

The background of the slide features a low-angle shot of graduates in silhouette against a light blue sky. They are celebrating, with many holding their black graduation caps high in the air and some holding rolled-up diplomas. The scene is filled with a sense of achievement and joy.

Professional doctorates Students and supervisors Journeying alongside each other

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Way through

- Context – professional doctorates different journeys
- **Considering throughout Personal , Learning and Institutional dimensions**
- Students and supervisors are both professionals
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Power and role clarity, secret garden, rickety bridge, boundaries and co working
- Journey stages and shapes - beyond Gurr
- Challenges and negotiations- research practices, use of theory, methodology and methods,
- Rigour and doable realisable research projects
- Writing
- Making a professional difference
- Prof docs are busy successful professionals perhaps either over confident or over anxious in a new sphere .
- Supervisors are guides, mentors and collaborators not personal assistants or administrative staff
- Time
- Wellbeing for students and supervisors -Maslow
- Contributions and achievements
- Building and maintaining communities –from staged workshop programmes to writing groups to LinkedIn
- Examiners??
- A collaborative journey



Context



As supervisors we might well work with postgraduate students exploring and researching issues in their professional practice with a view to making changes in that practice.

This talk focuses on our journey together as supervisor and professional doctoral student considering the supervision of the research and writing processes mostly in the thesis stage and issues of working relationships with often busy successful professionals, co researching and supporting their discovery of and engagement with identifying issues and questions, problematising the taken for granted or the unknown, learning and developing new processes, understanding and working with research methods, and managing time to do the research and writing work alongside professional jobs.

The structure and shape of their final submitted work might vary in relation to their discipline so the monograph or linked article format might involve writing for publication in the form that includes an exegesis and individual articles (normal in Scandinavia, Europe, Engineering and the sciences. It could have a product at its heart, such as a patent, or a painting or novel, or.... In these latter creative instances we are supervising the creative work as well as the written work.

We consider positive practices of working together and dealing with potential issues in that dynamic so that professional doctoral students and supervisors can grow alongside each other, identifying, shaping and working with new enough questions and projects and we also consider the importance of cohort community building to support that research journey and lead to future contacts.



We consider here what has been defined as ‘the modern doctorate’ (Lee, 2018) i.e. the professional doctorate focusing on professional practice and including ‘alternative’ formats eg doctorate by publication or creative work, from artwork to music to patents.

Many students studying for doctorates now do so because they want to relate their research to their professional practice, or because they feel the achievement of a doctorate will help them in their professional development, leading to advancement. Some professional practice-oriented students will want to undertake a full PhD, perhaps because of its status. This is particularly so in some cultural contexts where the alternative course-based plus thesis model, the professional practice doctorate (DBA, EdD, Prof doc) might once have been seen as of lesser status (shorter thesis??) . However, there is much to recommend the professional doctorate related to, growing from and feeding into professional practice.

It is also hard work and enables the development of the same research skills (as appropriate to the discipline as well as the thesis) as the longer PhD.

Arguably, for the students, it is also **often a more supportive process due to the mix of coursework and thesis, and ideally, cohort based developmental support.**

The coursework-based first stage supports development of researcher skills and approaches and community building .



The thesis stage demands a research-based study into an aspect of professional practice.

The whole professional doctorate process enables busy professionals to contribute to their professions from a research and practice base, to deal with interesting issues and problems and to gain recognised qualifications which help them deepen their theorising about their practice through the research process. Ultimately the award and skills also can lead to graduated doctors being promoted or to move jobs.

- If you were a professional practice doctoral student yourself you might be more familiar with the needs, benefits and challenges your student faces, and ways of managing these. However, if as a new supervisor, you achieved a traditional PhD, or you are a more traditional route early career researcher, or someone who has added supervision to their teaching range at any point in their career, there are some things you need to be aware of as one of their supervisors.

I was a part-time distance doctoral student studying for a literature doctorate alongside (not on) professional practice— who and what supported me?



1 Supervisor -2 collegial community –3 family ???

- 1 Genuine interest in my work and that of his other students
- Didn't force me into a mould
- Staying supportively in touch without overwhelming with too many demands and deadlines
- Waiting it out with background support, positive kindly communications no nagging no stressing –investment in my likelihood of turning the stalled project around (2 year gap)
- In time comments and intellectual 'nudges'- sound feedback/feedforward
- Ensuring I went to appropriate conferences when I was ready to learn and share and ensuring I met the right/interesting/some lead people

- 2 Putting me in touch with another generous academic who joined me into his research student community
- Collegial group sharing for a year
- 3 er- tolerance at best ! But some grounding



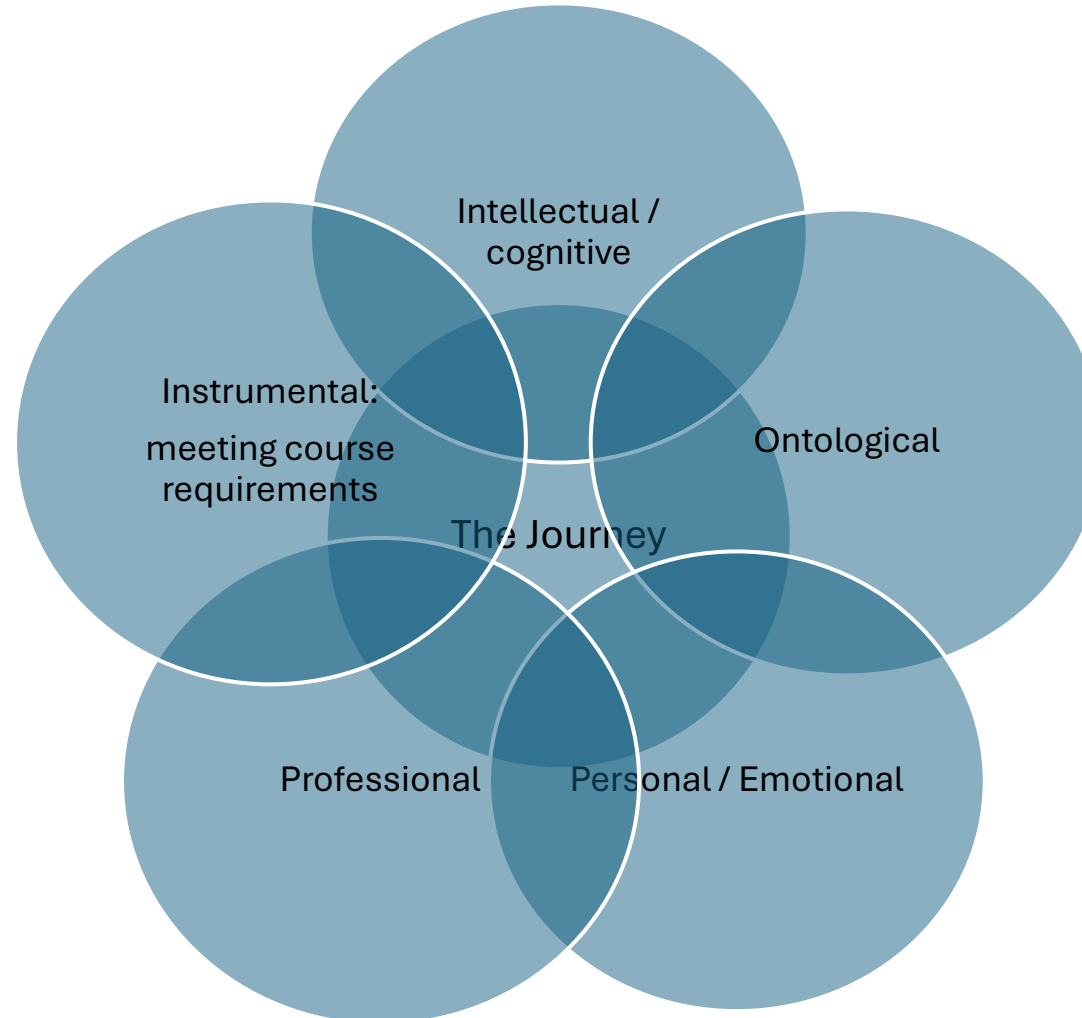
Supervising....who?



- **All** ‘my’ doctoral students have been part time -combining (or juggling) work and study .
- **Most** have been working on professional projects – from management roles and developments to issues and practices of teaching and learning, to writing a novel and critiquing the process .
- **Now** they are all remote, from a variety of cultural backgrounds and contexts , on different timezones, met on zoom/teams . In my main context- all are middle or senior managers in HE.

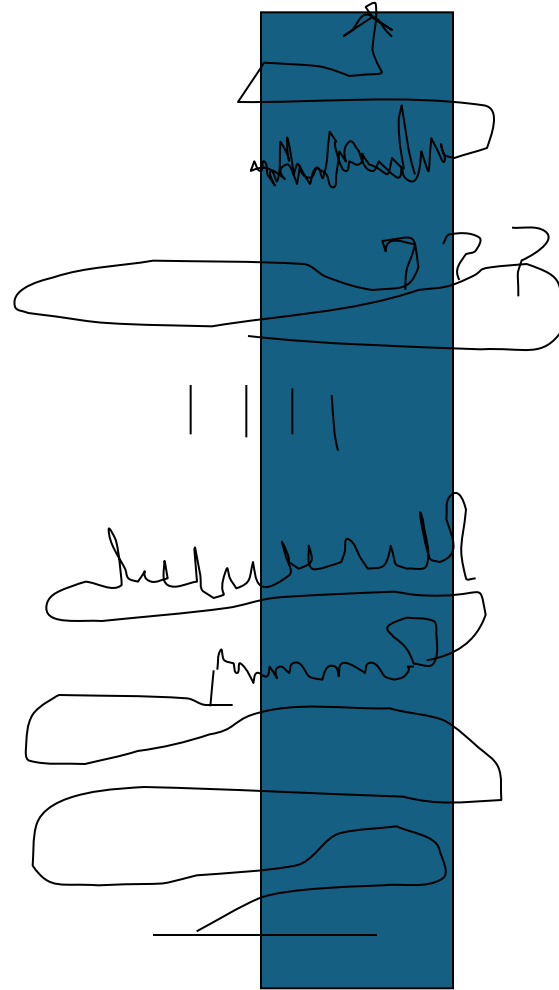
A Research learning journeys: multi-dimensional- (*doctoral learning journeys* *Wisker, Morris et al 2011*)

what are the research learning journeys of your professional doctoral students
working alongside you ?

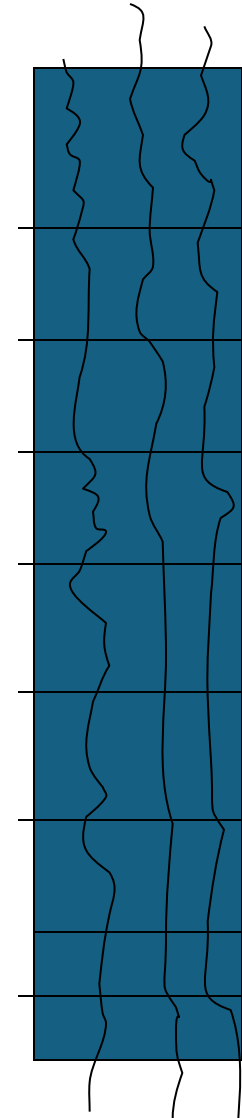


A thesis is a building

B Research is a journey



It looks mapped but -risks, surprises, deviations



Ordered, coherent, organised, linked

Working together on the research journey

- Please consider diagrams **A and B**
- The dimensions of doctoral study and supervision for professional doctorates
- The research and writing journey
- What expectations, issues, hitches come to mind for supervisors and professional doctoral students? And what can 'we' do to enable a successful journey?

Why carry out professional part-time postgraduate research?

- Professionals seeking opportunities to explore and develop their own work practices
- Changing organisational practice in the workplace – seeing the research project as a vehicle
- Seeking promotion and recognition
- At the right time for them to carry out this learning in their own learning trajectory
- Offers a real opportunity for those who have spent time working full-time and/ or engaged in domestic responsibilities
- Researching part-time is the only option financially
- It is the only option because of location, other demands, the nature of their research.



Being in the know - many positives



- Busy professionals have competencies and knowledge which can help identify important, credible doable professionally based issues and questions
- They might have insider knowledge about who to contact how to contact for the project and how to enable positive change as a result of the doctorate research project and written contribution(s)

Part time professional postgraduates might be affected by



- Combining across disciplines
- Culturally inflected different learning patterns and behaviours
- Learning behaviours rewarded in different systems such as professional practice,
- Balancing work, research, domestic responsibilities, and the rest of life
- Often working at a distance
- Other aspects of diversity – cultural difference, culturally inflected learning backgrounds, gender, religion, age....
- Varied experience with research approaches, design, practices
- Variable histories of and opportunities to express themselves in writing
- Variety of skills , life skills and job related developments as outcomes

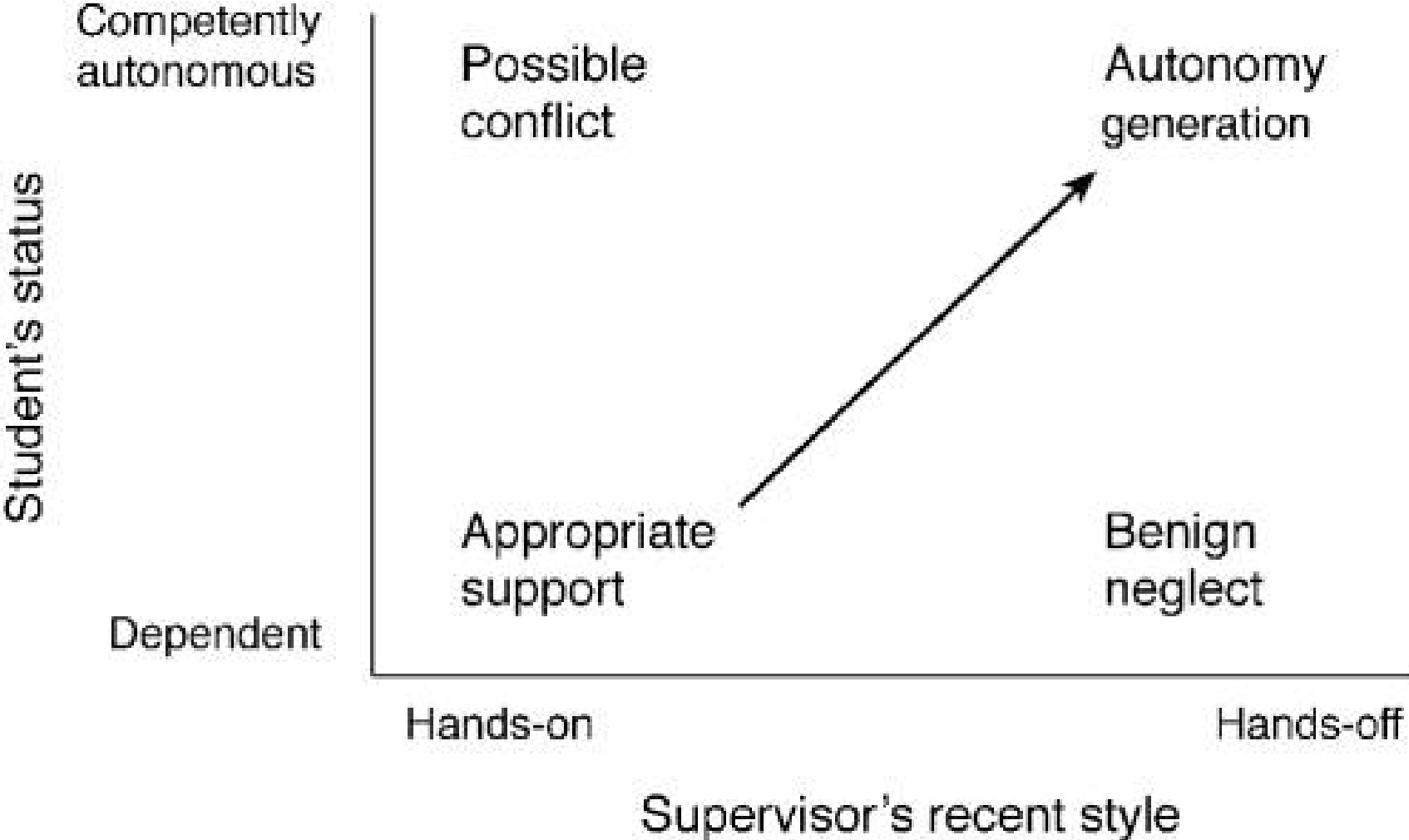
Part-time professional postgraduate students can present issues in terms of

- Available time
- Appropriate research topic, area, design related to outcome
- Research methods training and practice
- The provision at the University ie
 - The experience of supervisors and the system in enabling part-time professional postgraduate study
 - Resources available to them such as library, online, other facilities.
 - Supervisor time at appropriate moments, regularly
 - Community to support their work

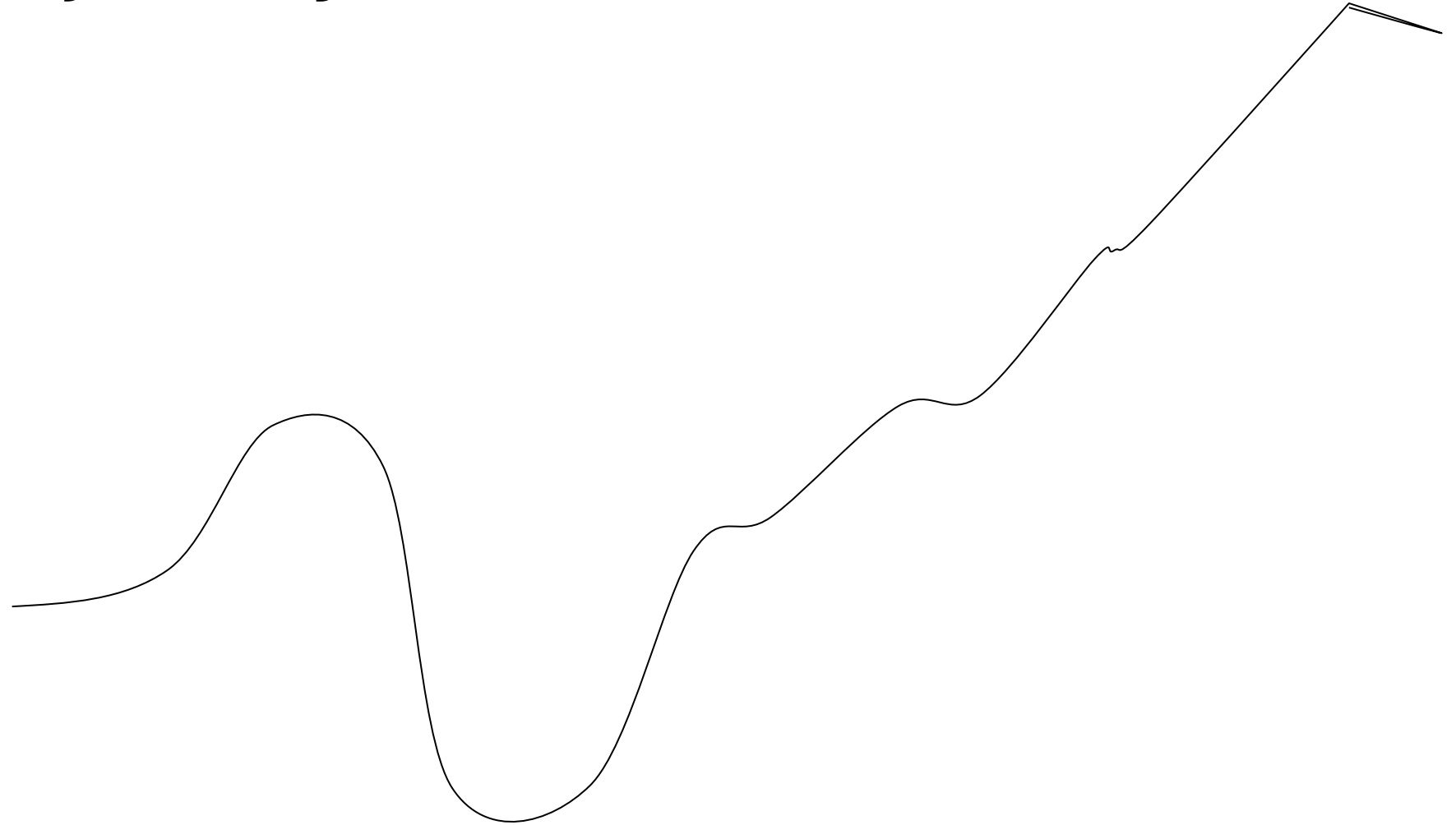


How can we understand and support their journeys??

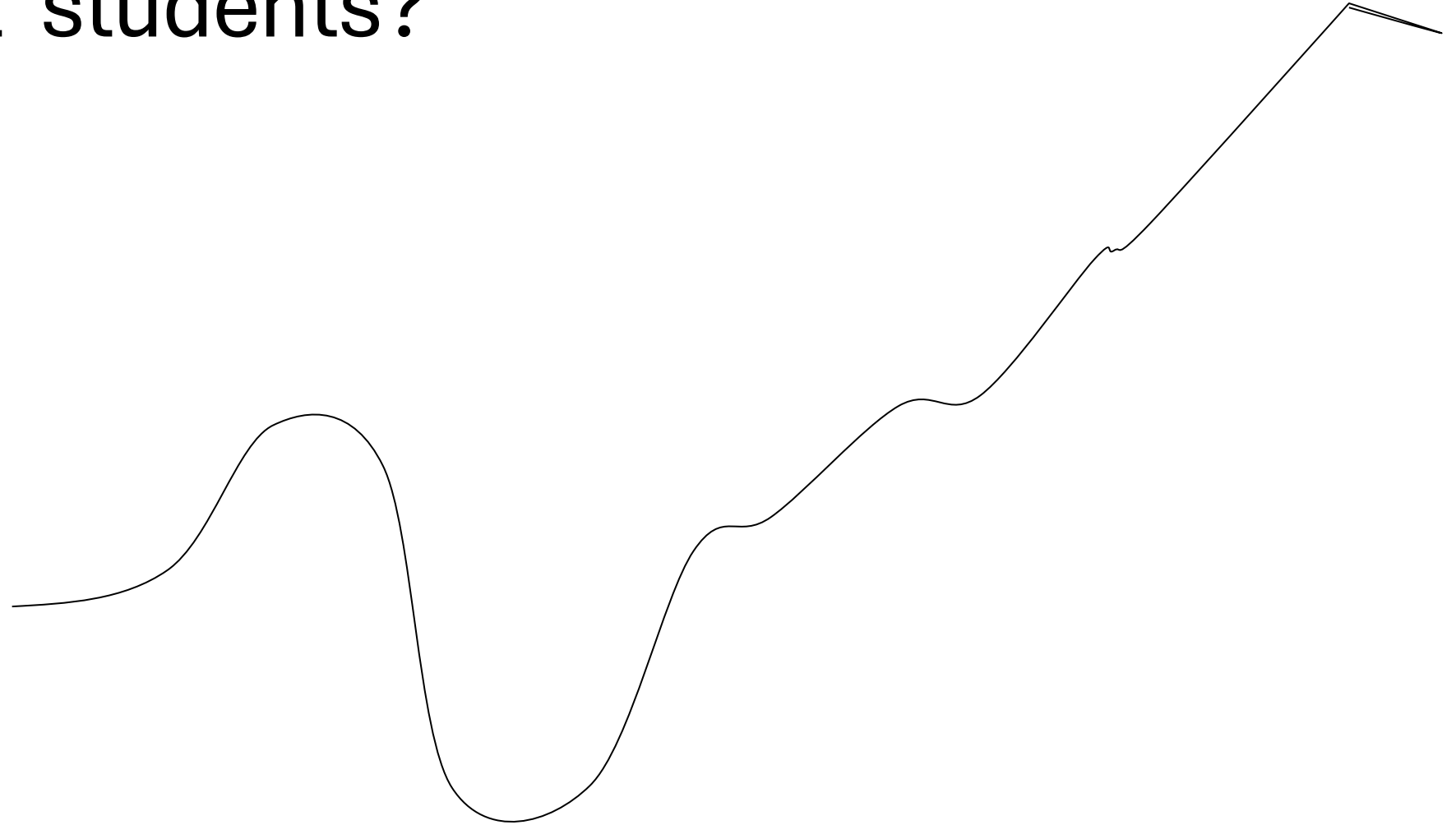
GURR'S SUPERVISORY ALIGNMENT MODEL



Research journeys - mine



Research journeys of part time professional doctoral students?

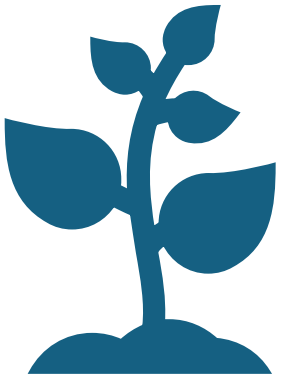


Key

and Questions -please consider -



- Blue-ft science doctoral student in a lab
 - Grey -me part time doctoral student with ft job
 - Red – part time professional doctoral student with ft job , family etc ---the bumps are often affected by work, family etc
-
- What is going on in the peaks and troughs?
 - What hinders and what supports our professional and professional practice doctoral students as they juggle life, pt time research and their ft jobs??
 - How can we build on our own experiences and research to support and enable these highly competent professionals achieve their doctorates?



- Questioning the doctoral learning journey trajectory (Gurr) recognising that for many students, this is **not an 'arrow straight journey upwards to achievement'**. There are blocks, stuck places, moments of questioning and moments of self doubt along the way.
- Normalising and dealing with setbacks, self doubt, offering clear guidance, clear stepping stones, models of successful writing and research, to work towards, will help make the doctoral journey a more manageable journey and therefore less stressful.
- 'Troublesome encounters toolkit' (Morris and Wisker 2011)

Gantt chart self developed

Question- how can this be re written to add in the time demands of professional work, family and life demands?

	4.2023	5.2023	6.2023	7.2023	10.2023	1.2024	4.2024	7.2024	9.2024
Writing the research context	█	█							
Read for and write the literature review (continues throughout)		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	
methodology chapter		█	█						
Questionnaire administered and collected				█	█	█			
Interviews undertaken, taped then transcribed				█	█	█			
Research data analysis						█	█		
Writing chapters on						█	█	█	█
1 results and discussion/ 2 findings						█	█	█	█
Refining and rewriting						█	█	█	█
1 Writing the conclusion then 2 finalising the abstract, introduction and conclusion. 3 Submit for final feedback and revisions						█	█	█	█

Managing expectations:

- Make systems, practices, responsibilities, roles, deadlines, communication expectations explicit
- Negotiate responsibilities and working practices
- Establishing ground rules – particular reference to available time, contact types, work to be sent, quality meetings
- The Supervisor Student Alignment Tool Kit (Gurr, 2001) allows students and supervisors to indicate perspectives about students' needs and supervisory style on a 2D graph.



What supports our professional doctoral students?

- Time and opportunity to develop research as learning approaches which enable
- Critical
- Conceptual
- Creative work
- Make systems, practices, responsibilities, roles, deadlines, communication expectations explicit
- Negotiate responsibilities and working practices
- Establish ground rules – particular reference to available time, contact types, work to be sent, quality meetings
- Use eg The Supervisor Student Alignment Tool Kit (Gurr, 2001) which allows students and supervisors to indicate perspectives about students' needs and supervisory style on a 2D graph.
- Fragmented time is available/so need to balance research with life and work so not overwhelmed by its rhythms
- (use the processes eg Gantt charts must reflect all the demands :- research, professional work, life events)
- Develop and use explicit critical thinking frameworks(Lea and Street 1999)
- Develop critical thinking through supervisor feedback on developing work-(Mellan and Stracke 2024)



Ensure and replicate community

- Find ways to establish social understanding, communication and contact
- Put students in touch with others at a distance, local to them
- Ensure community established at times they can engage, use blogs, community@brighton social learning spaces, online expectations



Levels

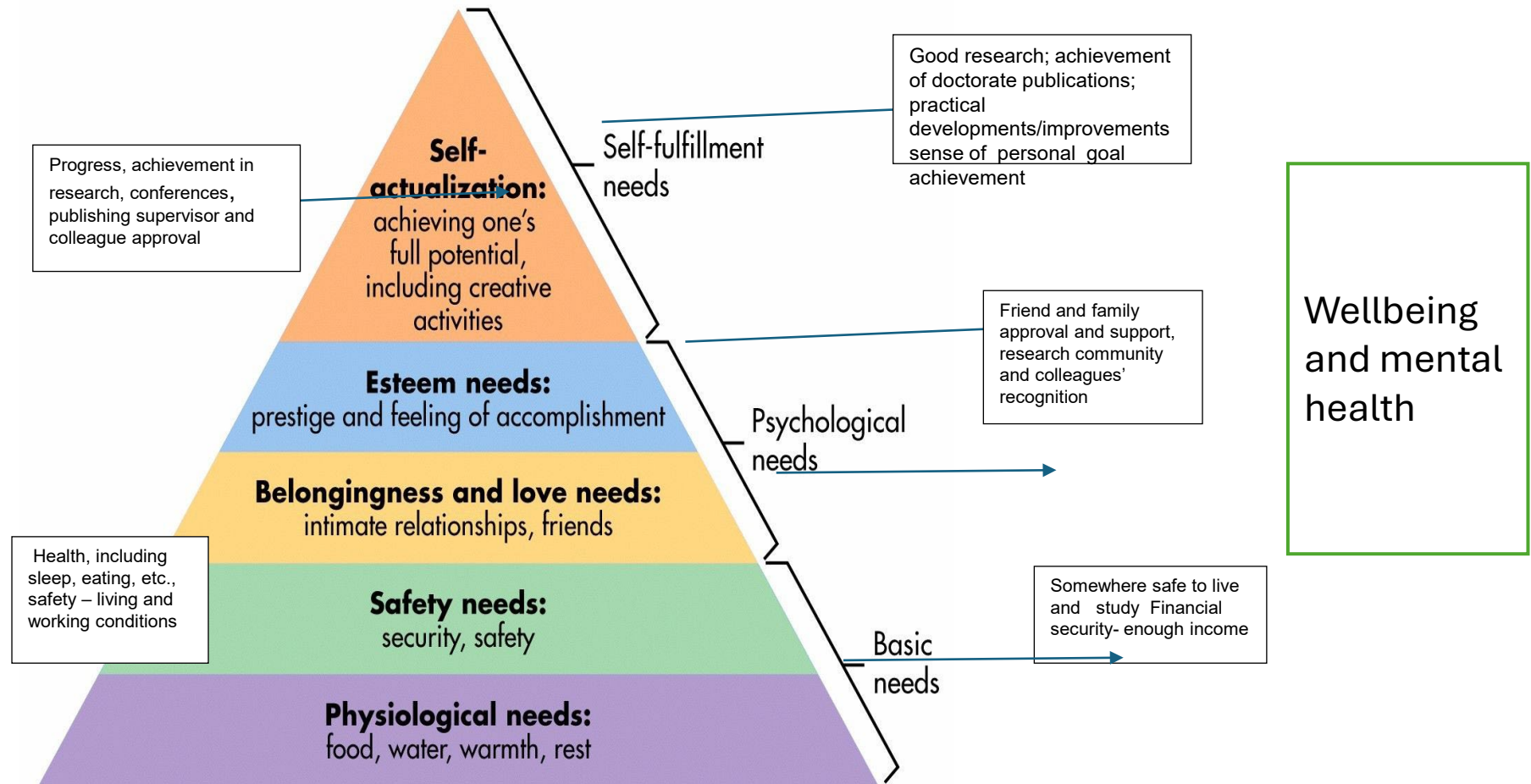
- Time and opportunity to develop research as learning approaches which enable
- Critical
- Conceptual
- Creative
- Enough work could be an issue
- Fragmented time available/can balance research with life and work so not overwhelmed by its rhythms

- Develop and use explicit critical thinking frameworks(Lea and Street 1999)
- Developing critical thinking through feedback on developing work-



Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) revisited:

everything in the research journey for professional doctoral students contributes (negatively or positively) to wellbeing and mental health and everything in the personal intellectual research journey thrives from sound wellbeing and mental health. This is also true for supervisors





Wellbeing for doctoral students has been the subject of a range of large projects over the past few years

Supervisor wellbeing is written about very little .

Our research (Wisker and Robinson, 2014) found **direct links between supervisors feeling well and positive, ie experiencing positive mental health and wellbeing- in relation to the movement forward and intellectual success of their students.**

Recognising this, and mitigating against feeling low and powerless when a student is not moving forwards successfully, is a key (along with all the information on taking exercise, breaking blocks etc) to supervisor mental health and wellbeing.

What are the characteristics of the professional doctoral journey which cause stress for students? And so for supervisors also?



- Expectation of continued high achievement.
- Mystifying expectations
- Isolation

It's a very long journey, a doctorate, and much of it seems difficult to define. Students are testing themselves, against some unknown practices and outcomes.

Your experiences and issues

As a supervisor- what are your views about the causes and problems of stress , poor mental health and poor wellbeing for students and for supervisors ?

- What causes you stress?
- What affects your wellbeing and mental health?

Think of eg

- University practices regulations and expectations
- Workload
- Interactions with students , other supervisors,
- Research and your other commitments
- Anything else ?



‘We tend to think about wellbeing in terms of its absence more than its presence. I mean it’s, you know, the notion of wellbeing is a kind of a default and we notice when we move away from itthere’s something about stress. I think where most people feel that they’re not in a state of wellbeing it’s often to do with pressures and stresses on them, and that’s interesting coz if you look at the definition of wellbeing it says it’s about **realising potential and coping with the normal stresses of life**, and I think that’s probably the key thing is that **we don’t have a sense of wellbeing because the level of stress that we experience is more than we can easily cope with.**’ (*From the research*

Troublesome encounters project Wisker and Morris 2011)





- Our wellbeing, mental health and stress levels as well as sense of self worth are tied up with student progress and development
- We need to see projects completed and students succeed and finish for funding (external), and self actualisation(internal) reasons
- We are highly capable and very busy- students are one of many of our responsibilities

How do we as supervisors know what to do to support our students and so relieve stress on ourselves?



The **unknown journey** has a number of stresses and complexities so it isn't surprising that doctoral students working alone will suffer mental health issues and problems with their wellbeing.

Some of this can be helped by supervisors **clarifying the steps and stages of the journey** with students

Some by reducing the isolation through enabling students to **join communities**.

Some will be helped by developing **emotional resilience** so that they can move towards a positive developmental learning experience and the achievement of the doctorate.

These same strategies support us as supervisors

Optimal functioning and Academic wellbeing

Basic economic and physical wellbeing is foundational for overall wellbeing and resilience (Hart et.al. 2007; Maslow, 1954).

- **Optimal functioning** / high level learning- and higher level study ideally entails a high level of academic challenge which can potentially test research students' potential and limitations. Research students often experience troublesomeness in their learning but this is often necessary, if intellectually and at times emotional demanding. The emotional resilience research students develop through community belonging and participation, positive relationships, wellbeing strategies and a strong safety net for when they experience adversity and / or at times of vulnerability, supports their journey and provides the best basis for engaging and coping with academic challenges and troublesomeness.

What do universities do?

Some of the literature suggests that graduate departments need to acknowledge the problem of student mental health and wellbeing

Some universities offer supervisors training on recognising, preventing and addressing mental health issues in their students and in themselves.

Some universities also talk about offering courses or workshops that teach yoga and mindfulness techniques.

Some ignore the issues





- **Academic Wellbeing** (both student and supervisors what can we learn from it?)
- Staff identified the following areas as being crucial to research student wellbeing and providing the necessary basis for fulfilling their academic potential. The same issues relate to us as supervisors.
 - Health;
 - Sense of security in what they're doing;
 - Ability to cope with stress;
 - Comfortable in the process of learning.
- It was perceived that it was essential to establish a balance between providing support and ensuring the research students develop as independent learners.
- The role of the supervisor in relation to research student wellbeing was a point of contention in one of the focus groups, with a question relating to how far supervisors should get involved in personal issues. A counter argument suggested that it was helpful to view the student holistically
- how far should wellbeing should be the student's own responsibility as opposed to supervisors or the institution?.
- How far should supervisor wellbeing be the responsibility of the individual or the institution?

Cohorts

There are different models of success in collegial research community of which cohorts are a good example as they include:

- Bringing postgraduate students together to streamline provision, support and encourage self-help, community, empowerment and ownership
- Supervisor teams
- Development workshops
- Standardised start dates
- Standardised time to completion with strict milestones e.g. transfer
- Involvement of others in reading and supporting the work at research proposal approval, one year in, transfer, exam.
- A supportive community, both work-oriented and social.



Programmes often include

- Induction – where the regulations are explained, and students begin to develop networks which will support them throughout their period of registration. Modules on:
 - Developing a research proposal/candidature
 - Ethics
 - Working with theory
 - Conducting and writing the literature review
 - Research methodology and methods
 - Writing at doctoral level
 - Managing the supervisory relationship
 - Working towards progression points/milestones
 - Preparing for examination including mock vivas/orals
 - Publishing from the PhD
 - Professional and public outcomes



Communities and collegial groups –part of the hidden curriculum – Uni Bath ICHEM DBA as an example

1 Residential workshop based development-

- Staged processes and opportunities to consider the role of : - literature review and theory; methodology, methods, ethics, data analysis- 4 staged assignments developing practice, sharing ideas .
- Thesis writing workshops.

2 Opportunities for presentation: ‘research rockets’; internal conferences, bring back sessions - familiarity, sharing and ongoing co support.



Finally

Be very careful about the examiners you select

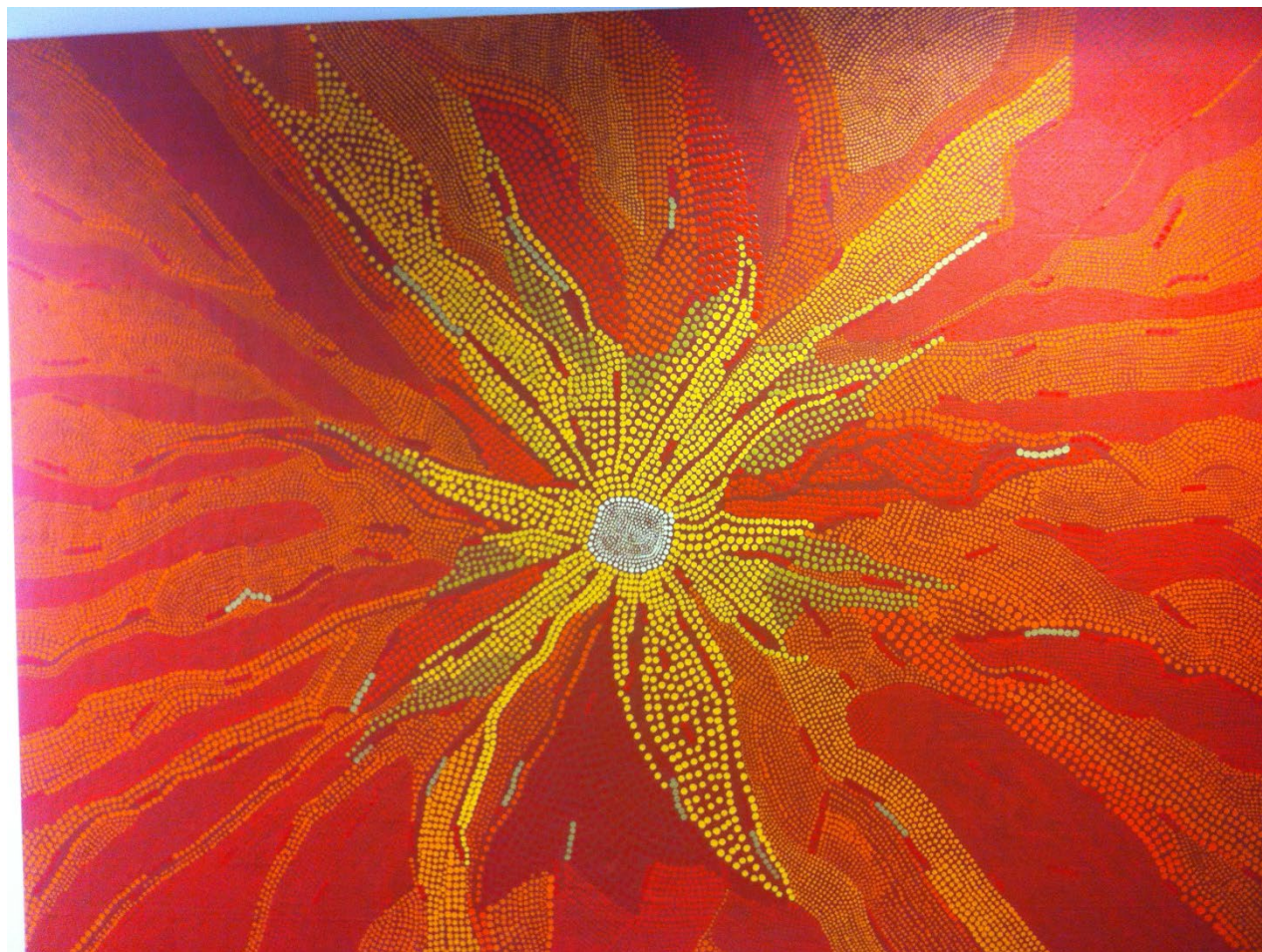
- Examiners need to be sensitive to the professional practice doctorate and /or the creative practice based doctorate

Student producing creative hybrid work

...that's all good but how am I going to pull that together and she said that's for you to decide. You have to find the right words to recapture the indigenous thinking so I thought metaphors, analogies and those sort of things and in the end I stuck with the metaphors because that seemed to fit the stories for each side. So we had people who are responsible for looking after those places. So there's a **whole set of aborigine society rules and protocols** and I thought this is really interesting because **I don't think any indigenous people have done their PhDs thinking about all of those things before and choosing them** and that's when I started **doing the paintings**, and I said to my **mum** about the time my auntie used to paint all the artefacts and do the weavings and stuff. She said alright then I'll let you do that. So then I started painting on canvas for the first time in 2001 when I did them. So that depicts what we call here the wet season and that's looking for the south west when I was painting that day and I was standing at a particular place.

That was a part of the process for me to understand **how I position myself within the PhD. And that the PhD wasn't just going to be an artefact of western academia it was part of our aboriginal life.** So when I was asked the question once is it just another academic artefact I said **no its not because my mum sung this thesis with the paintings that I did and my daughters danced to it while I painted bits in between and now its become a pathway for my family,** particularly my daughters to be able to integrate successfully. So they understand what the ceremony is and what it means to belong to the country and how to engage with people In the country and extended families through the ceremonies and what it means to come into a university environment.

The dry



Training your potential examiners

Dance to teach mathematics, based on the Eshkol-Wachman three dimensional movement notation



conclusion



- Supervision of professional doctoral students can be seen as relational (PGS conference stellenbosch 2025) conducted through dialogues
- The effective working relationship which supports student and their research and writing is based in
 - Mutual respect
 - negotiation of roles and working practices and the research and writing
- Dialogues between supervisors and students which encourage trust, knowledge building sharing and professional researcher independence and effective contribution.



- Sensitivity over peaks and troughs, work and life interruptions-domestic and work demands and completions
- Replicate community
- Critical and developmental feedback
- Nudge conceptual critical and creative work

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