INTRODUCTION

Despite having spent the last two and a half years researching the learning experiences of international PhD students in Australia, doctoral pedagogy remains something of a “black box” for me. What is known about doctoral learning centres on the ‘mysterious activity’ (Green, 2005, p. 151) of supervision, regarded by many as ‘a private pedagogical space’ (Manathunga, 2005, p. 17). In the absence of an explicit doctoral curriculum, it seems that “the student is supposed to absorb the necessary know-how by a sort of intellectual osmosis between great minds” (Connell, 1985, p. 38). It has been argued, however, that doctoral success or failure does not depend simply on the instruction the student receives but concerns ‘the relationships between students and the practices in which they and their teachers engage’ (Goode, 2007, p. 589). If this is true, exploring doctoral students’ perceptions of the practices in which they and their supervisors engage should generate insights into doctoral pedagogy.

However, my decision to use the problematic term “international students” needs to be justified lest it inadvertently ‘sanction an ethnocentric stance’ (Spack, 1997, p. 765). In Australia, the label “international student” is an administratively convenient way of designating an individual who crosses international borders in order to study; however, it also carries a number of unfortunate connotations. First, the
term overtly ‘others’ the students it describes, constructing them by reference to what they are not, i.e. Australian. Second, it is associated with a ‘discourse of deficit’ (Candlin & Crichton, 2010) invoking stereotyped images of underprepared students with weak English language skills. However:

[s]uch constrained understandings of international students do not take into account the motivations, transnational identities and resources these students bring to the ... university, and how these resources may be exploited to construct less parochial, more global or internationalized educational spaces’ (Doherty & Singh, 2007, p. 130).

Third, the label is associated with a tendency to treat international students as a homogeneous group. Writing in the context of higher education in the United Kingdom, Goode claims – ‘... it is not uncommon to hear talk about “international students” as a whole as “hard work”, both deferential and demanding, and as having an “immature approach to study, leading to a generalised stereotyping of what is ... a heterogeneous group’ (2007, p. 592). Where such negative attitudes and stereotypes exist, they are likely to impact on international students’ learning experiences.

It is against this backdrop that I locate my narrative study of the learning experiences of six international doctoral students studying in Australia. I retain the term “international student” despite its negative connotations both because it is a formal descriptive category employed in the university where the study participants are enrolled, and because it features prominently in the higher education discourse in Australia. Despite education having become an increasingly significant export industry in Australia (Bullen & Kenway, 2003; Marginson et al., 2010), the quality of international students’ educational experiences in Australia does not appear to have received much attention. This article addresses that gap by reporting on six international students’ perspectives on the pedagogy they encounter in their doctoral studies. First, I review recent research on doctoral pedagogy before discussing the participants’ accounts of their learning in the light of that research. I then draw on the participants’ accounts and my perspectives as doctoral student, researcher, and former academic in identifying key dimensions of effective doctoral pedagogy.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Fifteen years ago Green & Lee (1995, p. 40) described postgraduate pedagogy as ‘radically undertheorised’, suggesting that teaching-learning in higher education was not well understood. Why might this be so? First, pedagogy is highly abstract as both concept and practice, which makes it difficult to observe, analyse, and describe. Furthermore, historically, higher education privileged research and knowledge over teaching and learning in higher education (Evans & Green, 1995), with teaching considered ‘the poor relation’ (Vardi & Quin, 2011, p. 39). While much has been done in the last fifteen years to redress the imbalance (in status, recognition and rewards) between research and teaching in higher education, ‘many challenges remain to be addressed’ (Chalmers, 2011, p. 35). The apparent lack of interest in pedagogy may reflect ambivalence about where to locate research supervision in the conceptual landscape of scholarly activity. According to Lee & McKenzie, ‘supervision is neither simply “teaching” nor “research” but an uneasy bridge between both’ (2011, p. 69). This ambivalence is reflected in university performance review policies which designate research supervision as a ‘teaching’ activity (Blinded Institution, n.d.), while treating the outcomes of student research (theses and research articles) as aspects of research activity.

The importance of pedagogy lies in the fact that ‘it draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced ... asking under
what conditions and through what means we 'come to know' (Lusted, 1986, pp. 2-3). Gaining insight into how individuals 'come to know' is crucial if we are to enhance learning. Green & Lee argue that doctoral learning involves not only coming to know, but also coming to be' in that the doctoral student gradually acquires an identity as researcher and scholar (1995, p. 41). This idea of transformation is also central to Lusted’s understanding of pedagogy:

What pedagogy addresses is the ... transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce ... (1986, p. 3)

Nonetheless, Lusted’s definition must be modified if it is to account for the complex relations at the heart of doctoral learning. First, the learner, teacher, and their co-produced knowledge are not the only ‘agencies’ that contribute to pedagogy; they also interact with the academic discipline. Evans & Green argue that the disciplinary character of doctoral pedagogy distinguishes it from teaching at other levels: '[i]t is not so much what the supervisor literally ‘transmits’, pedagogically, as what (s)he enables by ... setting up a critical exchange ... between the student and the discipline' (1995, p. 4). In other words, the discipline is an invisible presence in the pedagogical relationship.

Second, any definition of doctoral pedagogy needs to incorporate interactions which occur beyond the supervisory team, whether in the wider discipline or closer to home. Doctoral learning ‘is better conceived ecosocially, i.e. as a total environment within which postgraduate research activity ... is realised’ (Green, 2005, p. 153) and which encompasses students’ relationships and experiences with a wide range of people (Hopwood, 2010). Third, any model of doctoral pedagogy would be incomplete without including the institutional and social dimensions of learning (Green & Lee, 1995). Doctoral students’ learning is impacted both by institutional policies and practices (such as funding arrangements and supervisor workloads), and by their social context populated by family, friends, peers, fellow researchers, and others.

Within this relational exchange, what does the supervisor’s pedagogical role consist of? One investigation of supervisory practice identified four categories of facilitative practices: (1) Progressing the candidature; (2) Mentoring (including personal support, career development, and intellectual development); (3) Coaching the research project; and (4) Sponsoring student participation in academic/professional practice (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004). Clearly some of these practices are more pedagogical than others. Recent research in doctoral pedagogy suggests that productive supervisor contributions include collaborating with students in co-authored research (Thein & Beach, 2010, p. 122), focusing attention on disciplinary discourse (Paré, 2010), providing resources such as models of good writing (Kamler & Thomson, 2006), sharing professional networks (Simpson & Matsuda, 2008), and critically analysing students’ work (Haksever & Manisali, 2000; Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Simpson & Matsuda, 2008).

The student’s role, on the other hand, involves gradually adopting the practices modelled by their supervisors as they begin participating in scholarly activities such as giving seminars, writing papers, and attending conferences. However, this role is not unproblematic. First, different expectations of supervisor and student roles can create misunderstanding, particularly in cross cultural contexts (Kiley, 1998). Second, not all supervisors are adept at ‘unpacking’ their scholarly expertise as they attempt to introduce their students to the history and practices of the discipline (Paré, 2010). Furthermore, an implicit supervisor bias towards valuing independence can discourage students from asking questions and encourage them instead to present themselves as ‘capable of independent scholarship from the beginning of their candidature’ (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000, p. 141). All three issues militate against effective learning.
Finally, peers can also contribute to doctoral students’ learning. By participating in activities such as doctoral writing groups, students gain opportunities to discuss and critique others’ texts thereby learning to speak and write as members of the research community (see for example, Aitchison, 2010; Maher et al., 2008). Nevertheless, peer contributions extend beyond critiquing texts. Pilbeam & Denyer (2009) found that doctoral students helped each other with conceptual and administrative matters, research methods, technical problems, and personal and social support. Acknowledging the contribution of peers and the wide range of contexts in which doctoral students learn suggests that ‘pedagogy be reconceptualised as significantly “distributed” and “horizontalized”, with an associated dispersal of responsibilities and of agency’ (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 502). In other words, doctoral pedagogy exists in interactions and ‘arrangements’ (Cumming, 2010) which operate beyond the “vertical” relationship of supervisor and student and crucially, can be student-driven.

BACKGROUND
The research described in this article was carried out to investigate questions about doctoral pedagogy raised by reviewing previous research. It does this by examining the transcripts of 22 hour-length interviews with six international doctoral students studying in Australia and identifying episodes which refer to participants’ experiences of and perspectives on pedagogy. Interviews were conducted with each participant approximately every four months between May 2009 and August 2010. Data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously in a dynamic, recursive process (Merriam, 1998). Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) involved multiple readings of the transcripts to locate all references to practices identified by the participants as promoting or inhibiting learning. Table 1 presents biographical information on the participants who had been enrolled for between 3 and 17 months at the time of their (first) interview. The numbers following participants’ names at the end of interview excerpts indicate which interview the extract is taken from and the number of the first line in the transcript. In analysing the interview data, I drew on my multiple perspectives as concurrent doctoral candidate-researcher, and experienced academic, researcher and supervisor.

RESULTS
This section first introduces supervisor practices which the six participants identified as contributing to their learning, and then ways in which they believed other individuals contributed. Subsequently, I present the unhelpful supervisor practices reported by the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariunaa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Human Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Withheld</td>
<td>Human Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Business and Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Business and Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants
POSITIVE SUPERVISOR PRACTICES

Table 2 lists positive supervisor behaviours reported by the participants grouped according to four sets of facilitative practices identified by Pearson & Kayrooz (2004). In this framework, facilitating the candidature refers to guidance which enables the student to manage their programme of study and meet official requirements. Mentoring practices can involve both personal and professional support which aims to help the student develop ‘in the context of their evolving personal and career goals’ (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004, p. 105). The authors cite the practice of introducing students to professional networks as an example. Coaching involves providing expertise on the research process and on writing the thesis. Finally, Sponsoring practices help students to access resources and opportunities.

In Table 2, the names of the participants who mentioned each practice are shown in brackets so as to provide an indication of how widely the practices were distributed across the participants. This reveals, for example, that of the 17 positive supervisor practices identified, Ariunaa reported only one, whereas Emily reported eight. The fact that the majority of practices were classified as examples of Coaching may reflect candidates’ prioritising of activities which focus directly on the research process. Interestingly, only two of the six participants reported any Mentoring practices.

POSITIVE PRACTICES – BEYOND THE SUPERVISORY TEAM

Table 3 presents positive learning experiences identified by the participants which originated beyond the supervisory team. Some of these were initiated by the participants (indicated by an asterisk); the rest were opportunities provided by other individuals. Inspection of Table 3 suggests first that some participants have access to more learning opportunities than others, and second that some appear to demonstrate more agency than others in constructing their own learning experiences. Once again Ariunaa reported only one supportive practice, whereas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Supervisor practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Facilitating the candidature | Monitors and provides regular feedback on progress (Dev)  
Helps structure ideas and plan research activities (Ariunaa, Dev, Emily) |
| Mentoring           | Boosts confidence, encourages, motivates, provides emotional and personal support (Dev)  
Always makes herself available (Emily)  
Responds promptly to emails, requests (Dev, Emily)  
Provides access to professional network (Dev, Emily) |
| Coaching            | Creates dialogue about ideas, provides intellectual challenge (Jack)  
Discusses theoretical problems (Mary)  
Discusses ideas for paper (Mary)  
Gives feedback on ideas/organisation/language in draft text (Emily, Jack, Journey, Mary)  
Revises and edits draft text (Emily, Mary)  
Writes collaboratively with student, helping reformulate draft text (Journey, Mary)  
Recommends specific readings for content (Journey)  
Recommends model articles to read in terms of structure, style, etc. (Journey)  
Knows who to contact, how to ask, how to do things the right way (Emily)  
Suggests designing a table to summarise all relevant studies (Emily) |
| Sponsoring          | Encourages student to publish and attend conferences (Mary) |
Emily identified six different ways in which her learning had been supported, including two which she initiated. Surprisingly, none of the participants mentioned learning interactions with peers.

UNHELPFUL SUPERVISOR PRACTICES

In addition to the positive practices, four of the participants reported supervisor activities that they found unhelpful (see Table 4). However, none of the students were willing to challenge their supervisors in relation to these practices. For example Jack explained how stressful he found his supervisor’s instructional style at first:

... he gives me a textbook which he thinks might be useful ... I have to read through it maybe like for three weeks, and probably it is a textbook which is 600 pages ... and then after that ... he quizzes me ... so you know I was opposed to that because ... I’m already past that level ... so there was a sort of friction for some time until I was just thinking should I just go back to [country where Jack did his MSc] and just continue with my professor ... so I just thought no ... I just got to do whatever he wanted me to do ... because you know when you’re arguing with a professor anyway, the truth is you really have a lot to lose ... so I just compromised ... and then sort of we started developing a relationship ... (Jack, 1, 266).

Interestingly, all three practices in the Coaching category in Table 4 reported by Jack, Emily and Journey respectively, relate to the same issue. All three seem dissatisfied with their supervisors’ feedback on their writing because it fails to provide direction for them as they revise it. Informal conversations with doctoral peers suggest that the modest inventory of unhelpful practices in Table 4 could easily be extended. However, regardless of the ‘truth value’ of the practices listed in Table 4 or the actual number of unhelpful practices the participants have experienced (some may have felt culturally constrained from ‘criticising’ their supervisors), these examples indicate that doctoral students have views on pedagogy, and suggest that their views are worth canvassing.

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TABLE 3

Positive practices – Beyond the supervisory team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating the candidature</td>
<td>Writing to clarify and reflect on ideas (Dev, Emily)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Receiving positive feedback on conference presentation from international expert (Jack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Receiving positive feedback on project from senior academic (also research partner) at another university (Emily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading papers to study their organisation and style (Mary)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving feedback on writing from conference paper reviewers (Journey, Mary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving feedback on writing from faculty writing specialist (Journey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving feedback on written papers from husband (Emily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussing ideas with husband (Mary, Emily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsoring</td>
<td>Taking part in Research Methods/Communication/Writing course (Ariunaa, Emily, Journey, Mary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking feedback on writing from international experts (Journey)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteering to review articles for journals (Emily)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Practices initiated by doctoral candidates
DISCUSSION
What does investigating the participants’ pedagogical experiences reveal? First, and most optimistically, many examples of good doctoral pedagogy reported in the research literature were also mentioned by participants (such as supervisors writing collaboratively with their students and providing access to personal networks). Second, practices related to writing dominate participants’ accounts. This may reflect the centrality of text-related work in doctoral study or suggest that talking about text is a useful way of exploring knowledge claims. However, analysis also reveals significant variation in the pedagogical affordances of the six participants. This section first discusses the quality and range of participants’ experiences, and then, based on these reflections, identifies elements likely to contribute to effective doctoral pedagogy.

SUPERVISORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS
The majority of supervisor practices identified by the participants were both helpful and supported by recent research in doctoral pedagogy. However, both the number and range of practices were relatively limited. Whereas Ariunaa reported only one positive supervisor practice, Emily and Mary both identified several different ways in which their supervisors supported their learning. Furthermore, a number of the innovative practices discussed earlier did not figure amongst the practices reported by the participants. For instance, none of the participants reported having the opportunity to critique others’ writing, to analyse written models or to consider the typical discourse features of their discipline. Furthermore, given that Journey, Emily and Dev had all elected to complete their thesis by publication, it is surprising that no instruction was provided in strategically conceptualising the research project in preparation for publishing. (See Kwan (2010) for a similar finding).

The fact that the participants identified a number of unhelpful supervisor practices indicates that some dissatisfaction with supervision exists. Yet, as Jack’s example suggests, supervisors did not appear to negotiate pedagogical activities with their students, or to seek feedback on their usefulness. A study of doctoral students’ experiences conducted in Canada and the UK reported a number of similar supervisor-related difficulties, including the lack of encouragement and the lack of feedback (McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek & Hopwood, 2009). However, anecdotal evidence suggests that students seldom raise such issues with their supervisors. For instance, although Mary was frustrated at her supervisor’s use of Chinese (their common first language) during their meetings, she did not challenge this practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Supervisor practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating the candidature</td>
<td>Assigns substantial amount of reading (e.g. 600 page textbook) and then quizzes me on the content (Jack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Uses Chinese during supervision sessions so I can’t practise my English (Mary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Provides negative feedback on ideas without suggesting what kind of change is needed (Jack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points out weaknesses in writing without suggesting how to ‘fix’ them (e.g. “too wordy” (Emily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fails to provide adequate detail and direction in feedback on draft text (Journey)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 4
Unhelpful supervisor practices

Yeah, of course it’s negative because you don’t have ... much opportunity to practise your English. But you can’t ask for your supervisor to change her way (laughs) (Mary, 3, 960)

As supervisors are unlikely to deliberately adopt behaviours which inhibit their students’ learning, this suggests they may lack insight into the way their practices impact on student learning. Whereas, teachers in most educational settings routinely obtain peer and student feedback on their teaching, supervisors seldom seek feedback on their supervision practices. Instead, most tend to rely on the results of annual student questionnaires. Yet the type of information likely to result in improved supervision processes ‘will not come from institutional level surveys’ (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004, p. 101).

PARTICIPANTS’ CONTRIBUTIONS
Differences were observed in the extent to which different participants took the initiative in their learning. Journey, Mary, Emily and Dev instigated activities which extended their understanding of ideas or scholarly practices. This kind of agency is probably influenced by factors such as the participants’ confidence and previous academic experience as well as their expectations of their and their supervisors’ roles. For instance, Journey had worked as an academic in Indonesia for fifteen years before enrolling as a PhD student; it is therefore not surprising that he initiated contact with two international experts to seek feedback on a conference paper he had written. Ariunaa, on the other hand, seemed content to participate in the activities her supervisors proposed. Clearly, diversity in students’ backgrounds demands that supervisors ‘differentiate students, tailor supervision accordingly and enter into genuine dialogue’ (Goode, 2007, p. 601) in the same way that experienced teachers adjust their teaching to cater for different types of learners.

OTHERS’ CONTRIBUTIONS
The participants reported a number of supportive practices which originated beyond their supervisory team. For example, Emily accessed a range of sources when trying to solve problems in her doctoral work:

So [if] I have a question, I go either in the papers and I find all the literature, for sure I learned a lot from the literature, but I cannot say this is more than all the professors I’ve met while they’ve been … discussing it and confronting my ideas … but I cannot say it’s only with [principal supervisor], it’s a lot larger. (Emily, 3, 1361)

Differences observed in the participants’ experience of obtaining assistance from members of the wider academic community raise the possibility that access to such opportunities is not equally shared. Whereas, the examples reported in Table 3 suggest that Emily’s doctoral experience is well supported by a range of individuals (Emily reported 6 of the 11 practices), Ariunaa and Jack seem more isolated in their academic interactions. Strikingly, none of the participants reported learning experiences with peers. This could be because they have no colleagues researching topics in the same area, they are reluctant to inconvenience other students by seeking help, or they believe their peers are unlikely to contribute anything of value. Alternatively, local student networks may be difficult for international students to access (Sawir et al., 2008) or the departmental culture may discourage student collaboration:

M I kind of think it’s a bit strange that we don’t collaborate
S But is that your decision or do you prefer it that way?
M Not my decision because when I come here, others don’t have no collaboration with each other and my supervisor didn’t ask we to collaborate each other and I didn’t bother to ask and I just -
S - sort of followed that pattern?
M Yeah, yeah (Mary, 3, 419)
Given the positive outcomes of peer learning (Maher et al., 2008), the participants’ lack of opportunities to interact with peers about their learning is regrettable.

GOOD DOCTORAL PEDAGOGY

There is little doubt that PhD supervisors wish to support their students’ learning. However, the accounts of the study participants suggest that not all their interactions with their supervisors constitute effective pedagogy. In this section, I discuss critical dimensions of effective student-supervisor encounters revealed in the participants’ accounts of their learning and infer important principles for implementing effective doctoral pedagogy.

RESPECT AND CONCERN

All six participants spoke candidly and overwhelmingly positively about their relationships with their supervisors, despite, in Jack’s case, some initial difficulty adjusting to his supervisor’s working style. Dev spoke appreciatively about his supervisor’s concern for his general well-being:

... [Principal supervisor] is pretty cool ... he’s a kind of person who really ... helps you sorting your problem, personal problems as well ... he nourishes me, pampers me ... so ... he asks me - “How are you?” ... “How is everything?” (Dev, 2, 424).

However, Journey’s account of co-authoring an article with his supervisor reflects most eloquently qualities in their relationship which support successful learning:

... when he adds his parts into the draft I submitted to him, he will ask my opinion on that ... I respect his way of letting me be in a strong position to decide what would be best for the papers ... He also changed the formulation I made on another part of the paper. And, he asked me whether I am happy with what he added and whether the change doesn’t take away the main message I want to deliver (Journey, Email message, February 25, 2010).

The respect, concern, and genuine collaboration evoked in Journey’s description represent key underpinnings of effective doctoral pedagogy. A successful supervision relationship recognises what both parties have to offer - ‘successful pedagogy should not ... construct the student as an empty vessel’ (Tsoidlis, 2001, p. 108).

Negotiating a comfortable supervision relationship demands time and sensitivity and may require additional skill in transcultural relationships where communicative behaviours and styles can differ (Adams & Cargill, 2003). Flexibility and sensitivity to cultural practices is also important; for example, despite the apparent warmth of his relationship with his supervisor, Dev persisted in calling him ‘Sir’ because – ‘It’s an Indian thing’ (Dev, Interview 2, 479). Positive supervisory relationships are a source of interpersonal and intellectual support for students (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004) and are characterised by good rapport. Clear communication is essential for establishing rapport. Kiley points out that students and their supervisors may have different assumptions about issues such as who should call meetings, so that, as this Indonesian student in her study comments:

A supervisor should be understanding about the culture. Like here, if you don’t ask anything then it means that everything is ok, but in Indonesia it means that everything is wrong (1998, p. 197).

A relationship based on respect, concern for the student’s well-being and good communication is a fundamental component of effective pedagogy.
STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT

In each interview, Ariunaa expressed anxiety about her progress, citing her lack of research experience, her weak English skills and her family commitments as obstacles. Her sense of insecurity was clear from our very first interview when Ariunaa explained how she had felt confused for the first three months of her candidature:

A ... from February I was very stressful and I didn’t know what I had to do because ah supervisor means in Mongolia “conductor” ... and supervisor teach always give direction and do this, do this, and it’s easy ... But here it’s totally different and first time I didn’t realise what I have to do and I was stressed and I thought I couldn’t do my PhD, might be, I cannot finish it always think –

S That must have been a very uncomfortable period?

A Yeah –

S And so how did that become clear? Was it just over time talking to your supervisor that you realised it was a different style?

A Yeah, I talked to my supervisor what I had to try ... and ... after three months I realised what I have to do. During that time I discussed with my fellow students –

S Exactly and I bet that was helpful too?

A Yeah and also um discussed with Mongolian students who is studying in different states in Australia ... also they faced the same situation and ah read some books how to do PhD, what I had to do and that ... three months was very difficult, I am always busy, reading something but I have no direction ... it’s very difficult –

(Ariunaa, 1, 212)

Arguably, Ariunaa’s supervisor could have helped more by providing more structured support during her first few months and making expectations explicit. Experienced supervisors recommend requiring new doctoral students to attend regular supervision meetings and complete small tasks (such as summarising or critiquing text), as well as providing feedback from the beginning (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Furthermore, when seeking to provide doctoral students with additional support, the supervision relationship itself is also worthy of attention. Gurr (2001) recommends the use of a simple tool to track developments in the supervisory relationship and facilitate adjustments when, for example, candidates demonstrate the ability to operate more independently. Kiley (1998) includes a useful tool for making expectations about roles in supervision explicit. These and other tools may help provide the kind of explicit structure and support that some students need.

ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOLARLY PRACTICES

The heart of the pedagogy experienced by the participants seems to reside in the practices which Pearson & Kayrooz (2004) classify as Coaching. Whereas the students clearly appreciate the personal and emotional support (Mentoring) their supervisors provide, and use their assistance in meeting official requirements (Facilitating the candidature) and accessing resources and opportunities (Sponsoring), they benefit particularly from their supervisors’ Coaching practices since these model typical researcher behaviours. When she describes her experience of co-authoring an article with her supervisors, Emily conveys a sense of the learning process proceeding in tandem with construction of the text:

E Yes but so I realised [Principal Supervisor]’s help was ... to go forward and that was very, very useful –

S You say forward, what do you mean by that?

E Um I would give her all my idea and she would make it better and we could start from there, while for [Associate Supervisor] I needed to go back, look at my text and reflect –

S Oh I see!
Doctoral Pedagogy: What Do International PhD Students in Australia Think About It?

REFLECTION

In a recent interview (not formally analysed for this paper), Emily explained that she valued the opportunity to reflect on her learning which the interviews provided:

I think that every PhD student should have um someone doing a PhD about PhD students [laughs] ... No, but a counsellor, someone who’s there to show how is it going, and someone detached, not your supervisor ... not anyone in your department, that can just see how are you doing, and how are you feeling through all that, because it is a long road ... and there’s a lot of things attached to this road, it’s ... (Emily, 6, 1812)

In her research with graduate students in the USA, Austin noted a similar phenomenon - ‘... many respondents told us how much they looked forward to the interviews as the only opportunity for structured self-reflection with an interested professional’ (2002, p. 116). While Emily suggests creating opportunities for reflection outside the supervision relationship, an argument can also be made for viewing reflection as a component of effective doctoral pedagogy. In a landmark study of ESL learners, O’Malley and his colleagues cautioned:

Students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to review their progress, accomplishments and future learning directions. (1985, p. 561)

The same is true of doctoral students. By reflecting on the way in which they are gradually acquiring confidence as researchers, they become better able to manage their future learning. Both my study participants and my doctoral peers have been consistently willing to discuss their PhD learning experiences. This suggests that incorporating structured opportunities for reflection into doctoral pedagogies would benefit all PhD students.

The participants appreciated opportunities to discuss their ideas, draft and revise texts and engage with their supervisors’ feedback on their writing. However, as was noted earlier, practices aimed at supporting student writing were relatively limited for some. Simpson & Matsuda (2008) describe three other opportunities which graduate students might benefit from: copyediting proofs, transcribing a scholarly interview, and participating in a collaborative research project. While doctoral students initially exercise their research skills during supervision sessions, other opportunities can arise in departmental seminars, electronic discussions, student-mediated groups and conferences. For less confident students, opportunities to engage in such practices will depend on the extent to which their supervisors promote such activities and encourage them to participate. Previous research (Aitchison, 2010; Maher et al., 2008) indicates that peer writing groups also provide a positive environment for developing skill in a range of scholarly practices. Given the resistance some participants in my study demonstrated to interacting with peers about their work, the benefits of such opportunities may need to be promoted more actively.

Emily - and then I learned so much. I’ve realised when he said two words, I was “But how can I do this?” - but then no, I breathed in and looked at my text and said - Yes, that’s true, I can make this sentence a lot shorter. This is the point, I can take this away, I’m just repeating that part, and I’ve realised how my text was improving following his comments even if I would have liked him from the beginning to tell me -

S - to give more direction?

Emily - do it! (laughs) Not all of it but to show me how he would have done it or to give examples.

S - But in terms of learning, that’s fabulous!

Emily - Exactly. I did learn a lot by doing that. (Emily, 3, 710)
CONCLUSION

This study has a number of limitations. First, it reports the views of a small number of doctoral students whose experiences may be unrepresentative. Second, it deliberately privileges the student perspective in an attempt to complement research conducted with supervisors. Third, it only discusses learning experiences mentioned by the participants; some practices may have been too implicit to detect, too complex to describe or may have seemed too ‘obvious’ to report. Finally, the article presents an aggregated account of pedagogical practice rather than profiling the experiences of any one participant. A case study treatment of the data would provide a more nuanced individual perspective on doctoral pedagogy.

Despite these limitations, the study provides some empirical support for reconceptualising doctoral pedagogy as ‘significantly “distributed” and “horizontalized”’ (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 502). The participants identified learning as occurring in face to face settings, via computer-mediated communication, and in international academic meetings. These opportunities involved a ‘diverse range of relationships, networks, resources, and artefacts’ (Cumming, 2010, p. 33) confirming that learning as participation can operate in settings other than the supervisory dyad. The study also confirms that doctoral students have useful things to say about pedagogy. Rather than rely on institutional surveys to obtain such critical information, supervisors could periodically review their practices with students using tools developed for this purpose. The results of this research also highlight the wide range of practices expected of skilled doctoral supervisors. While no supervisor can be expected to be expert in all aspects of supervision, some may need to ‘increase their pedagogic repertoires’ (Edwards, 2001, p. 176). Finally, the study provides some evidence to suggest that effective doctoral pedagogy is based on a mutually respectful relationship supported by a flexible learning structure which incorporates opportunities for scaffolded participation and reflection.

Examining the pedagogical experiences of the six study participants confirms that when it comes to pedagogy – ‘one size does not fit all’. If students cannot count on access to good pedagogy during their doctoral studies, they must learn to understand and manage their own learning. Goode argues that ‘[i]nternational doctoral students ... are able competently to make “adjustments” once they understand the “rules of the game”’ (2007, p. 601). Rather than expect students to painstakingly discover these rules for themselves, supervisors can help by initiating discussion about the what, why and how of doctoral learning from the very first supervision session.

REFERENCES


Doctoral Pedagogy: What Do International PhD Students in Australia Think About It?


