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A trio-autoethnographic analysis of the experiences and wellbeing of part-time doctoral students with full-time academic roles

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the needs and potentialities of an often-overlooked group: Part-Time Doctoral Students who are Full-Time Academics at their institutions (PTSFTAs). Such students are rarely considered in the research literature, yet they face a unique set of tensions as their roles and identities evolve. This study contributes fresh understanding of PTSFTAs' experiences and wellbeing through a thematic analysis of a series of five open conversations reflecting on the supervisory process. Three PTSFTAs who studied and work at the same institution engaged in a series of trio-autoethnographic dialogues. These dialogues were structured around five doctoral supervision concepts. Tensions are identified that have the potential to affect PTSFTA wellbeing and identity. The study concludes that a student-centred doctoral supervision process can enable PTSFTAs to develop multifaceted personal and professional identities and rich personal epistemologies.

KEYWORDS

Doctoral supervision; doctoral students; wellbeing; relationships; identity; academic role

Introduction

Academic staff are often recognised as an occupational group facing significant fluctuations in workplace wellbeing (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Part-time doctoral students who are concurrently full-time academics at their institutions (PTSFTAs) represent a particularly overlooked subset within this demographic. This paper explores the supervisory experiences of three PTSFTAs, outlining the distinct challenges they face in managing dual roles and the impact on their wellbeing and professional identity development during the doctoral supervision process.

Existing literature on part-time doctoral students highlights that identity is dynamic and shaped by interpersonal relationships, being inherently fluid and subject to change (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Holmes, 2013). Although part-time doctoral students are often termed 'invisible students' (Neumann & Rodwell, 2009; Turner, 2023), suggesting a systemic oversight in their needs within supervisory structures, their full-time academic roles add layers of complexity to their identity dynamics. For example, Leach (2021) uses the

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metaphor of a 'fractured I' to describe the challenging navigation between student and academic identities within the same university setting.

The wellbeing of doctoral students, including PTSFTAs, is frequently compromised under the pressures of academic demands, unclear supervisory relationships, and precarious future career prospects (Levecque et al., 2017). This study asserts the necessity of understanding and addressing these pressures within doctoral supervision tailored to the unique context of PTSFTAs. Using Lee's (2008) conceptual framework, which outlines five supervisory approaches: functional, enculturation, critical thinking, emancipation, and developing a quality relationship, the paper evaluates how these modalities interact with the wellbeing of PTSFTAs. Lee's (2008) conceptual framework for doctoral supervision draws attention to the potential tension between professional and personal identities, allowing for a multidimensional consideration of wellbeing that looks at how several factors interact (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). Similarly, Jazvac-Martek draws attention to the 'oscillating role identities' of doctoral students as they go through a process of transition (Jazvac-Martek, 2009).

Wildy et al. (2015, p. 772) suggest that part-time students with full-time professions are often 'time-poor and experience rich'. Their research highlights factors such as their work-family life balance, job demands, supervisory leadership style, and concerns about future career progression. PTSFTAs are likely to have these factors in common. A comparison of full-time doctoral students and those working clinically alongside their studies at a Swedish medical faculty highlighted the importance of supervisor support, frustrating structures within the academic system and feelings of dependency on supervisors for both groups. However, the full-time employed doctoral students described difficulties in balancing their regular work with research responsibilities and faced hierarchical system pressures which led to feelings of alienation within research groups. Nevertheless, they had the advantage of greater job security (Falk et al., 2019).

By adopting a trio-autoethnographic approach, this study explores the lived experiences of the three PTSFTAs, reflecting on their supervisory experiences through structured dialogues aligned with Lee's framework. The overarching research question seeks to identify the factors influencing the supervisory wellbeing of PTSFTAs, contributing to the discourse on this often-neglected group and highlighting opportunities to enhance supervisory practices. The study is guided by the research question:

What factors affect the supervisory wellbeing of part-time doctoral students with full-time academic jobs?

Literature review

Lee's framework, originally designed for supervisors, is deemed suitable for this study due to participant characteristics, guiding an exploration of five key concepts.

Functionality

Lee (2008) suggests a functional role for supervisors which supports students in ensuring procedures are followed. Van der Wath et al. (2016) liken this to a project manager who ensures that students adhere to the expected protocols. This approach aims to cultivate

students' independence and decision-making abilities, giving them the opportunity to 'cultivate the ability for independent thinking' (Choi, 2019). However, a student-centred approach may pose challenges, requiring supervisory empathy, transparency, and an early clarification of expectations (Choi, 2019).

Enculturation

It is recognised that the social support offered by the scholarly community is a crucial aspect of the doctoral process (Marais et al., 2018), and supervisors play a role in encouraging this (Lee, 2008). Pyhältö et al. (2009) identify a need to foster students' active involvement with their scholarly communities, however they also state that this is not always positive. Similarly, Cole et al. (2010) note that a lack of enculturation can have a negative impact on engagement on doctoral studies. Investigating the learning journeys of part-time PhD students in UK universities, Jones (2023) advises students to manage their wellbeing proactively by seeking support when needed and engaging with academic communities both within and outside their institutions to enhance their doctoral experience.

Becoming an autonomous scholar while navigating social interactions presents challenges, such as negative comparisons and competitiveness, urging supervisors to align environments with students' motivations (Berry et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2004). Recognising the link between emotional intelligence and professional practice Boud and Lee (2005) advocate for 'peer learning', framing research education as a reciprocal learning activity. Peer learning is construed as a reciprocal learning activity involving overlapping networks of learning relationships wherein students act as research peers giving seminar presentations, reviewing and co-authoring papers, or co-writing grant applications. Such activities provide means of 'becoming peers' as students are apprenticed into ways of working that are valued in the research culture (Bernstein, 1990; Boud & Lee, 2005). The result of this reframing may be to build 'a more complex and thoughtful learning ecology' (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 504).

Critical thinking

Critical thinking development is vital in doctoral education (Faryadi, 2018). Lee's (2008) emphasis on problematising and finding connections aligns with Van der Wath et al.'s suggestion of a supervisor as a 'methodological expert'. However, facilitating criticality can lead to defensive stances impacting wellbeing (Brodin, 2016). Van der Wath et al. (2016) suggest a supervisor's role should be that of a 'methodological expert', to address any knowledge gaps, to ensure that work meets discipline-specific standards and to facilitate reflective conversations. However, there is some tension in the way that criticality is facilitated, and this often results in students adopting a defensive stance that might adversely impact wellbeing (Brodin, 2016). In relation to criticality, Korthagen (2004), states that emotions are indispensable to rational decision making and that emotional intelligence is at the heart of good professional practice. Kiley and Wisker (2010) highlight the impact of 'conceptual threshold crossing' moments on doctoral students' developing identities, using the term liminality to describe the transitional or in-between state where students often feel confusion and struggle before achieving

a conceptual breakthrough. This emphasises the importance of recognising the process of transformation.

Emancipation

Much educational thought sees doctoral education in process terms as *doing, being* and *becoming* (Bastalich, 2017). Lee (2008) asserts that the supervisors' and students' ability to reflect upon the psychodynamics of the doctoral process is essential for student wellbeing and is a process of personal growth and autonomy. Paradoxically, it is recognised that PhD students often suffer from imposter syndrome, the feeling of not belonging to their research community (Deconinck, 2015). *Becoming* may thus remain a difficult concept to achieve for PTSFTAs as they inhabit multiple spaces and identities, a difficult and complex navigation to feel entirely part of the research community whilst working in an academic role. Boud and Lee's (2005) analysis of doctoral student interviews acknowledges that supervisors learn with and from their students, an idea that is echoed by East et al. (2012) who document a symbiotic supervision relationship that evolves into a partnership of equals and learning together, strengthening the notion of *becoming*. At the same time, González-Ocampo and Castelló (2019) highlight that some of the tensions that arise from supervisors' own experiences may have a negative impact on students' wellbeing.

Developing a quality relationship

According to Lee (2008), 'developing a quality relationship' is pivotal to securing a successful outcome. Bastalich (2017) suggests that supervisory teams should be based on the compatibility of research interests and personalities, noting that 'marital metaphors are common' (p. 1147). Van der Wath et al. (2016) assert that an effective supervisor needs to be able to guide the student towards personal, professional and academic growth in an emotionally supportive environment. This may be a challenge when the student is also a work colleague.

In the context of part-time students working full-time in academia, overlapping identities may cause tension and impact wellbeing (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Leijen et al., 2016). Feeling that they are now a novice in an environment in which they are normally expert has potential to cause friction (Devine & Hunter, 2017) as they are required to interact with their peers and colleagues differently whilst navigating their identity as a researcher. Similarly, Gardner and Gopaul (2012) highlight that while some of their challenges overlap with those of full-time doctoral students, part-time doctoral students' experiences are distinctively more complex and require targeted initiatives to better understand and support them.

This literature review identifies tensions across Lee's concepts affecting the wellbeing of PTSFTAs, further explored in dialogic discussions among the authors, all of whom are PTSFTAs.

Methodology

Working within an interpretative paradigm, this study adopts a trio-autoethnographic approach wherein the three authors as participants reflect upon their own personal

supervision experiences through dialogue. A paradigm was sought that allowed these participants to 'create new meanings and representations' (Sawyer & Norris, 2015, p. 1), whilst acknowledging the role they had in the process. Dialogic research methodology is recognised for its collaborative nature and invites two or more researchers to engage in dialogue relating to a given phenomenon (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). In line with the trio-autoethnographic methodology, the participants undertook five recorded dialogues related to Lee's five doctoral supervision concepts (Lee, 2008), sharing the experiences of their personal supervision processes. The dialogues varied from 30–55 minutes in length. It was assumed that 'the intent is for emergent meanings and meaning making to become dialogic within the text and between the text and the reader' (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 10). When basing research on autobiographical accounts, it can be difficult for authors to remain objective about their experiences and to recollect memories accurately (Clements, 1999). However, in this instance all participants were employed by the same institution, and all had recently been through the doctoral supervision process, adding to the accuracy and reliability of the narratives.

Methods

Critical case sampling was selected to focus on a small group who have experienced the same phenomenon (Guetterman, 2015). This sample is a group of three participants, the authors of this paper, who have recently completed their doctorates, and who work and study at the same institution. The participants defended doctorates in the fields of teacher identity, technology in teacher education, and speech and language development. They studied at and have been employed by the same university for over 10 years. All three are women with families and are second career academics, having previously been teachers. They undertook a doctoral supervision qualification together and already have a trusting collegiate relationship, enabling them to engage in dialogue with a critical reflexive stance. Structuring the conversations around Lee's conceptual framework helped to minimise potential bias. Ethical approval was given by their university and the fundamental principle of 'do no harm' was applied throughout. Participants have been allocated a code to protect identities and ensure confidentiality.

An iterative thematic analysis was conducted wherein each of the participant researchers analysed the five transcribed scripts to find commonalities and initial codes using an open-source online qualitative data analysis tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial set of codes was revisited and refined, and a group consensus was reached on common themes (Table 1). A further round of analysis took place as the participant researchers revisited the raw data and applied the agreed themes to Lee's five concepts. The resulting themes are outlined in Table 1.

Results and discussion

A group consensus was reached on the themes that emerged from the participant discussions and these were aligned to Lee's (2008) conceptual model.

The section that follows considers the findings through a lens of wellbeing for PTSFTAs using Lee's five concepts (Lee, 2008).

Table 1. Themes emerging from the analysis.

Concepts	Themes
Functionality	Procedural Administrative
Enculturation	Community positive Community negative External community
Critical thinking	Family Adaptability Self-reflection Self-criticism
Emancipation	Journey Prior experience Autonomy Timeliness Negative experiences
Developing a quality relationship	Tensions Diversity Trust Relationships Empathy Supervisory approach- personal Supervisory approach – professional

Functionality

In relation to PTSFTAs' wellbeing, these findings suggest an emotive supervisory process, with participants using words such as '*reassuring*', '*calming*', and conversely discussing that there was a '*mountain to climb*'. When discussing the necessary professional skills of a supervisor, participants also highlight project management. They value the experience and knowledge of their supervisor that enables them to complete:

I think having somebody who obviously knows the process is good from a wellbeing point of view ... You know, having that calming kind of influence almost? (P3)

There was recognition of a need for functionality, although this is seen as a negative as well as a positive, such as when constrained by computer systems:

I would say that was the biggest kind of mountain to climb, (was) really just dealing with technology. (P3)

It can be argued that effective management of the process is pivotal to student enjoyment, wellbeing and successful completion. This is perhaps even more important to PTSFTAs who are being supervised by their work colleagues, with whom they will have ongoing research relationships.

Enculturation

Responses to the concept of enculturation are overwhelmingly positive. Participants agree that community belonging has a positive impact on their wellbeing, however they recognise that their needs are varied,

We draw on different communities for different needs. (P2)

However, the limited comments on the theme of community suggest that overall, there is not a strong feeling of belonging. Factors such as workload impede community engagement, highlighting the conflicting demands of working full-time and studying part-time. As one participant states,

It was just one step too far to do the extra things. (P2)

It may be that imposter syndrome is also at play here (Deconinck, 2015). PTSFTAs may feel less belonging due to not being completely immersed in the community. Participant 3 alluded to this, when saying:

I feel like I'm an imposter, as it were, you know, an infiltrator. (P3)

Nevertheless, belonging to the local research community is a source of motivation. One participant actively seeks to belong to the postgraduate research office:

I used to situate myself purposely, at the kind of social end of the room, like in pretty much in the kitchen area, so that I spoke to people. (P3)

However, they acknowledge that this source of collegiate support ended once their PhD was completed, by adding:

When I went in the room after I'd, you know, graduated or whatever, they said what are you doing in it, you're not supposed to be around anymore. (P3)

Another participant is conscious of the divide between full-time and PTSFTAs:

When you went into the research room...I just felt it was full of full-time PhD students who had their own community. (P1)

Although participants sometimes felt they were on the periphery of the university postgraduate community, they engaged in critical debate with people outside the supervisory team such as fellow research staff in their teaching field, librarians, technicians, support staff, subject associations and family members. The wider research community can offer a sustained sense of belonging (Dunleavy, 2003). It should be noted however that these links within the institution were colleagues within the university, rather than fellow students, indicating a perceived divide between the traditional student and the PTSFTAs. PTSFTAs draw support from overlapping communities that include work colleagues across a range of disciplines, fellow postgraduate researchers, subject association networks, friends and family. Participants clearly value the autonomy to choose their own communities. Supervisors, therefore, need to be mindful of the value of the sense of belonging in relation to student wellbeing, and to be aware that there is no single solution that suits every student.

With reference to wellbeing, the enculturation practice needs to acknowledge the range of communities PTSFTAs belong to, and the overlaps between their professional and personal identities. PTSFTAs' enculturation takes place before and beyond the doctoral process as part of their academic role, and it is therefore important to develop co-productive, peer-based relationships with the supervisors and the relevant research communities (Boud & Lee, 2005; East et al., 2012).

Critical thinking

The concept of criticality is categorised by five themes shown in Table 1: Adaptability, Self-reflection, Self-criticism, Journey and Prior Experience. This theme reoccurred throughout the discussions indicating that this was a key theme for the participants.

In thinking about adaptability, participants identify the need for students and supervisors to be flexible, not just in terms of deadlines and procedures, but to amend strategies and goals to take account of the PTSFTA demands:

My supervisor and I would set my milestones but then they were highly movable because I was doing it with my family and working at the same time. (P1)

This adaptability is based on trust:

They didn't have to worry that I wouldn't complete it was just a case of how and when. (P3)

PTSFTAs are already well placed to develop criticality; what is evident in relation to wellbeing is the need for flexibility and understanding. They often need to balance their work and homelife as well as their doctoral studies. The time and space needed for effective critical thinking is not always easy to find and this can lead to feelings of doubt and self-criticism (Cottrell, 2017).

Self-reflection and self-criticism feature as themes that can impact negatively on wellbeing for PTSFTAs, and there is recognition of a need for emotional resilience when engaging in critical thinking:

I think we've all fallen foul of our own reflective practice . . . sometimes you've tied yourself up in knots because you've been overly reflective. (P2)

As PTSFTAs, their prior experiences and other professional roles in the field are seen to be an advantage in relation to critical thinking that needs to be acknowledged from the outset:

We are like a stick of rock. . .through the middle it will say 'reflective practitioner' because it's what we do. (P3)

Emancipation

The dominant theme within this concept was in relation to the development of autonomy within the concept of emancipation. Other positive themes emerging within this concept include epiphanies and timeliness. However, several comments in this concept centred on negative experiences and tensions. The findings suggest that the balance between emotional support, practical advice and logistical governance is a complex one, and in avoiding conflict and upset, an early agreement about the roles and responsibilities in the supervisory relationship is essential. A need for supervisor support is evident but participants suggest that this needs to be balanced with progressing research skills and gaining independence as researchers. This is emphasised when discussing the type of supervisor they thought they might be:

I would like to think that as a supervisor, you know, what I would be is supportive of that process, where they come to a point where they can stand up and say, 'this is what I've done. And this is what is new, and this is my contribution to knowledge'. (P1)

Participants emphasise the role of sensitive support and well-scaffolded discussions in helping them articulate their ideas and develop personal epistemologies throughout their doctoral journey:

I had no idea what I was trying to say. And I think it was that careful questioning, and actually the skill of my supervisor to read my work and understand it (P2)

Similarly, they highlight the fine balance that is needed to generate a supportive but challenging environment for discourse and debate:

You need to have space and you need to be listened to...it doesn't need to be too critical...there's a fine line, isn't there between criticality and allowing the reflections to emerge (P1)

The data suggest that emancipation is an emergent process that the supervisory team can facilitate:

The best thing about it as well was to have somebody hold my hand while I try and untangle my thoughts and make them into something that was logical. (P1)

The doctoral journey involves building confidence and criticality, and as these skills evolve participants gain self-direction and feel more on equal terms with their supervisors:

I think I very much went into it feeling like a novice, you know, and a bit of an inconvenience at times. But then as it went through, and I built my confidence, I think I did feel a bit more like an expert. (P2)

Epiphanies and 'lightbulb moments' are identified as key moments of progress. However, the doctoral route is not without its challenges and, when considering the impact on wellbeing, there were tensions:

It was very kind of combative. It was like, you had to really gird yourself up for your supervisions because it was always bang, bang, bang. (P1)

These tensions are evident in discussions relating to emancipation, highlighting the importance of a balance between criticality and criticism.

There's a fine line between reflecting and being self-critical... I never have enough time; I've never done enough... so a lot of my reflection was almost about my work ethic, even though I knew that I couldn't do any more than I was doing. (P2)

Building autonomy is recognised as an important factor in doctoral study (Lee, 2008; Van der Wath et al., 2016). The process aligns with the Vygotskian concept of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1962). Devine and Hunter (2017) assert that those who are studying in their work environments, and find themselves being treated as novices, can encounter insecurity and upset as part of this process. The PTFSTAs in this study call for support that relates to their individual needs, considering that they are already working as autonomous academics with their own established communities within their fields. As discussed above relationships change as colleagues become supervisors, and the delicate balancing act of sufficient and appropriate support needs to recognise the individual and varied prior experiences of the PTFSTAs.

The emancipation journeys described by the PTFSTA's also sit well with Kram's four phases of mentoring that describe the transition from scaffolded 'initiation', through the 'cultivation' of a positive relationship to 'separation' and 'redefinition' as the relationship

evolves into an emergent peer relationship of equals (Kram, 1983). This illustrates the importance of supervisors knowing their students and anticipating when they are ready to become more independent.

Developing a quality relationship

Relationship building is shown to have significance to participants across the themes of diversity, trust, relationships, empathy and supervisory approaches. There were two additional themes: supervisory approach personal and supervisory approach professional.

Recognition of the external influences on the doctoral experience is important:

My main supervisor would talk to me about personal stuff as well about her family, and things like that. And I think that's really important. (P1)

Trust and building relationships are recognised as being interconnected:

There is a lot more understanding there with someone you align with and that who you trust. I think you're much more likely to open up. (P1)

However, a desire for more critique and challenge is also highlighted:

He wasn't actually very critical of what I had done either. He was just very supportive. (P2)

The PTSFTAs value their relationships with their supervisors, and this aligns with the literature which emphasises the importance of a respectful and trusting understanding. As the relationship develops, there is evidence that bringing the personal self into the professional role can be helpful in building the supervisory relationship. Tensions inevitably arise over the course of the doctoral experience, and if they are made explicit, they can become valuable reflection points (González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2019). In this way, the mode of 'learning through self-awareness' can be usefully applied to the supervision model (Bastalich, 2017; Kiley & Wisker, 2010).

It is suggested that this trusting relationship takes time, and that careful consideration should be given to the choice of supervisor beyond subject expertise. Bastalich (2017) emphasises the compatibility of research interests and personalities. A balance needs to be maintained between the personal and the professional, especially in the case of PTSFTAs, who are likely to have relationships with their supervisors before and beyond their doctoral studies. Sensitivity towards these changing relationships is crucial to maintaining their wellbeing (Benmore, 2016). Zhuchkova and Bekova suggest that the employment status of doctoral students who are already working in universities, along with the support they receive from supervisors and departments, can influence their identity development as academics. With the right guidance and support, their existing roles within the academic environment can provide PTSFTAs with opportunities to develop relevant competencies and cultivate their identities (Zhuchkova et al., 2023).

Limitations

It is not the aim of this research to generalise to the wider population as it was recognised that this is difficult to do with small-scale ethnographic studies (Rosenblatt, 1978). Instead, the aim is for commonalities to be identified and

used to aid future practice and thinking within the doctoral supervision forum, drawing upon the creative scope afforded by trio-autoethnography. While this study focuses upon the experiences of PTSFTA's in the social sciences, there is much that Lee's framework might offer to scaffold discussions with doctoral students studying in different fields. It is also recognised that the sample size of this study was small, even for a qualitative study, but this research did not set out to generalise to the wider population, instead intending to shine a light on individual experiences.

Conclusion

Our conclusion considers the supervisory experiences of PTSFTA doctoral students in relation to their identity, wellbeing and potentiality. This study began with the premise that doctoral students should not be regarded as a homogenous group and that PTSFTAs are a distinct demographic. We have shown that the doctoral journey of PTSFTAs demonstrates a unique set of challenges. A key challenge is reconciling the changes of identity associated with gaining a doctorate whilst remaining an academic. Not only are these students balancing work and studying, but they are also studying in their place of work, and this can create contradictions in their professional roles. In addition, the students in this study were all dealing with tensions between their professional and personal roles as mature students with demanding family lives beyond academia (Leijen et al., 2016). Our results indicate that these multiple identities can create vulnerabilities within the doctoral process that require a sensitive approach to supervisory practices if students are to thrive, as noted by Leach (2021). This finding concurs with Jazvac-Martek's observation that identity formation is as key to the doctoral process as knowledge production (Jazvac-Martek, 2009).

It is therefore suggested that to manage the wellbeing of PTSFTAs there needs to be an explicit affective dimension throughout the supervisory process that is sensitive to student needs and nurtures their emergent academic voices. The delicate process of moving from novice to expert as a doctoral student, whilst remaining an expert as a professional academic, might be balanced through student and supervisor relationships that foster a student-centred pedagogical approach, as described by Berry et al. (2020) and Jones (2023). Such an approach involves supervisors reflecting on their own supervisory experiences to develop skills of empathy, understanding and inclusivity. They need to be aware of how multiple influences interact to shape wellbeing (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018) and that the development of role identity is a reflexive and dialogic process (Jazvac-Martek, 2009).

This study also highlights an ethical and moral demand on supervisors to safeguard their students' wellbeing so that they thrive in the research process (Berry et al., 2020). Van der Wath et al. (2016) note that good supervisors create opportunities for students to express their concerns and opinions. The results from this study suggest that time needs to be allocated for providing support to PTSFTAs that are experiencing a range of challenging circumstances, recognising that differing strategies may be called for to meet their varying needs (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012). Furthermore, supervisors need to anticipate a shift in the power dynamic when colleagues become their students and be alert to possible conflicts as the balance of the working relationship adjusts over time:

I was really lucky, because I'd worked with (my supervisors) for a very long time in another capacity ... we needed to take all of the good bits from our previous relationship and apply them in the different situation. (P2)

We therefore suggest that the supervisory team for PTSFTAs should be appointed not only with the supervisor's expertise in mind but with an emphasis on emotional intelligence. This requires a strategic approach to supervisor training and development that goes beyond the functional role of the supervisor to ensure that all five interlinked concepts considered in this study are addressed. A conceptual rather than a functional supervisory framework, as outlined by Lee (2008), has the advantage of emphasising relationships and recognising tensions between various personal and professional identities that is consistent with our findings. By considering the supervisory concepts as connected and influential on each other, we can identify the complexity of influences on PTSFTAs' wellbeing and develop the language needed to discuss them. With wellbeing, empathy and nurture explicitly at the centre of the supervisory process, and a metacognitive understanding of how key aspects of the process interact, we can turn the tensions into positives.

In our view, a tailored approach to PTSFTA's wellbeing values their vision and is sensitive to their potentialities. This approach acknowledges that the supervisory process moves through evolving phases from transactional to transformational (Kram, 1983) as they become autonomous peer researchers working alongside or in collaboration with their supervisors. Their existing academic roles enhance the opportunity to have an influence within the wider research community before and during the doctoral journey, and then offer them a route to impact upon completion.

This study goes further in suggesting that PTSFTAs' multifaceted experiences provide them with strong potential to make innovative contributions to their fields. Such students can be celebrated for the richness of their personal and professional achievements. Placing wellbeing at the centre of the supervisory process recognises the complexity of student needs and identities. The resulting enhanced metacognition enables supervisors and students to appreciate PTSFTAs' challenges and contributions. This increases students' voice and agency as they transition into new academic roles. Far from being invisible or fractured, PTSFTAs can then emerge from the doctoral journey as deeply reflective researchers with rich personal epistemologies and make an immediate impact.

The study offers the following recommendations for practice:

- Universities implement positive strategies and student-centred pedagogies to support wellbeing throughout their doctoral programmes
- Supervisor training and development acknowledges the role of emotional intelligence, and the need to balance empathy and compassion with critique and challenge.
- Supervisors and students develop sensitivity to PTSFTAs' multiple roles and identities and to the complex dynamics of their workplace.
- PTSFTAs are encouraged to balance their professional roles and studies with due consideration for their wellbeing

Recommendations for further research:

- Investigation of the developmental processes influencing PTSFTA's personal and professional epistemologies, and how these can enrich research outcomes.

References

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