

Exemplary practice in research supervision: a personal view

alys.young@manchester.ac.uk



A distinct teaching and learning process

- Subject specific expertise is a necessary but not sufficient condition to doing this well
- Totally unique experience every time
- Huge commitment of time, engagement and care
- Does not begin or end with the start and finish of the PhD
- Personally hugely rewarding and enriching
- Should be given far more recognition and attention

**A meta-
conversation
about
writing from
the start**

*What kind of writer
are you?*

- Grounds the task and opens up the scope of learning
- Conscious learning and skill acquisition
- Demons and angels from the past
- Teaches another aspect of critical awareness
- Enables distance and task-seeing
- Ultimately a source of pride

What do my students do?

- Invite a friend for tea and talk to them as if they know nothing that transitions into writing
- Use first language first / Don't use first language first
- Draw the structure of the ideas – writing is secondary
- Call it a style to fit the task
- Bite sized or whole
- Go on courses
- Eat cake (the academic half stone)

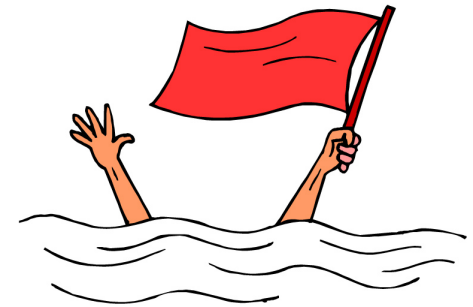
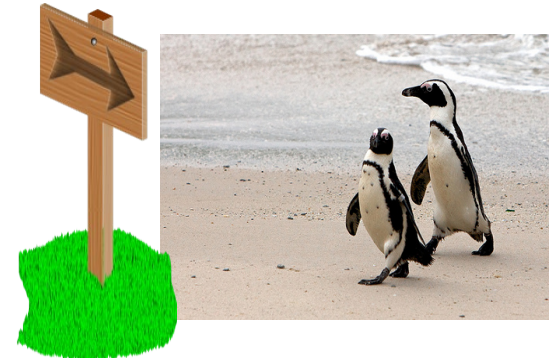
Power differentials

- Can be helpful and unhelpful – expertise is not the same as the exercise of power
- Culture/history/identity
 - Nothing to do with the PhD and everything to do with the learning process
- Encouraging the growth of self belief and expertise
 - Emphasising the shared learning
 - Consciously unknowledgeable
 - Modelling openness
- Reading together
- Peer group strengths/exchanges and moans

Expectations of supervision

- Always worth interrogating the word and the assumptions and meanings it carries
- ‘Contracts’ don’t necessarily address style
 - Dialogic?
 - Supervision partners
- Feedback within the process – preferences?
- Flexibility and boundaries
- Unconditional positive regard still enables you to disagree, be firm, give advice and if required to sit on the fence until the student decides

Alternative ways to enable a student to stand back from being stuck



Trusting the process and 'containment'

- *'I want to stop doing everything for the first time'!*
- Not just trust the supervisors, learning to trust the process
 - Linked with learning styles
 - Challenges to self image
 - Warning of pitfalls...please!
 - Developing self belief regardless of seeing the end
- Role in containing anxieties, maintaining belief, remaining fixed on final achievement
- Importance of anticipatory strategies and actions
 - *'you never stopped believing in me'*

Before and after

- Talent spotting long before...
- Finding funding or just finding a way...
- Creating opportunities along the way but require careful judgement
 - Journal reviewing
 - Conference presentations
 - Publishing
 - Teaching
- Career support
 - Interview practice
 - Horizon scanning
 - Joint writing
 - Mentoring
 - Absenting yourself too

- A huge privilege to be a supervisor
- A few of my students...

