

TWELVE

‘Doctoring’ our own: Confessions of a Māori doctoral supervisor

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Introduction

There is very little literature, empirically based or otherwise, on the supervision of Māori doctoral students (Fitzgerald, 2005; Pope, 2008; Kidman, 2007; Smith, 2007). There is even less relating to Māori supervisors working with Māori doctoral students (Kidman, 2007), let alone Māori supervisors working with non-Māori students. While the relatively large corpus of literature on doctoral supervision may be of some assistance to Māori supervisors, there is also a dearth of studies that focus on the pedagogical aspects. Research undertaken by Elizabeth McKinley and her co-researchers (McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin & Williams, 2009) will now help to fill the literature gap on the teaching and learning process of supervision as it pertains to Māori.

Meanwhile, those of us who are Māori supervising Māori doctoral students have endeavoured to ‘doctor our own’ in principled ways, informed by our cultural, our academic and our research knowledge. In this chapter I reflect on my experiences of supervising mainly Māori doctoral students. I focus particularly on aspects that have grown in significance to me over the years, initially as a still wet-behind-the-ears PhD graduate and latterly as a supervisor with a little ‘street cred’. Some of the aspects that I explore include supervision as culturally located pedagogy; whanaungatanga (existence and practices of, especially kinship-based, relationships) and self-regulation as a delicate balancing act; and waking up at midnight.

When I enrolled in the PhD programme in Education at the University of Auckland in the early 1990s the cohort of potential Māori supervisors numbered zero. In the final years of PhD study my advisor, who was Māori, had gained her PhD and was able to move into a formally recognised supervisor role. Since then the growth in the numbers of Māori obtaining doctoral qualifications in education, as well as in other fields, who are working in universities, whare wānanga (Māori institutions of tertiary learning) and other tertiary institutions

has greatly increased opportunities for Māori doctoral students to seek out supervisors who are Māori.

Between the submission of my doctoral thesis in 1998 and 2006 Māori doctoral student enrolments grew by 79% (Çinlar & Dowse, 2008). To what extent have universities and other tertiary institutions explicitly planned for or supported Māori doctoral student growth? A summary review of available university strategic plans indicates that few of the major universities appear to make explicit mention of growing Māori doctoral numbers. While there are statements about Māori recruitment, retention, participation and achievement, and statements about postgraduate and doctoral student growth, little connection appears to be made between the two.

Commitment to Māori doctoral study has increased nationally. This is reflected in policy as well as more concretely, such as through equity-related funding provisions which see Māori doctoral completions funded at double the rate of other completions (this is also the case for Pasifika completions).

Another national support is found in Te Kupenga o MAI (Māori and Indigenous) network for Māori and indigenous doctoral candidates. The MAI network works across a range of institutions, disciplines and regions in Aotearoa New Zealand. MAI was set up to accelerate the already growing numbers of Māori doctoral students and to support successful completion of doctoral degrees by Māori. Students are provided mentoring and learning opportunities via writing retreats and workshops held throughout the country. MAI also provides some access to funding through fellowships and internships. Māori academics across the country for the most part shoulder MAI work, with help from non-Māori and indigenous colleagues. MAI also provides publishing opportunities to students through the *MAI Review* — a journal that aims at advancing Māori and indigenous research capabilities, and *AlterNative* — an international journal of indigenous scholarship.

There are also support mechanisms for doctoral supervisors of Māori students through MAI networking. Other supportive opportunities for supervisors are provided by Manu-Ao, a Māori academic networking initiative which aims to support a culture of Māori scholarship. Manu-Ao is supported by Te Kāhui Amokura (a Māori standing committee of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committee) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). It operates in association with all universities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Networks such as MAI and Manu-Ao provide valuable resources and learning opportunities that can assist in doctoral supervision. However, the work that supervisors do directly with their Māori doctoral students is still the most critical component in the process if students are to complete their study successfully. Supporting Māori and other indigenous students undertaking research study has a higher degree of complexity than supporting

non-indigenous students (Day, 2007). For a whole raft of different reasons supervisors can expend an enormous amount of time and energy working alongside students as they come to grips with doctoral work.

Supervision as culturally located pedagogy

Kidman notes that as Māori students come to grips with doctoral work they can feel they need to 'leave their culture at the door (rather like a wet umbrella)' (p. 165). Other indigenous doctoral students have described similar experiences. Fredericks and Croft (2007) identified the contradictory nature of their indigenous knowledge within their doctoral studies. While their Aboriginal world-views gave them particular power in terms of knowledge, they also reported making 'the decision that we needed to place some of our knowledge to one side until after we finished our doctoral studies in light of the silencing we experienced ...' (p. 3).

Supervisors who are Māori may have had similar experiences of cultural silencing and non-recognition of their cultural knowledge base and world-view when they themselves were doctoral students. Some may continue to feel pressure to leave these outside their own office door as they supervise. As I work with students, Māori, pākehā or otherwise, who I am is fundamental to how I teach, learn and supervise. There are culturally located practices that are present in my personal and whānau life that also imbue my pedagogy of supervision. However, I am also aware of the dangers of uncritically transferring how I live as a cultural being to how I teach and supervise as a cultural being.

My practices of supervision, indeed of teaching and learning in general, are located within a philosophy that has been described as Kaupapa Māori. Kaupapa Māori encompasses theory, research and a philosophical position and encapsulates Māori ways of doing things; Māori control and Māori autonomy (Smith, 1995). Commitment to making transformational change is a fundamental element of Kaupapa Māori.

My approach to supervision as culturally located pedagogy involves *not* taking for granted that all my Māori students are like each other or like me. Just as doctoral students per se are diverse in a range of ways — culture, class, gender, age and educational experiences to name but a few (Fitzgerald, 2005), Māori doctoral students may share as many differences with each other as they might with non-Māori students (Kidman, 2007). In entering any supervisory relationship, learning about the student is critical and supervision protocols and practices are negotiated as part of the learning process. Supervision protocols and practices are inherently cultural in nature, being Māori as supervisor or Māori as student adds another complex cultural dimension. While non-Māori supervisors may be 'several steps removed from the deeper level of meanings and understandings energising their candidates' intellectual work' (Henry,

with the Institute of Koorie Education, 2007, p. 160), just because one is Māori does not automatically mean that one shares the same cultural and linguistic understandings of all students who are Māori. The 'not taking for granted' extends to *not* uncritically assuming that because we are Māori, we share similar values, practices or levels of knowledge around, for example, karakia (prayer), kai (food), whānau (family), te reo Māori (Māori language) or tikanga (cultural principles). The protocols of supervision, the location(s) of supervision, the language(s) of supervision, who will be present during supervision, and so on, need exploring between supervisor and student.

I have contributed to greater and lesser degrees in the supervision of 14 doctoral candidates over eight years following graduation — all but two are Māori. Some have successfully completed, a large group is in the throes of final writing before submission and a smaller group is in the final stages of examination. One has taken a break from doctoral work. Each supervision enterprise has been unique. However, while the kawa (protocols and practices) of supervision as culturally located pedagogy have been, or are being, enacted differently with each student, the tikanga and kaupapa (guiding philosophy) remain constant.

Principles such as wairuatanga (spirituality), whanaungatanga (relationships to people/land based on genealogical connections) manaakitanga (care and hospitality), underpin supervision practices. How they are played out differs. For example, karakia at the beginning and closure of each supervision encounter is an ordinary practice in the supervision of some students, but not with others. That karakia does not occur, however, by no means indicates that wairuatanga is not part of the supervisory pedagogy. The bringing or offering of kai is a normal practice reflecting manaakitanga at each supervision meeting in the case of some students, but not others. There are other ways that manaakitanga can be acted out. Being sensitive to, and accommodating of, significant challenges and issues in each other's lives is also an enactment of manaakitanga. This has included arranging for suspensions in registration to make needed space for students to address health-related problems affecting themselves or their whānau. It has also involved agreeing to supervise long-distance when a student has had to re-locate. At times this has involved a great deal of travel on my part as well as the student's, with no recognition of time taken or of fuel expended. Whanaungatanga may be evidenced in children, partners, parents and other whānau members being present during, and even participating in, the supervision of some students.

Te reo Māori is a language of supervision with some students. For others, contributing to their developing knowledge of Māori language and tikanga is part of the supervision. McKinley et al. (2009, p. 7) similarly report that they found that for some of the Māori participants in their study, doctoral study also

involved 'a slow and demanding journey towards becoming more secure in themselves as Māori'. I cannot work from the expectation that because a student is Māori they know how to operate appropriately in a range of Māori contexts or in Māori language. Some students may require a lot of assistance to be able to engage with or carry out research with Māori participants or communities, or may require a lot of persuading that it may not (yet) be appropriate for them to work with groups they wish to, given their current cultural or linguistic knowledge!

Fitzgerald (2005) contends that supervisory relationships between non-Māori and Māori need to acknowledge a base of intercultural partnership. Even when both supervisor and student identify as Māori, the need to recognise intercultural aspects of the relationship still remains. This is because at the end of the day the institution in which we, as Māori supervisors, work invariably has a culture of its own. The culture of the institution permeates formal supervision protocols, practices and processes. In the case of universities this culture has its historical basis, or *whakapapa*, coming out of a non-Māori culture, sometimes called a Western world-view.

I have some familiarity with university culture, beginning as a child of one of the first of our *whānau* to graduate and work in university settings. The association continued as I became a university graduate and then a university staff member myself. While a Māori student necessarily comes with a level of academic history and familiarity with 'tertiary culture' in order to enter doctoral study, supervisors cannot take for granted that they have in-depth understanding of that culture, its traditions, protocols and expectations. It is important to get to know well a student's areas of familiarity and strengths in relation to Māori, to academic skills and academia itself, as well as areas in which they will need to develop strength if they are to successfully complete a doctorate.

Whanaungatanga and self-regulation — a delicate balancing act

Whanaungatanga can take many forms in supervision. As mentioned above, whanaungatanga and *whakawhanaungatanga* — the development and practices of whanaungatanga — are inherent to a kaupapa Māori pedagogical approach. Whanaungatanga may precede a supervisory relationship in the case of a Māori supervisor and Māori doctoral student relationship. I have supervised students with whom I have *whakapapa* relationships based on *hapū* (sub-tribe) and *iwi* (tribe) affiliations. I have supervised students I have worked with on largely political kaupapa and Māori protest movements (Harris, 2004). While I have found that preceding relationships, *whakapapa*-related or otherwise, have added strength to supervision, I have come to see that how we will work together probably needs to be even more explicitly and intensely discussed at

the outset of our supervisory relationship, and may need more regular revisiting to make sure we have got it right.

There can also be a sense of whanaungatanga developed between whānau and academia via first-generation graduates. One of the things that I celebrated when I became a second-generation holder of a PhD in my whānau was that it happened alongside two stunning Māori women who were the first of their respective whānau to gain this degree. For indigenous students who are the first in their families to come into university study, that the relationship extends to the families and in many cases into their communities is particularly critical. Aboriginal women Bronwyn Fredericks and Pamela Croft (2007) identified the significance of their communities' and their partners' support: 'We each offer respect for our sacred bonds between our selves and our partners and don't tread over and on these bonds in the process of our work. The indigenous men in our lives are steadfast in their support for what we do and what we see as our work' (p. 5). My experiences of supervising Māori students have involved supporting a student to integrate doctoral study into their whānau and community lives in ways that sustain and enrich, rather than undermine their significant relationships. This is a particularly challenging thing to do when you are from a whānau or community that has little experience of doctoral study. Ways that can facilitate positive contributions that Fredericks and Croft highlight involve demystifying academic culture and ensuring that whānau members develop an understanding and familiarity with academia themselves.

Doctoral supervision is often seen as involving movement towards self-regulation and the production of independent researchers (King, 2007). However, the optimal state of self-regulation and independence encapsulated in whakawhanaungatanga might be better understood as interdependence. Interdependence includes the ability to self-regulate in a manner that includes identification of issues or areas of need that require assistance and input from others (Timperley et al. 2009). Those others not only include academics or so-called experts. They can include cultural advisors. One of the students I supervise identifies these as her Iwi supervisors, who, along with her university supervisors, a Pae Kaumatua (Board of Elders), and members of other significant groups in her research, comprise her doctoral research supervision system and structure (Ruawai-Hamilton, in preparation).

Arrangements such as this not only reflect whanaungatanga as a supervisory process, but also help to consolidate a strong system of interdependence between developing Māori researchers and groups, including iwi and community-based groups, with which they may work in the future.

Some recent developments in Māori doctoral supervision, such as MAI described above, also reflect the significance of interdependence to successful doctoral completion amongst Māori and indigenous doctoral students and

Māori academics and researchers. The developments help to better prepare Māori candidates for a research world that is ever more collaborative in nature.

Lack of support and isolation are identified as possible key reasons for the relatively high attrition rate of Māori doctoral students (Smith, 2007). Isolation and alienation have also been identified as key barriers to successful graduate study by minority doctoral students in the United States (Walker, 2006). Similarly, Aboriginal doctoral students have expressed frustration with the lack of relevant literature and scholarly leadership (Fredericks & Croft, 2007), which can also heighten a sense of isolation and alienation. For Māori students, *whakawhanaungatanga* can be a critical supervisory support mechanism to help address isolation and alienation. As reflected in the above, *whakawhanaungatanga* requires the supervisory relationship to go beyond that between the student and supervisor. *Whakawhanaungatanga* includes the space and place for *whānau*, *kaumatua* and community in Māori student's doctoral endeavours and supervision.

As an aside, I have found that issues around interdependence are not confined to supervision of Māori students. Ensuring cultural safety of oneself and one's participants is a particular challenge facing non-Māori students who work with Māori in the process of their doctoral studies. Supervising *pākehā* students, particularly when their research includes Māori community members, also involves the enactment of *whakawhanaungatanga*. This has involved critically examining with the student their reasons for working with Māori and how the research will be empowering and transformative in nature with Māori. In one instance this has involved identifying critical friends, Māori with whom the student has high-trust, power-sharing relationships. It is important that with critical friends we also identify benefits for those who take such roles, so they do not become merely research 'sherpas' for a *pākehā* doctoral candidate. There may be hidden workload costs related to time spent discussing educational or professional pathways with critical friends. These costs are not restricted to working with *pākehā* students, and issues of benefits or recompense to cultural advisors are also present in the supervision of Māori students (McKinley et al., 2009).

Waking up at midnight

Joanna Kidman (2007) comments on the disappointment that can be experienced when Māori doctoral candidates decide to withdraw early from study. I have experienced similar feelings of disappointment when potential Māori students I have spent considerable time working with decide not to enrol in doctoral studies at all, and have questioned whether I could have done more. Over the years, much time and energy has gone into working with potential

Māori students and overseas-based indigenous students: discussing their ideas for possible research; helping them to navigate enrolment requirements and procedures; advocating for their inclusion in doctoral programmes when they 'don't quite fit the bill'; supporting funding and scholarship applications and so on. Some students have gone on to enrol in the institution for which I currently work.

Some, usually because of their research interests or where they are living, have gone on to enrol in other institutions. I see this as a successful outcome, even though the work and energy expended may be relatively unrecognised in formal workload terms (McKinley & Grant, 2008).

Māori students often seek out Māori supervisors as much for our cultural background as our disciplinary background. As a result, the topics of doctoral students I have helped supervise over the years form a veritable research rainbow. I have found myself asking students why they thought I would be an appropriate supervisor, given I sometimes had little content knowledge in the area they wanted to research! Earlier responses were likely to focus on things like my knowledge related to *te reo Māori*, *tikanga*, to my commitment over the years to 'the kaupapa', or that our existing relationship indicated we would be able to work well together. Lately, responses have included comments about 'good press' I might get from past and current students. Some of my doctoral students have also started coming back from writing workshops or MAI retreats, warning me of the likelihood of requests for supervision, as a result of their conversations with others. Getting good press can be a double-edged sword, though. Working with students in areas I am not so familiar with takes considerable time and energy. I have found this the case even when teamed with a supervisor highly knowledgeable in the area. As someone who tends to find it hard to say 'no', I have probably been the worst contributing factor to supervisory overload.

Māori academics, though many more in number than when I enrolled in doctoral studies, are still precious few. Given their value, it is not surprising that they can be highly mobile. So it is also not surprising that some students I have ended up supervising may have been through other supervisors before they came to me. In hindsight these are sometimes the most challenging supervisions. For the student, there are often time-costs related to having to look for new supervisors, which can impact heavily on expected times of completion. Valuable supervisory time can be spent dealing with 'paper-pushing' administration activities. At the least, documents to change supervision arrangements have to be completed and processed. In many instances there is a need to request extensions. The worst situations have included having to complete annual doctoral reports for years that I wasn't supervising, in order to meet registration requirements.

Taking on students who are part-way through doctoral study involves working in a context in which the important spadework has already been done. This also can be a mixed blessing. The development of the research topic, the methodology for collecting the data, even sometimes considerable writing may already have been completed. These kinds of supervisions are also more likely to be in areas in which I have relatively limited content knowledge. Saying 'yes' can at times make more sense culturally than academically. And saying 'yes' can result in being woken up at midnight by anxieties around the rate of progress and the standard of work being done, particularly when it is an area in which I do not have a great familiarity. Some of the more serious issues resulting in my waking up at midnight have required advice and support 'from the top' and intensive advocacy for students dealing with challenges that have impacted on their progress. Ideally, the load is shared with another supervisor — however, in some cases, time for completion requirements has meant that there has been little or no time left to put one, let alone two, supervisors in place before the maximum date for thesis submission.

The supervision of Māori and other indigenous students carries a heightened responsibility to advocate for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge as not only valid knowledge within the academy but also appropriate for the level of doctoral study (Henry et al., 2007). Henry notes that supervising indigenous students can be a risky business for the academic involved due to the new ground that may be tested. Many Māori doctoral students focus on topics to which they are personally connected and passionate about. They may approach such topics from innovative and creative angles, which may not be readily understood by the general academy. I have invariable anxiety attacks about whether I am doing a good job with supervision of research that is 'out of the square' and the extent to which I am protecting the integrity of students' works. Anxiety is also heightened at the later stage of supervision by a limited pool of potential examiners who have understandings of the theoretically and academically ground-breaking nature of many Māori doctoral students' work, or have experience in what is involved in the supervision of indigenous students.

A final comment

In this chapter I have endeavoured to reflect on my supervision experiences as a Māori supervisor working with mainly Māori doctoral students. I view my approach to supervision as involving culturally located pedagogy that draws on Kaupapa Māori theoretical and research approaches. Supervising Māori students can be a complex and demanding enterprise, administratively and educationally. The complexity of many of their lives can result in a higher level of administrative activity for supervisors and a longer supervision process.

Those students who have made their way to academia via less conventional pathways may also require more targeted support from their supervisors with, for example, academic writing.

The same reasons that make supervising Māori students a demanding enterprise also contribute to it being a very fulfilling exercise in the sense that each graduation is contributing to transformational change, be it through the generation of knowledge that makes a difference at societal levels or the gaining of a qualification that makes a difference at the level of life chances. Transformational change is not restricted to society nor to the individual student; it can also encompass his or her whānau, and me. Each supervision I have been involved with has added to the layers of my understandings and practices of Kaupapa Māori, not only as a supervisor of doctoral students undertaking research, but as a researcher myself. The sense of supervision as an interdependent relational activity is captured well in a whakatauki (proverb) given to one doctoral student as a guiding metaphor for his collaborative research work in a Māori community setting.

Ko koe ki tēnā, ko ahau ki tēnei kīwai o te kete.
You at that, and I at this handle of the basket.