The accounts provide a rich source of knowledge on specific supervisory practices that is complementary to other literature in the more general fields of creative and design research. For example it sits well alongside *Creative arts research: Narratives of methodologies and practices* (Grierson & Brearley, 2009), which presents a range of methodologies and approaches for research projects in creative fields. Through differing accounts of creative practice-led projects and the challenges presented by a range of methodologies, Grierson and Brearley shed new light on issues of research in the academy to bring designers, artists, performers, writers and philosophers into conversation with one another. The various accounts also raise important epistemological and ontological questions about doing research and being a creative practitioner researcher in these fields.

Other relevant books offering discourse on this emerging research field include, *Practice as research: Context, method, knowledge* (Barrett & Bolt, 2007), which provides supportive material for postgraduate students undertaking studio-based research in art, film and video, creative writing and dance. It gives an account of practice-led models of enquiry, the role of theory in creative research, and the relationship between processes of enquiry and modes of exegesis.

*Design research* (Downton, 2003) gives a thorough discussion of design as a model for knowledge production, drawing on Peter Downton's twenty years of experience as the coordinator of the RMIT School of Architecture and Design research methods course for postgraduate students. Downton is highly critical of the *design methods* approach that was dominant in the 1970s involving design science-based research *for* design rather than *through* design. This earlier reductive model imposed a linear and rule-based set of prescriptions on design practice and

privileged quantitative and technical criteria. Downton's approach to design research methods focuses on qualitative, iterative and reflective practices. He gives a clear account of designerly knowing and discovery as a set of distinctive research practices. His chapter in this present book further extends these discussions by providing an account of his own supervisory practices across an interdisciplinary community of design researchers.

Leon van Schaik founded the design research by project model, with Downton, at RMIT in 1987. van Schaik continues to lead the supervision of a stream of candidates, who are exemplary and acclaimed practitioners in architecture and design. They are invited back into the academy to reflect on, and extend their embodied practices within a research by project degree framework. He places a strong emphasis on structures and practices that build innovative communities of practice and has documented and disseminated this model through a series of publications (van Schaik, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2003; van Schaik & Spooner, 2010), and related books that include *Mastering architecture: Becoming a creative innovator in practice* (van Schaik, 2004) and *Architecture and design, by practice by invitation, design practice research at RMIT* (van Schaik & Johnson, 2011).

Paul Carter and van Schaik have co-supervised a cohort of postgraduate architecture and design candidates whose research bridges between public and installation art, and architectural design practices. Carter's book, *Material thinking: The theory and practice of creative research* (Carter, 2004) outlines a model of interdisciplinary and collaborative research practice that forges productive relationships between critical writing, cultural inscription, and material and spatial production. *Studies in Material Thinking* is an academic journal for artists, designers and writers with an emphasis on the materiality and the poetics of creative research, informed in part by Carter's model (Rosenberg & Fairfax, 2008). The journal publishes discourse on invention, design, creative practice and research methodology, with a particular emphasis on innovations in curricula for research practice. Brent Allpress and Michael Ostwald founded and edited the initial three volumes of the first international, refereed, project-based, design research journal, *Architectural Design Research* (Allpress & Ostwald, 2005, 2007, 2008), which adapted the RMIT model of project-based research with accompanying exegesis as an alternative to the traditional written journal article format. Two further book series, *Design research*, through RMIT Publishing in Melbourne, and *Design research in architecture* through Ashgate in the UK, adopt aspects of this approach to the documentation of project-based, design research.

Other publications on Ph.D. by project supervision and practice-based education that include chapters by editors and writers in this present collection, are D. Boud and A. Lee, *Changing practices in doctoral education* (2009), with a chapter on project-based architectural design research by Brent Allpress and Robyn Barnacle, and Joy Higgs' edited collection, *Education for future practice* (2010), in which Allpress and Barnacle have a chapter addressing the educational practices of project-based, research-led teaching focusing a case study on the RMIT School of Architecture and Design. Another writer in this present collection, Lesley Duxbury

has published on creative arts-based research in *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communications, Cultural & Policy Studies* (Duxbury, 2011).

### THEMES AND APPROACHES

For candidates re-entering the academy, often from well-established professional contexts, the process of becoming a beginner in research terms can be challenging. Enhanced research capabilities that extend and transform a candidate's practices can enable different models of professional leadership. This presents an opportunity to foster innovative communities of practice across the academy and industry that extend beyond any individual candidacy. Also creative practice and design-based modes of research can contribute potentially to the vibrancy of a practice community by enhancing collaborative ways of working.

For many candidates the possibilities of extending beyond the boundaries of solo practice can be challenging if not daunting, especially in a field such as fine art with its inherited lineage of artist as sole creative practitioner. Laurene Vaughan's chapter in this collection addresses this challenge by canvassing ways of overcoming the loneliness of being a solo researcher. In consideration is the overcoming of possible feelings of isolation that can arise in a sole supervisor-candidate relationship. Even if meetings occur at regular intervals both supervisor and candidate can feel divorced from the business of knowledge generation at the challenging interface of scholarly and creative ideas. These challenges and more are discussed in this book with pertinent examples and case studies of pedagogical innovations to overcome such isolating practices. Thus we start to see that supervisory practices involve far more than content knowledge. As we enter into the educational contract with candidates there is a responsibility to attend to ways of thinking, knowing, making, relating and being through the process of undertaking research.

Understanding or even recognising these sometimes subtle concerns or anxieties can be challenging when one is new to the business of being a supervisor. There needs to be recognition of the different ways people learn and discover through research, and a willingness to allow new ideas to take shape in their own way and time. Challenges can exist for beginning supervisors whose role it is to guide and advise the candidate, encourage new findings, recognise and share in the risk-taking and excitement of discovery as little by little they witness the mapping of new terrain and the creation and communication of new knowledge.

This book focuses primarily on the practices of supervisors who are working with fine art, creative writing, architecture and design candidates to support and open up the potential for thinking and enquiry through practice. It will be particularly relevant for academics seeking to improve their own supervisory practices informed by the experiences of colleagues in the same and similar fields. The collection is organised around the thematic focus on "practices of" supervision to illuminate key approaches to supervision while emphasising the practice-led focus of both the postgraduate research by project model and the contributors' supervisory insights. There is something very active here. As Elizabeth Grierson

points out in her chapter, “*Practice* is identified as action, from Greek, *praktikē*, *practical work*, from *prattein*, *to do*, *to act*”. Thus the focus of the book is on practical action with supervisory experiences presented as inventories or enactments of practice in the field of creative and design-based research.

The notion of “practices of” also implies that such practices are multiple, highlighting that experienced supervisors adopt a range of supervisory strategies and approaches in what they do. Moreover, by showcasing a range of supervisory practices the collection allows readers to benefit from multiple views and insights. To speak of fine art, creative writing, architecture and design practice is not to proscribe confined fields of scholarship. Each of these arenas of research is multifaceted and each comes with rich and varied histories and configurations that reveal their means of production as they materialise their new forms of knowledge.

## THE CHAPTERS

Chapters have been organised to emphasise the range of stories that can be told about supervisory practices, from an integrative, whole of candidature perspective through to the ways in which supervisors address particular issues, such as writing, ethics approval processes, exhibitions, and activating theory and language as a creative practice. The contributors to this book are experienced supervisors of creative and practice-led research at RMIT who have engaged in scholarly reflection on selective aspects of their supervisory practices with the aim of providing insight to others regarding what they do, and how and why they do it. Specific fields of practice include contemporary art, architecture, creative writing and communication design. The writers document and discuss a range of different supervisory strategies, reflecting the diversity of disciplinary concerns and approaches that have been established through a sustained engagement with this emerging mode of postgraduate research pedagogy.

Following this chapter by the four editors situating the key aims, themes and approaches, chapters are arranged by sequences of thematic affinities. The first group of chapters from Lesley Duxbury, Brent Allpress, Catherine Cole and Philip Samartzis offers situating accounts of core supervisory practices in fine art, architecture, and creative writing, where the models of creative practice-led and project-based research elicit specific supervisory responses and engagements. The second sequence of chapters by Elizabeth Grierson, Robyn Barnacle, Linda Daley and Pia Ednie-Brown examines a number of selective thematic concerns involving project-based supervision. They acknowledge the challenges that can exist in these academic fields of research, such as activating language as a creative practice, bringing together theory and practice in generative ways, supervising experienced professionals who must negotiate the state of being beginners in research terms, supervising outside one’s customary field of scholarship, and navigating requirements for ethics clearance and other institutional demands. The last four chapters by Peter Downton, Laurene Vaughan, David Thomas and Kevin White give accounts of their own particular embodied experiences of supervising creative and design research candidates as an integrative set of practices. This group

includes narratives on particular supervisory histories and traits, communities of enquiry, supervision as a pedagogical practice, and supervising doctorates by distance in Asian locations. The rich cartography of practice presented by these twelve writers draws from decades of accumulated experiences of supervising postgraduate programmes in art, creative writing, architecture and design. Each of the writers speaks through the lived academic experiences of working in the academy while also being practitioner researchers themselves, as professional artists, writers, architects and designers.

The first group of chapters starts with Lesley Duxbury's 'Opening the door: Portals to good supervision of creative practice-led research'. Duxbury draws upon her personal experience of being supervised for her own practice-led Ph.D. during the early years of the introduction of doctoral degrees in Australia to determine what might constitute good supervision. Her first research supervision, a Master of Arts candidate, affords an entrée for her to tease out what was valuable and what was not as far as supervision is concerned, and an opportunity for reflection on processes of supervision and personal relationships to candidates. She acknowledges that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to supervision and that often it falls somewhere between teaching and mentoring, between being 'hands-on' and 'hands-off' and constitutes a serious on-going relationship, during which it is essential that supervisor and candidate like and respect each other.

Brent Allpress, in Chapter Three, 'Pedagogical practices for supervising project-based research in architecture and design' takes a complementary approach to the first person accounts of individual supervision models outlined by many of the other contributors. Allpress situates the diversity of supervisory practices being employed within the RMIT School of Architecture and Design that have consolidated around particular research clusters with distinctive methodological practices and concerns. He outlines the infrastructural frameworks and supervisory procedures and practices that foster a dynamic and emergent research community. He addresses a range of obstacles and opportunities that are specific to the practice-based research by project model, particularly around strategies for framing, making legible and disseminating the research embodied within and across a series of project investigations. In presenting this account Allpress also canvasses the historical growth of this research supervision model and its trajectories into future practice with its presence in the European Union and Asia. In many ways, this chapter sets the scene for the model of design project-based research that other writers address and it provides a basis for understanding why design practice deserves, indeed demands, a model of supervision that is appropriate for its particular forms of knowledge generation.

In Chapter Four, 'Good supervision: The creative work in process. Effective and engaged postgraduate supervision in creative writing', Catherine Cole focuses on supervising postgraduate candidates in creative writing. She commences by positioning the emergence of creative writing programmes in Australia in the early 1970s and canvasses their growth and specific formations. She considers the often challenging relationship between a writer/student and writer/academic and examines the specific expectations for the supervisory relationship in postgraduate

creative writing degrees, questioning the extent to which the supervisor and candidate may be able to enhance the creative experience of one another. She accounts for different perspectives and approaches to these relationships from a range of writers thus situating her discussion within a broader discourse. Through her writing she demonstrates that there may well be untapped potential for a more reflexive and reciprocal academic interchange in and through this specific form of creative practice-led research programme. She leaves the reader with a positive reflection on the academy's potential for enhancing creative communities and how such dialogues about creativity and research continue to reshape the academy's understanding of itself.

The final chapter in this group, Chapter Five, is by Philip Samartzis, 'Articulating sound in a synthesised material space', which places the exhibition of the doctorate research in a central role. Sound art comes with its own set of problems regarding the presentation of an exhibition in relation to candidates who undertake a Ph.D. in this discipline and who may articulate their projects through installations, performances or recordings. In this chapter, Samartzis considers the role of the supervisor regarding the examination process to create a compelling experience for the examiner and provide an encounter with new knowledge impossible to produce in any other way. Through an explication of the contemporary art gallery he outlines the positives and negatives for sound art researchers and the ways in which their projects need to take special account of the site for their examination.

The next group starts with Elizabeth Grierson in Chapter Six, 'A complex terrain: Putting theory and practice to work as a generative praxis'. Her stated philosophical project is to consider the relationship of theory and practice in the supervisory contract with candidates undertaking research degrees in art and design or other creative fields. Working through language as a creative practice she takes as her starting point the Greek identification of *praxis* as a generative way of acting or doing, from the Greek origin of *practice*, thus positioning the practical side of a field of study as the focus of attention. She makes a claim that within this practical knowledge language is a creative practice and art practice is a creative text. Thus she is interested in the way supervisors can activate the interrelations between theory and practice as a way of performing intertextually in a generative mode as the research seeks new pathways and discoveries. Arguing against a naturalistic and assumed or self-evident account of practice and creativity, she seeks to extend our understanding of what *praktikē* might mean when text and art come together in the candidate's project and how the supervisor might generate a creative interplay between the two. She draws from a range of philosophical writers to address how the candidate situates voice, questions of methodologies, critical pedagogies and the call for a political will, and applies these analyses to the task of supervision in the creative fields.

In Chapter Seven, Robyn Barnacle explores a set of predicaments unique to what she calls the "practitioner-researcher" coalescing around the problem of authority. Her chapter, 'Becoming a practitioner-researcher-writer' explores issues intrinsic to the situation of the practitioner-researcher straddling, as they do, the

academy on the one hand and a professional practice context on the other. Barnacle argues that the problem of authorisation is particularly active in the context of scholarly or research writing where it can manifest, for example, in extreme responses to the literature or precedent, such as either deferring too much to external sources of validation or resisting them entirely. Another way that it can manifest is resistance to the risk involved in research by refusing to relinquish the role of expert professional and being a beginner in research terms. Barnacle also addresses the question of writing as a research practice with the positioning of writing as an embodied practice to be engaged from the very beginning of the candidature. Inhering within these issues, according to Barnacle, is the struggle to come to terms with what being a practitioner-researcher might mean, both individually and professionally. Her chapter sheds light on the nature of these issues and what supervisors can do to address them.

In Chapter Eight, 'Pedagogies of invention', Linda Daley explores the experience of supervising across paradigms that arise when supervising candidates outside one's own field, an expertise many supervisors acquire often by accident. For academics working in a constantly and rapidly changing sector where disciplinary mergers and institutional restructures occur with increasing frequency, such experiences are not uncommon and necessitate agility by academics toward supervision. By giving emphasis to this type of supervisory experience, Daley makes a claim for a certain kind of pedagogy within supervision, which treats supervision as a set of relations or a set of relays of knowing and unknowing held between supervisor and candidate of a research project. This process does not restrict itself to the idea of the skilled, master-practitioner in the role of supervising the practitioner-candidate. Moreover, it is an approach that foregrounds the relation between knowing and making in the candidature, with the implication that a supervisor without a practice-based background can offer highly productive and successful supervision.

Pia Ednie-Brown in Chapter Nine, 'Supervising emergence: Adapting ethics approval frameworks toward research by creative project', examines challenges of the ethics approval process for iterative cycles of speculative, project-based, design research activity. Her chapter offers three examples of candidates who have engaged with the ethics approval process using each story to highlight a different issue, or problem that has been faced. These stories provide a set of tangible examples through which to address what Ednie-Brown regards as the main problem in the tension between university ethics approval processes and research by creative project: that the mode of research enquiry in question pertains to a relatively new paradigm of emergent practices that can be understood in terms of broad socio-cultural changes, and valued in terms of an ethical framework demanded by those broad changes. Ethics approval processes assume that research methodologies are determined in advance of an investigation, whereas creative and speculative research often involves methodologies that emerge out of the practice of doing the research. Ednie-Brown argues that the paradigmatic shift towards emergent models of research practice has not yet been absorbed or adequately accommodated by ethics approval processes. Her chapter concludes by offering

suggestions as to what both candidates and their supervisors can do to deal with this issue.

The final group of chapters begins with Peter Downton in Chapter Ten. ‘Beside myself: Scrutinising decades of supervising designers’ focuses on the processual nature of design research supervision, or what a supervisor does to assist in the production of design knowledge and to help shape the form and presentation of that knowledge. Downton argues that the process of design research supervision cannot be abstracted and bottled as a distilled essence, in that there is no single model for how supervisors should assist candidates in the production of knowledge. According to Downton, people undertaking doctorates have differing needs and, given the iterative and cyclical nature of design research undertaken through a series of projects, these may alter significantly and grow across the course of their candidature. Downton shows how patterns of need become more visible the longer one supervises, such that a supervisor’s perception of, and responsive reaction to differing needs becomes a key factor in informing the nature of their supervisory practice.

David Thomas presents his experiences of supervising fine art projects in Chapter Eleven, ‘How to work better: supervising for Ph.D. exhibition’ by bringing into the supervisory relationship the model of the composite and duration, which has long held interest for him as a research and teaching approach. He discusses the doctoral project in fine art through its exhibition and supervision by relating these to the heterogeneous nature of a composite in the fine art context. To do this Thomas draws from the writings of Henri Bergson as an approach to understanding the temporal process of the conditions of art making, research practice, and supervision, all of which to one extent or another are ways of seeking meaning in the complicated realities and contingencies of life as a fluid state of existence. Working with the notion of the composite, the multiple, Thomas examines the work of filmmaker, Jacques Tati to consider timing and complexity relating these to supervision practice, and Henri Bergson on duration and the composite with application to supervisory and fine art practices. He then presents case studies of his own supervisor-candidate relationships and projects in fine art, practice-led research.

Laurene Vaughan in Chapter Twelve, ‘Designing a practice and pedagogy of postgraduate supervision’ offers an account of the foundation and context for supervision practices. The chapter starts with a discussion of her interest in the practices of walking as a framework of experiential knowing, and relates this to supervising a community of scholars as a pedagogical process. Thus Vaughan argues that supervision is a pedagogic practice and she gives an account of some of the systems and structures she uses to enact that practice. The discussion comes from the first person narrative approach to supervision and makes a case for communities of enquiry as a way of progressing the candidates’ learning through their research discoveries. She covers areas such as how to overcome the loneliness or isolation of postgraduate research, working within frameworks of expertise, the challenges of institutional processes such as ethics clearance, and designing a practice for postgraduate learning and pedagogy. Throughout the discussion

Vaughan positions herself and her way of thinking as a design practitioner for whom transdisciplinary practices and design experiences foster a rich and fruitful dialogue for both supervisors and candidates.

Chapter Thirteen, the final chapter in the collection comes from Kevin White. ‘The flying doctorate: Doctoral supervision by distance in Hong Kong’ takes the reader on a journey both physical and metaphorical. He writes from his experiences of distance supervisory practice with fine art doctorate candidates in Asian locations. There are many challenges here. In presenting his experiences of distance education, White addresses what distance means within the context of a cross-cultural, educational experience, and how this distance is both navigated and negotiated by candidate and supervisor. Following his metaphor he considers the role of supervisor and candidate when packing for the journey; facing border controls and customs; the flight itself with in-flight entertainment; encountering ‘turbulence’ including translocation of meanings in working with complex theoretical and conceptual issues with candidates for whom English is a second language; arrival at the destination after a long-haul flight; and then the jetlag and the questions of what to do next. This chapter brings together the long experience of the writer in his field of postgraduate supervision in off-shore locations, and his understanding that postgraduate supervisors have a significant role and responsibility in issues that are often to do with identity and cultural change, as he leaves the reader with a hopeful message while looking up at the night sky at the end of a long journey.

This is a fitting end to the book. The chapters cover a rich terrain and offer a range of approaches to questions of supervision in the creative fields of postgraduate research, acknowledging the very real challenges, even problems that academics can face in this burgeoning field of knowledge generation. The twelve contributors to this book are senior academics with significant supervisory and research experience. They present through their writings a multi-faceted yet cohesive picture of the diverse models of pedagogy that can enhance creative ways of working, thinking and being. Together, they present a kind of academic community united by their dedication to the educational cause of creative, practice-led research by project.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

*Supervising Practices for Postgraduate Research in Art, Architecture and Design* is a book intended for readers seeking insight into supervisory practice within these fields of research. It meets this aim and more. Through considerations, investigations and analyses of the challenges posed by supervising in these specific fields of postgraduate research, there is a broadening and deepening of the concept of *practice*. Project-based research offers a framework for candidates to reflect on, situate, improve, and innovate their practices in order to make relevant and significant contributions to knowledge within their disciplinary community that can be of qualitative benefit to culture, society and the broader community.

As we undertake this work we can be reminded that the future is only as good as what we make of the present, and that our contributions to the stakes of knowledge are a very real legacy for future generations. At the end of her chapter in this collection, Linda Daley leaves us with a reflective yet challenging thought when she writes, “Practitioner research is not the only genre of knowledge production that has a stake in this matter, however, it is the very mode by which the stakes can be decisively shown and presented”. It is here that our challenge really lies. We need to be decisive, to speak out and disseminate our experiences and ways of knowing; we need to enact leadership in this pedagogical field if *praktikē* is to be understood in the models and methodologies as presented here.

Practitioner researchers and those who supervise them to doctorate levels have an opportunity to mark and measure the terrain, to bring to the fore the matters that matter, to bear witness and not be silent when changes must be made and new ways of enacting may be found. This book ultimately sets out to capture reflections on supervisory practices through which affective, creative and practical knowledge can be enhanced and transformed, offering models for supporting the emergence of generative practices and of knowledge yet to come.

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LESLEY DUXBURY

## 2. OPENING THE DOOR

*Portals to Good Supervision of Creative Practice-led Research*

### INTRODUCTION

In 1998 I successfully supervised my first research student to completion, a Master of Arts (Fine Art) through a creative project, and commenced a creative doctorate in the same department in which I was employed as a lecturer. Although practice-led masters had been offered for several years, Ph.Ds. through practice-led research were in their infancy in Australia at that time and there was limited experience of supervising them. Supervisors would be colleagues and few had qualifications commensurate with the programmes being undertaken by the candidates they supervised. These early experiences of supervising and observing the progress of the nascent practice-led Ph.D. programme have influenced and guided my role as a supervisor of practice-led research degrees.

### TWO WAYS OF GETTING IT WRONG

I inherited my first practice-led research candidate from the lecturer I had replaced in the department where I had commenced employment. The candidate was more than half way through her Master of Arts (Fine Art) by creative project and was undertaking a topic I knew little about; in fact it could not have been further from my own evolving research interests although I was familiar with the artistic medium of her research, as it was my own specialisation. When I completed a Master of Arts through practice-led research five years previously, not only had I expanded the ways I intellectualised my subject, but also I had developed the ways of utilising my mediums. This led to some extraordinary and innovative results. However it appeared to me that my MA candidate, who was illustrating particular feminist theories, was sticking with her well-established ways of producing images. To my way of thinking, her images and theory did not sit easily together although her previous supervisor had allowed her to progress thus far in this manner. In my meetings with her over the ensuing months I tried to encourage her to think in different ways about articulating her ideas and to avoid direct illustration. However, as her examination loomed I was concerned firstly about her progress and then became more directive by suggesting possible resolutions to ideas and images. She strove hard to complete her research project and presented for examination an experimental exhibition of work, which included installation and performance, and she successfully achieved her MA degree. However soon

after receiving her award she reverted to her pre-MA practices. Even today when occasionally I see her work I notice that it has changed little since she commenced her degree. During our short period together she appeared to follow my suggestions obediently, but ultimately these recommendations were not useful in her subsequent professional role as an exhibiting artist. On reflection, my supervision of her had been too didactic and directional, and did not take into account her future needs.

In the early years of the introduction of creative practice-led Ph.Ds., during the late 1990s in Australia, there were situations where supervisors failed to share the research interests of their candidates, provided little input, and thus exacerbated the isolation of those candidates. At this time it was not the norm for artist-academics in universities to hold a doctorate although their art history colleagues in the same departments were often doctorate qualified. In these early years at RMIT University the role of senior supervisor fell predominantly to the Ph.D. qualified art history lecturer who had little expertise in the practical focus of their candidate. A senior staff member of the same department, who was an artist, usually supported the senior supervisor, although often the artistic concerns of the second supervisor did not correspond with that of their candidate. Likeminded artist-academics undertaking a Ph.D. tended to form loose, support groups to celebrate research discoveries and share information, however this was no substitute for a good supervisor. Early artist-academics as research candidates often missed out on critical feedback and potentially inspirational conversations, which should have been central to their experience as a research candidate. My own experience of being supervised for a practice-led Ph.D. was as the one described above and, although I successfully completed my doctorate, this model of supervision was not the one I wished to emulate when I subsequently became a supervisor of doctoral candidates.

Since 1998, I have supervised 15 MA (Fine Art) and eight doctoral (both Ph.D. and professional doctorate) research students to completion. They have come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences: some directly from undergraduate studies with no experience other than that of a student, and others from the art profession as extremely successful local and international artists, and also colleagues and lecturers from other universities. Happily, since graduating with their research degrees the majority of them have become successful in their careers as practitioners and/or academics.

Neither of the accounts I have described above provide a good example for the supervision of creative doctorates. However each presents an opportunity for reflection and reassessment of the needs and requirements of both the supervisor and the research candidate of creative, practice-led projects.

#### WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO

...supervision is a complex process that requires both situational awareness and a flexible posture... (Grant, 1999, p. 1).

While there may be many models of research supervision that are adopted or that change over time in differing circumstances, the personality traits of any given supervisor are constants in all interactions with research candidates. The characteristics of the supervisor may affect “the essentially rational and transparent engagement between autonomous individuals” (Delany, 2005, p. 5) that research supervision is generally understood to be. In retrospect, the expectations I had of my first Master of Arts candidate were based solely on my own experience of undertaking this degree, and I wanted her to exhibit similar enthusiasm and attain extraordinary achievements through rigorous practice and experimentation. However my candidate, who had acquired a certain amount of success as an exhibiting artist prior to embarking on a Master of Arts, appeared to me to be afraid of changing her style and work practices, perhaps fearing rejection from galleries and her buying public. Becoming her supervisor late into her programme meant that these issues had not been addressed earlier and I could deal only with my concern for her seeming lack of progress by prescribing ways of working that related to my own experiences and work practices. This was certainly an example of a mismatch between the expectations of candidate and those of the supervisor.

According to Joram ten Brink, “You’re not there to teach them how to do the research other than critically look at their research and offer them positions to consider” (2008, n.p.n). Brink recommends that the supervisor’s main role is to give the candidate confidence to own her research, lead it, ask the questions and look for the answers from people other than the supervisor. He advises that the supervisor is there to encourage the candidate to go out and present their research as papers and exhibitions, the approach being that the candidate drives the process. While this appears to be the course for a number of candidates, especially those with a little more independence, the majority of research candidates expect a great deal more from their supervisors, and usually considerably more than the instilling of confidence and a hands-off approach.

Of the research candidates I have supervised to completion, the majority have been those who have progressed from undergraduate bachelor degrees to masters and doctoral studies, followed by artists returning to study for a variety of reasons. Within these two diverse groups of candidates there are requirements for quite different approaches to supervision. If I add to this the students who are academics from other tertiary institutions upgrading their qualifications for professional reasons, local colleagues doing the same, and a scattering of international academics and artists, it is obvious that a one-size-fits-all approach to supervision is out of the question. In my interactions with such a diverse range of personalities, abilities and dispositions I may find myself in one or more of a number of roles, such as a director, facilitator, advisor, teacher, critic, supporter, collaborator, friend or mentor, who may be approachable and friendly, supportive with a positive attitude, open-minded, organised and stimulating; the list of desirable features is a long one (Delany, 2005, pp. 6–7). If variables such as workload demands, conflicting individual needs, new modes of communication and the challenges faced by those in the newer academic disciplines such as the creative arts are

thrown into the mix, then the supervisor-candidate relationship becomes a bespoke challenge (Brien & Williamson, 2009, p. 1).

In a contradictory way my experience of working more-or-less alone on my own creative, project-based Ph.D. provides a useful model for being a supervisor of doctoral practice-led projects. It required me to be resourceful, less reliant on others than I might normally have been in seeking information and answers, and it gave me the confidence so desired by ten Brink. Even the experience of “aleness” was useful in retrospect as, according to ten Brink, this is crucial:

It [research], like the marathon runner, is absolutely lonely. Here is a marathon runner on his or her own, absolutely lonely and difficult and it is why, like marathon runners a lot of them do stop half way through. Because it is a singular occupation, there are no mates, there are no other people who do the same thing, you're not in a classroom situation, you're not at work and you don't have colleagues (2008, Afternoon Discussion, para. 14).

Humility or “the ability to understand one’s strengths and weaknesses, willingness to learn from others and to exceed one’s usual limits [to] forge a connection to a larger perspective” are considered to be key characteristics of good leadership (Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005, p. 1330), and yet could be applied equally to the leadership role of the research supervisor in her interactions with research candidates. Leadership abilities that are imperative in research and relevant to supervision such as inspiring someone to do or think something differently are aligned also to the three distinct dimensions of humility, which according to Morris et al. are, self-awareness (knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses), openness (open to new ideas and ways of knowing) and transcendence (exceeding one’s usual limits to forge connections to a larger perspective) (2005, p. 1331). These qualities are apt for the research supervisor of practice-led research, given that the traditional conception of artists representing the constituency of the majority of research candidates under discussion here is of the creative and independent individual. It is a humble supervisor who can engage with and guide the research candidate to think and act as a researcher while retaining the spirit and independence of an artist.

Over the past thirteen years or so supervisory arrangements have improved considerably for current research candidates. Because of the changing research environment in the overall university environment and more rigorous selection procedures today it would be rare for a candidate to be assigned a supervisor who is not fully cognisant of the proposed field of research. At RMIT University, for example, there are now groupings of academic staff in research clusters of common themes and ideas, and research candidates are aligned with supervisors who have similar research interests. From the rather disparate group of artist-academics of thirteen years ago and supervisory arrangements that aligned candidates to supervisors in the same practical artistic field, the situation now is one that is specialised and particular. In accordance with university-wide processes, applications for places in postgraduate research in the School of Art are scrutinised for compliance with the basic requirements, such as having the right

qualifications and exceptional grades, and applicants cannot be considered unless appropriate supervision can be provided and the proposed research project aligns with the research foci of the school, which are ultimately the research priorities of the university. This means that research supervisors have had to clarify and make public their own research interests and need to be able to field enquiries from prospective students, which has made academic staff more aware of what is involved in supervision and the needs of the candidates. Now it is not good enough simply to be available to take on a new candidate; research supervisors must prove their abilities as artists, thinkers, theorists and mentors.

At present I am senior supervisor to nine research candidates undertaking creative projects predominantly through Ph.D. and professional doctorates, and second supervisor to two Ph.D. candidates. All of these research candidates are engaged in practice-led projects ranging from overt environmental concerns to artistic cartography and curatorship. They engage in specific media in which I have an intrinsic interest, such as photography and printmaking. Each project is idiosyncratically different and yet I am able to contribute to each investigation through theory and history, and most importantly through my personal experiences of on-going research and explorations as an artist and writer. It is vital to practice and exhibit as an artist, to write and publish, and to ensure that both these strands of research are up-to-date and current, as a way of setting an example and publicly demonstrating one's own research strengths and abilities.

#### WHOSE DREAM IS THIS ANYWAY?

I have taught a research strategies course to all new research candidates for a number of years now, the aim of which is to impart ways and methods of going about research. There is also a requirement to develop the proposal by contextualising the research project in terms of the fundamental questions: What? Why? How? Through this process, all candidates apply for a postgraduate research programme through the presentation of a proposal for a research project based in their own arts-based practice. However the project needs, as does all research, a firm theoretical base, a context through a review of current literature and art practice, research questions and an appropriate methodology. This fundamental necessity tends to induce considerable anxiety in candidates. I have noticed during the first few research strategies classes of each year that students undergo a form of crisis and a period of self-doubt when they realise that their proposed project must be converted from one grounded in professional practice to one that meets the requirements of research. The candidate is required to articulate how the project will add to the field and create new knowledge and also there must be a rationale for doing it, one that is centred on relevance to the community. During these early and fluid stages all aspects of the project are up for negotiation and require “a very creative and positive approach on both sides” (Biggs & Buechler, 2009, p. 10). The role of the supervisor is to reassure the candidate that the project can be reconfigured to address real-world research questions, through valid aims and objectives that will produce outcomes not only meaningful to the candidate, but

also accessible and relevant to the community. Quality supervision ensures the candidate will be confident that the articulation of ideas through her practice as an artist *is* the research and has the potential to result in new knowledge.



*Figure 1. Studio of Ph.D. candidate, School of Art, RMIT University. Photo by the author.*

The first and vitally important stage of the research programme is to sort out and clarify the project, not only for the supervisor and candidate to ensure they are both travelling in the same direction, but also for the examiner or the audience for the project, to know at the outset what is being aimed for and why. As a seasoned supervisor I spend many sessions with my candidates in the early days of the project talking about and around the subject and concepts of the proposed research. We meet most frequently in the candidate's studio with her work surrounding us. I encourage my candidates to display their work, to live with it and to allow the work to have a 'voice'.

Together the candidate and I have intense discussions as I attempt to draw out the thinking that underpins the work while posing hypothetical scenarios. Often I play devil's advocate, tossing in possibilities and sometimes, outrageous alternatives with the aim of nudging the candidate to articulate what the project is not, with the object of arriving at the nub of the question. I encourage my candidates to investigate their topic widely, beyond their own medium and familiar references, stretching to other genres such as film, text and yet beyond to science and history – where practitioners have investigated similar themes. Often I become intensely interested in the potential of the project and envisage outcomes of which the candidate is not yet aware. Sometimes, because of our common interests and the situation by which candidates are assigned to supervisors with similar research interests, the candidate's project can start to feel like my project and I have to resist

the temptation of taking it on as such. My aim is to instil in my candidate a curiosity and a means to make discoveries for herself. As one of my candidates emailed to me recently: "...and I was telling her [a friend] what a good supervisor you are because I know that you know what I need to write/do but instead of telling me the way you make sure I discover it myself. It's exactly what good mothers do. I also figure I'm extremely lucky to have a supervisor who is just as excited by my topics as I am!" (24 March, 2011). Informed by my training and my own work practices I set out to be challenging and curious, and acknowledge the inspiration and intuition that give rise to the research processes and form the conceptual framework. In the end, however, I am not the expert, so as supervisor I must accept that my candidate will become the expert of her particular project and will know more about the topic than I do.

#### DOWN THE ROAD TOGETHER

After the initial, very intense period of defining the research for approval of the project and confirmation of candidature, candidates normally require a period of time alone just to get on with the practical work without the 'distractions' of writing the research proposal, and I support this as a practice-led process. The making of art is a reflective activity that takes time – time to make mistakes, time to experiment with unfamiliar media perhaps, and time to engage in creative play. It is an important period for the candidate to regain her independence, collect her thoughts and test out ideas without someone overseeing her or regularly checking in for meetings. This middle period of the programme is when most of the creativity in the form of trial works and experimentation takes place. I encourage my candidates to exhibit their work as this form of publication is the essence of the research and in fact the work cannot be considered research unless it is made public. During this seemingly more relaxed period I hold regular reviews of work; we complete progress reports together and agree on plans for the forthcoming months. There are times, however, when it is obvious that the work is not progressing and it is necessary to intervene. Quite often candidates become side-tracked; the processes of research through art practice can be exciting and open up possibilities and directions that were not part of the original plan and these must be taken into consideration. What happens if a candidate does not follow advice or do as requested? How does the supervisor get the candidate back on track? According to Mark Sinclair, 'hands off' supervisors who are reluctant to intervene or redirect are the least successful; they expect their candidates to function too independently without a great deal of guidance (Sinclair, 2004, pp. vi–vii), and although this may work for some, even the most experienced artists or mature-age candidates do need the regular input of supervisors. The 'hands on' supervisor is more successful because she tends to structure the candidate's journey and establish a peer relationship with the candidate using her 'superior' position to mentor and encourage trust (2004, p. vii). I usually find that by refocussing the candidate on the original plan, providing appropriate direction and structure, and acknowledging the good work already created, the candidate can get back on track with renewed

enthusiasm. It is also important that I support my candidate by visiting her exhibitions, attending and taking part in opening celebrations, and by providing critical feedback.

In the final stages of the programme candidates again seem to require more intensive supervision. Unlike conventional doctoral candidates who produce a thesis, the majority of my candidates are examined through an exhibition of resolved artwork accompanied by a durable record of the project in a visual format and an extensive text or exegesis, which contextualises the research project. Each element of these requirements for examination needs a particular form of supervision and this is where a more directive approach may be justified, as certain criteria must be adhered to and fulfilled. The exegesis inevitably takes up the most time, often because candidates whose art practice is their primary activity are neither used to, nor confident about writing such texts. Working on the exegesis as supervisor and candidate does produce a different relationship from the peer relationship that we have as artists. As the supervisor who has guided several candidates successfully through this process, I do take on a more authoritarian role and state clearly what needs to be done, and how, which is quite different from a conversation about the artwork where there is more opportunity for negotiation.

Having examined nationally more than 15 doctoral projects, from my point of view the exegesis is the most difficult and unresolved aspect of practice-led research. When advising my own candidates I draw on what I have read as an examiner to impart to my candidate what not to do and to discuss the ways it can be done better. As a supervisor of the exegesis I am both content and copy editor, setting particular tasks for chapters, and requiring compliance regarding referencing, legibility and relevance. Often I am tempted to write sections for the candidate, but keep a check on this, although I do confess to extensive copy-editing. I encourage exegesis writing as an ongoing activity for the candidate, ideally right through the three or so years of the research although it takes place invariably during the final year. Other aspects, such as the visual durable record mentioned above, have to be routinely kept up-to-date with sound and appropriate data. When it comes to selecting work for the examination I make this a joint activity and together we carefully choose the work that best represents the intentions of the research project along with the ways in which it will be presented. Sometimes even the most experienced of artists loses confidence at this final stage and needs help and support to present the exhibition for examination.

#### CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

To sum up my role as a supervisor of candidates undertaking practice-led research projects, as for supervisors of all research projects, I need to be interested in the potential research project, which has to sustain me along with the candidate throughout the years of the degree. I find that I need to like my candidates as people, in fact this is a very important aspect, so that we can carry out a peer relationship, agree to respect our individual differences and maintain civility towards each other.

As the mentor, guide and leader I need to be a good listener yet know when to interject and offer advice and support; try to be humble yet challenging and curious about all aspects of the candidate's project and findings; know when to be 'hands-on' and when to leave the candidates alone, and calling upon my seniority to be authoritative when necessary, while being aware that my candidate will surge ahead in a particular field, which may be partially mine. At the end of our first year together the same candidate who sent the earlier email sent another one and it encapsulates much of what I have been writing here:

I was thinking about that approach the other night whilst watching bits of *The Matrix*. There's a part where Morpheus says to Neo, 'I can only show you the door. You are the one who must walk through it'. All very Zen-like and like good therapy too. Supervision is a lot like psychological therapy. Good therapists get you to look at a problem from a different angle, to make the discovery yourself. Bad therapists tell you what to do (16 May 2011).

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