Article

Understanding Supervisory Practices: Commonalities and Differences in Ways of Working with Doctoral Writers

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Abstract

Thesis supervision is a crucial aspect of the doctoral writing experience. While scholarly attention to both doctoral writing and supervisory dynamics is increasing, supervisory support of doctoral students as novice academic writers is still an under-investigated topic. Not having a clear understanding of the way supervisors treat writing gives insufficient insight into a crucial aspect of the doctoral experience. To counter this lack of information about supervision as it pertains to writing, I conducted interviews with seven supervisors who were identified by their doctoral students as a good supervisor of writing. In this paper, I will discuss the practices that unified and those that distinguished these supervisors in their role as supporters of doctoral writing. The supervisors interviewed expressed similar ideas in three areas: reflexivity about academic writing; awareness of variability among doctoral writers; and acceptance of the profound challenges facing doctoral writers. In three other key areas, the supervisors expressed significant differences: attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support; commitment to writing support as professional development; and facilitation of peer mentoring. These patterns of commonality and difference suggest that good supervisory writing support may allow for significant variations while still drawing upon crucial shared precepts.

Keywords: Doctoral writers; thesis supervision; academic writing

Introduction

Thesis supervision is, of course, crucial to the success of doctoral students: graduate students are helped by pragmatic and supportive supervisors and can be hampered by supervision that is disengaged or inconsistent. The dynamic that attends all supervisory interactions is inherently complex, with a blend of evaluation, instruction, and mentoring in the fraught context of the current academic job market. Over recent years, significant attention has been paid to many dimensions of the doctoral experience, including writing and supervision (Baxter Magolda, 1998; Lee, 2008; Paré, Starke-Meyerring, & McAlpine, 2009; Cotterall, 2011; Simpson, 2012; Starke-Meyerring, Paré, Sun, & El-Bezre, 2014; Acker & Haque, 2015; Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016; Huerta, Goodson, Beigi, & Chlup, 2016; Thomson & Kamler, 2016; Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018). Despite this growing interest, the complex relationship between supervisors and doctoral writers remains relatively opaque. These interactions are essentially private, and both sides are constrained in their public reflections due to professional power dynamics and privacy concerns (Barnes, Williams, & Stassen, 2012; Vehviläinen & Löfström, 2016). As a result, a lot of anecdotal negativity is heard from both sides, without much being shared about the practices of strong supervisors. One of the more occluded elements of the relationship is how supervisors support doctoral students as novice academic writers rather than as novice disciplinary researchers.

Not having a clear understanding of the way supervisors treat writing creates uncertainty about a crucial aspect of the doctoral experience. Discussing the practices of successful supervisors could provide much needed insight into ways in which supervisors might deepen their pedagogical treatment of doctoral writing. Given the importance of writing to the overall success of doctoral students, it is crucial to seek out ways to investigate the treatment of writing in supervisory relationships (Pare, 2011; McCulloch, Kumar, van Schalkwyk, & Wisker, 2016; Stracke & Kumar, 2016). In particular, I wish to go beyond the narrative of disappointment that is so often heard in discussions of supervisory relationships and instead consider the practices of supervisors who do a good job supporting writers. In order to learn more about the practices of these supervisors, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven supervisors who were identified by their doctoral students as good supervisors of writing.

In this paper, I will discuss the practices that were shared across the group and those that reflected the divergent approaches of particular supervisors. As interest increases in the role of doctoral supervision, knowing more about the ways in which supervisors do a good job in supporting novice

writers could be helpful to other supervisors, to institutions who wish to improve supervision prac-tices, and to graduate writing specialists who work with doctoral writers.

Doctoral Writing

At this point, the story of inadequate attention being paid to doctoral writing is a familiar one. This narrative begins with the notion that doctoral writers have unique writing needs (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991; Casanave & Hubbard, 1992; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Rose & McClafferty, 2001; Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007; Micciche & Carr, 2011; Sallee, Hallett & Tierney, 2011). Two key aspects of this growing body of research are the need for a more pedagogical approach to doctoral writing (Cotterall, 2011) and the nature of the supervisory relationship as it pertains to writing (Paré, 2010).

The emphasis on pedagogy within doctoral writing instruction encourages us to move beyond the view that the problem is simply the quality of graduate writing. Rose and McClafferty (2001) point out the irony of the fact that complaints about academic writing are rarely paired with a willingness to build writing instruction into graduate programs. The interest in pedagogies of doctoral writing is also a valuable counterweight to a particular sort of attention that is often paid to the problem of doctoral writing. One of the ways in which doctoral writing is seen as worthy of attention is when it is diagnosed as an obstacle to timely degree completion; however, when writing is framed as an ad-ministrative problem for the institution, the nature of the engagement may be quite different than that envisioned by proponents of graduate writing support (Starke-Meyerring et al., 2014). That is, when writing is primarily seen as a factor in attrition or time-to-completion challenges, the planned response may not provide the quality of support that is needed. In the words of Aitchison and Lee (2006), writing "in these circumstances becomes problematic, construed as a site of deficit or disrup-tion to the smooth, 'proper' flow of punctual and effective completion of the doctorate" (p. 265) In other words, even if graduate writing becomes less institutionally neglected, the quality of the atten-tion may itself be problematic (Kamler & Thomson, 2008).

This tension surrounding the quality of the attention paid to doctoral writing has been well ex-plored by Starke-Meyerring et al. (2014) in their discussion of institutional discourses about writing at Canadian universities; their analysis shows that attention to doctoral writing can intensify without a concomitant awareness of the importance of treating thesis writing as an activity whose contours and challenges are themselves worthy of research. Treating the research writing process as a site of research can seem self-evident among those who study writing but is often outside the common

framework that treats research writing as a straightforward technical process. However, as long as writing is marginalized and seen as a personal deficiency of a particular writer, institutions may not feel obliged to teach writing as an integral aspect of the research process. A more pedagogical approach to doctoral writing can happen in many ways, but at present it often involves supporting doctoral writers themselves; such support may be offered outside of traditional academic departments through writing groups (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Maher et al., 2008) or through centralized writing support initiatives (Carter, 2011).

Even if meaningful, pedagogically rich writing support is increased at an institutional level, doctoral writers will still look to their supervisors for writing support. Supervisors possess both disciplinary expertise and significant authority over the production of an acceptable thesis; these two attributes make them the most obvious and efficient source of writing insight. However, as has been well-documented, doctoral writers often do not find the writing support that they need within the confines of the supervisory relationship (Paré, Starke-Meyerring & McAlpine, 2009; Grant & Graham, 1999). Since focusing solely on graduate writers is, from a practical perspective, an inherently limited way of tackling this problem, researchers are naturally interested in investigating initiatives supporting doctoral supervision itself (Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007). Any attempt to improve supervision can benefit from a better understanding of the supervisors' own experiences (Lee, 2008; Barnes, 2010; Halse & Malfroy, 2010). In particular, it will be valuable to consider reflections from supervisors who were selected based on their students' assessment of their efficacy as supervisors of writing.

Interviewing Supervisors

In response to this need for deeper insight into how supervisors envision their role as supporters of writing, I conducted seven semi-structured one-on-one interviews with thesis supervisors in the humanities and social sciences at a large Canadian research university; this research project was approved by my institutional Research Ethics Board. Each of these supervisors was recommended by one of their students. Graduate students who had interacted in some capacity with the graduate writing centre were asked if they would recommend their supervisor as a supervisor of academic writing. The recommendation was solicited via email with the following question: Was your supervisor particularly interested in supporting the development of academic writing skills? That is, they were asked if their supervisor was notably good at supporting them as writers as opposed to, for instance, providing them with research support or professional mentorship. As a result of this framing, the students were the ones defining what was meant by good supervision of writing. In my experience,

doctoral writers often assess the efficacy of their supervision without considering the amount of attention paid to writing. To get beyond this tendency, I wanted to be sure that the recommended supervisors had been identified as particularly helpful on the topic of writing. These supervisors came from departments of religion, comparative literature, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and education. They had different levels of experience: one was new to supervising Ph.D. students, and the others were either mid- or late-career. Once I had a list of supervisors, we arranged to meet (in person or via Skype) for 60-minute interviews. The interview questions were designed to elicit holistic reflections on how each supervisor oriented themself towards writing and towards the supervision of writing. The following six themes emerged from a thematic analysis of the resulting transcripts: (1) reflexivity about academic writing; (2) awareness of variability among doctoral writers; (3) acceptance of the profound challenges facing doctoral writers; (4) attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support; (5) commitment to writing support as professional development; and (6) facilitation of peer mentoring. These six themes were determined to be present in some form in all the interviews.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this project was the difficulty in defining what it means to say that a supervisor is good at supporting writing. I am treating these supervisors as good writing supervisors for the purposes of my study when all I know is that they were good supervisors of writing for the one person who recommended them. These interactions may also have been influenced by a range of factors outside my scope here. For instance, the student and supervisor may have shared a basic temperament; they may have been motivated by shared enthusiasm for the research topic; or they may have been bound together by methodological commonalities. And it may well be that each of these supervisors has had other doctoral students who found them less effective at supporting writing. Cognizant of this limitation, I will nonetheless explore what these supervisors—each of whom were identified by at least one student as good at supporting writing—said about how they support their doctoral students as writers. These in-depth interviews will allow us to hear reflections from supervisors on an aspect of supervision that requires more attention.

Commonalities and Differences

As I said above, the supervisors all paid attention to the six key themes, but that attention contained significant variation. For the purposes of this discussion, I have further subdivided the six categories into commonalities and differences. The transcripts showed a strong commonality in three areas: reflexivity about academic writing; awareness of variability among doctoral writers; and acceptance of the profound challenges facing doctoral writers. These commonalities left three categories in which there were significant differences: attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support; commitment to writing support as professional development; and facilitation of peer mentoring. Good supervision is, of course, contextual in that it relies on external factors such as the demands of the discipline and internal factors such as the coherence of the approach and its suitability for a particular student. Despite the essential specificity of any supervisory relationship, identifying patterns can help to define what makes for good supervision. By allowing these six categories to emerge and then breaking them down between commonalities and differences, I hope to be able to show the importance of specificity while still attempting to identify good supervisory practices.

Commonalities

In the interest of space, I will not quote from all seven interviews in each of the three common categories; however, to be treated as a commonality, the sentiment had to have emerged in each interview.

Reflexivity about academic writing. The first area of commonality, a relatively straightforward one, is that the supervisors I spoke with all showed a high degree of reflexivity about their own experiences of the writing process. It is easy to conjecture that supervisors who have learned about themselves as writers—generally by experiencing the challenges of research writing, especially during the thesis writing process—would be better able to help their students develop an identity as an academic writer.

> I struggle with writing, who doesn't I guess, but my bigger problem is not so much style […] as with marshaling my ideas. […] I use writing as a way of thinking, and so I find it agonizing because my thought isn't very clear, and so I tend to circle around things and begin arguments multiple times. […] And so I think that's a personality thing of being

tentative and unsure of myself as a scholar, and that's reflected in my thought and then in my writing.

Well, writing, I always find difficult. I've written a huge amount, but it's never easy. [...] The writing process is much more than just a technical exercise of getting it down on paper. It's really the way you wrestle with core ideas and thinking and doing research, and that's why I've always found it very difficult. I have to discipline myself when I'm writing to spend a certain number of hours every day, usually for me, the morning. I always tell students, find out when is your time when you're most alert and then set aside that time for writing because it is so demanding.

These two quotes show a sensitivity to the way that writing connects to the demanding project of coming to understand our own thinking. It is easy to imagine that a supervisor who recognizes the daily struggle of writing and revising one's thoughts will be able to provide valuable support to a doctoral student who is undertaking a major academic writing project for the first time; this finding is supported by Lee's (2008) claim that a supervisor's own experience as a doctoral student can have a significant impact on their supervisory practices.

   Awareness of variability among doctoral writers. The second area of commonality is the recognition of the inherent variability of thesis writers. None of the participants was willing to offer a general theory of all thesis writers: they all prefaced their remarks with their awareness that any support had to be seen against a backdrop of individual characters.

It's different for every single one of them.

They're all so different.

It's different for every person.

It's so different with different students depending more on where they are in their thinking and their course work; so, for each student it's pretty different.

> So I can see different approaches for this, depending on the students. […] If you think of
> students as being on some kind of spectrum, or a bell-shaped curve of 'how easy is writ-
> ing for you', the easier writing gets for them, the less effort you have to put into in being
> a drill sergeant, and getting them to produce something. And the less you have to worry
> about discouraging them from writing by giving them detailed comments. […] I don't
> think there's a one-size-fits-all way of dealing with a thesis writer.

This awareness of needing different approaches for different students made the supervisor less likely to impose an established approach—derived from departmental convention or previous students or the supervisor's earlier experience with their own supervisor—without a consideration of individual difference. One of the main complaints that I hear from doctoral writers about their supervisors involves rigidity: either that a supervisor wants to see a particular written product or that they are advocating a particular writing practice. In both cases, the doctoral writer can end up feeling an irreducible tension between their own approach and the one advocated by the supervisor. The awareness of variation suggested in these interviews could mean that these supervisors are successful due to their willingness to ground their advice in an understanding of the doctoral writer's own approach to writing.

Acceptance of the profound challenges facing doctoral writers. The third and perhaps most important area of commonality concerns the acceptance of how hard thesis writing is, intellectually and psychologically.

> I think they seem to be really paralyzed often by a sense of some audience out there, that
> they've never written for before, and that thinks they're stupid and doesn't believe that
> they know anything about the subjects that they're writing about, so they waste huge
> amounts of time and energy and pages, trying to defend themselves against that person,
> if they get around to writing. If not, they're too paralyzed to even write, because they just
> have this sense that they have to have read everything before they start or something.

> Graduate students are […] very emotionally vulnerable, because it's a very difficult time
> in all kinds of ways. You don't really have a job, you're an adult, other people have jobs
> and […] are getting ahead and you're not. You're used to thinking that you're very smart
> [and now] you're surrounded by other people that are also very good in school. It's very

> emotionally bruising and you're being supervised, even though it's becoming less and
> less bearable as you feel more and more [as if you're too old] to be supervised.
>
> It's a tough journey. You really learn to organize your life and your time in a way that
> almost no other role that I can think of requires because you're on your own in terms of
> all these decisions, how to use your time. And that's why I feel it's also a great experience
> of self-understanding.

The compassion shown here is noteworthy, especially since we will also see below a great deal of variation in the amount of support deemed appropriate. That is, we will see that these supervisors differed significantly in the way that they understood their obligations to manage the writer's productivity and emotional challenges; the striking similarity is the underlying awareness of the vulnerability of doctoral writers.

Differences

These supervisory comments suggest that these three stances were part of the way these effective supervisors supported their students; indeed, it is easy to believe that most thesis writers would welcome these attitudes from their supervisor. This holistic conception of doctoral writers can lead to supervisory support that acknowledges the unprecedented challenge of developing an identity as an academic writer; being supervised by someone who evinces an awareness of the challenges could lead to a secure foundation for developing a doctoral thesis. At this point, we can turn to the more interesting issue: the ways in which these strong supervisors differed from one another. As was mentioned above, the interview transcripts suggested notable differences in three areas: attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support; commitment to writing support as professional development; and facilitation of peer mentoring.

Attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support. The first—and most important—area of divergence concerns the stance of the supervisor vis-à-vis the thesis writer. These comments show different conceptions of the role of supervisor and notably different assessments of the best way to be a genuine help to the student. This variation demonstrates the necessity of seeing these practices in context. Abstractly, these practices could readily seem too harsh or too nurturing; integrated into the supervisor's overall system, however, they appear to be benefitting individual students.

This is a general struggle: How much direction do you give? They're grown-ups, I'm extremely busy. I tell them to manage me; I'm not going to manage them. But I do say, 'I'm not your mother. I'm not going to ask if you tied your shoes and brushed your teeth. You've got to take responsibility for this process. And if you want to avoid [that responsibility], by year 10, we kick you out.' Because I don't want to get angry at them over this. So I'm trying to manage my own expectations: I have very high expectations of the quality of their work, [but] their progress, they have to manage. It's one or the other. I can't do both. And I'd rather spend time talking about the ideas in the writing than spend time about how they manage their time.

Students need structure, right? You do need to keep in touch with them and you just have deadlines and talk to them if the deadlines aren't met. It's irresponsible to be an advisor and not insist on deadlines. [If you don't] you're saying you are indifferent, right? If you do don't make them work, then you're letting them drift the program and eventually they're going to just leave without finishing it.

It's just hard to see them struggling so much. I do think that's the hardest and sometimes you just want to give them a hug because it's clearly so much more psychological or emotional [than intellectual]. [...] I keep telling them my job is in part cheerleading, so anytime you need a cheerleader, come. [...] It seems to me you can't hear it enough, that you're not alone, that your struggle is common, and given that, there are actually resources that are commonly available because you're not the only person—we're all struggling to do the same thing.

What I've learned is that it's very difficult for a person to write when they are not feeling good about who they are and where they're at in their life. So as a thesis supervisor, I found it necessary to go outside of the traditional box and find out and be very aware of where people are at and to prioritize supporting them so that they can have a sense of well-being. And that nothing good will come [...] unless they have balance and a good sense of well-being. And as such, it's interesting to see how this plays out but again, by socializing people in a group and paying attention to how they feel, they can do this for

each other and modelling this has been an important part of bringing people into the academic fold. And I think that that's a hugely neglected portion of our academy: we don't pay attention to people's lives, to whether they're feeling ill or trying to parent and having a rough time in other ways.

The variation here is stark. These quotes run the gamut from requiring self-reliance to offering an intentionally nurturing environment; in the middle, we see an emphasis on responsible stewardship of writing deadlines as a basic element of ethical supervision. The fundamental compassion that I identified as a commonality is clearly present, but the parameters of both emotional engagement with the writer and pragmatic engagement with the writing process are widely divergent.

Commitment to writing support as professional development. One of the topics I was most interested in is what these strong supervisors were likely to think of writing support from outside the supervisory relationship. One respondent discussed their developing awareness of the potential for writing support for doctoral writers:

But I would say that it's really in the last five years or so, wherein I have been much more conscious of writing pedagogy and the resources that are available at [institution], and I have availed myself of those resources, both for my own work and for other people's work. That's just changed everything totally.

The other respondents were less likely to see writing support as the sort of professional development that would be useful for any student. These responses generally held that writing support could be good for those who need it; this attitude clearly suggests that writing support is not desirable for all and may even be seen as a waste of time for those without significant weaknesses in their writing.

I generally respond to problems in writing rather than recommending [writing support] as kind of an ongoing professional skills development. I hadn't thought about that, but I think that would probably be a fair statement: I respond to problems rather than encouraging everyone to get this kind of help.

So for the students who write well and who have their heads screwed on straight, and then they say I'm going to take some writing courses. Sometimes I find myself being like,

'Why would you do that? You're already okay. Why don't you just go do those interviews you need to be doing? Or something?' But I do [...] make them all very much aware of the writing center.

Usually PhD students don't have the kind of problems where I think they definitely need writing assistance beyond the kind of help that I can provide for them. So far I haven't had one that has been in that kind of need.

Overall, the notion that doctoral writers ought to have routine access to writing support was not predominant here. Interestingly, these supervisors were all recommended by doctoral writers who had taken advantage of centralized writing support, even if their supervisors had some reservation about writing support as a routine element of graduate professional development.

Facilitation of peer mentoring. The third area of divergence concerns the way peer mentoring was viewed. While it was clear that everyone was happy to share the burden of supervision, only some were actually involved in the creation or maintenance of peer communities.

So, one of the things that I always say to my students is that I will not read something that has not been read by their peers, that they have to have a writing group, that they have to have commitments to their writing group. [...] I'm also in a writing group, so I kind of model it for them and say, 'I'm in a writing group. This is what we do, so you need to do the same thing'.

The first thing I tell them is they have to form groups of support among their colleagues: chapter writing groups or something where they're accountable. [...] I think I'd say that all students must find peer support. [Getting writing support] is part of professional development. I talk about it even when I meet incoming graduate students in the department. You have to cultivate your colleagues as peers, as fellow scholars right away. Because it's a part of how we become conversant in our field and outside our field. So it's a huge part of what being a scholar is. [...] I say this to undergraduates all the way up to doctoral students, that this is just part of being a scholar.

So I understand the thesis journey as being one that students need to be socialized into and that writing is just one component but the writing can't occur unless there has been a great deal of dialogue and engagement around core issues, and that that dialogue and engagement is not only with me as a supervisor but very much with their peer group. So my process is to have students who I know I will be supervising join a thesis group from the very beginning. Even before they have completed their coursework and are actually thinking about a topic, they're already a part of a community and they're seeing and engaging with others at different stages of the journey.

I have a very active thesis group, and the students help each other tremendously. [...] I have honestly seen this group just be a wonderful support. [...] It's a flow-in and flow-out group. Nobody has an obligation to be there, some people just drop in a couple of times to get help when they need it, other people feel this is their real support group, so they'll be there every time. [...] Students don't have to be my supervisees, so quite a number of them I may just be their committee member and there are a few cases where I'm not even on the committee. We don't have any requirements; they don't have to have any particular connection to me.

Whenever students are hitting various milestones, then we get together as a group, all my Master and Ph.D. students, and then they'll give a presentation, and then we'll go through it, and talk about what needs to be improved. [...] I have the newest people comment first, and usually they sort of see the big, obvious issues, and then we work our way up until my most senior, the PhD student who's most ready to graduate, they comment, and then finally I comment, so then everybody gets a chance to express what they think needs to be improved upon, and then they can see what the next level and the next level and the next level is. [...] When I'm looking to take people in for grad school, I try to have people in every stage, so that the most advanced can mentor the newest ones, and everybody can learn from everybody else.

There is a shared sense of the value of peer support and community but a divergence in responsibility and involvement. It is obviously different to stipulate that peer review must happen before the su-

pervisor will get involved than it is to form a writing community, particularly one which the supervisor plays an active role. The former may teach a valuable lesson about getting feedback on writing and about broadening the circle of support during doctoral writing, but the latter may do much more to demonstrate how to create a writing community and to validate the importance of treating writing as a social act.

Conclusion

Overall, these interviews showed that the strong supervisors were united in some aspects of supervision and divergent in others. The collection of commonalities suggests that these supervisors may be effective supervisors of writing because they were thoughtful about writing: about their own writing challenges; about the profound challenges facing doctoral writers; and about wide divergence of writing practices among doctoral writers. Put more broadly, these commonalities suggest that strong supervisors may recognize the complex process of academic identity formation that accompanies thesis writing (Cameron, Nairn, & Higgins, 2009; Hall & Burns, 2009; Mewburn, 2011). While the number of interviews may not support such a strong conclusion, this finding is consistent with what we know about good writing support in general. The collection of differences, on the other hand, suggests that good writing supervision may be highly contextual. With the core commonalities in place, a supervisor can remain effective while demonstrating a great deal of variety in thinking about aspects of writing supervision: attitudes towards the appropriate degree of supervisory support; commitment to writing support as professional development; and facilitation of peer mentoring. While some of the efficacy of these seven supervisors may, of course, be explained by a natural interpersonal fit or a shared affinity for the topic, it is also possible to look for a broader explanation. I am suggesting that beneficial supervisory practices may be best understood within the context of a particular supervisory style. That is, the supervisor who identifies the value of being tough on students and the supervisor who identifies the value of providing more support are each making those choices in a broader context. The decision about how supportive and accommodating to be is not made in a vacuum: each supervisory decision is balanced with others. In such a circumstance, students may not need a set amount of personal support, for instance, as long as the supervisor has an overall approach that is supportive of writing.

The value of this conclusion is that it suggests a core area for development—reflexivity about the writing process—without needing to touch upon all areas of supervisory style. A supervisor's temperament and pedagogical commitments are likely to be fairly fixed and, more importantly, beyond

the purview of institutional support for supervisors. It may be useful to be able to say to graduate faculty that they can be strong supervisors of writing while remaining true to their own pedagogical habits, as long as they are willing to be reflective about writing, generous about the challenging nature of graduate writing, and cognizant of the way that different students will need different sorts of support. Understanding variety in this instance will mean grasping that a thesis writer may need different support from that which the supervisor themselves received and different from that which other supervisees may have needed, but not fundamentally different from what the supervisor is able to provide. Supervision is a form of teaching and, as such, requires supervisors to act in a manner consonant with their own pedagogical instincts. Significant variation among supervisory styles is inevitable, but reflexivity about writing can still be seen as fundamental to strong supervision. This insight could potentially be beneficial to supervisors, institutions, and graduate writing specialists. Supervisors who wish to improve their supervision of doctoral writers could be heartened to consider an area for development that nonetheless leaves core aspects of their pedagogical practices intact. Institutions who wish to improve their support of doctoral supervisors could be guided by the notion that reflexivity about writing and its challenges should be a crucial focal point. Lastly, graduate writing specialists could deepen their support of doctoral writers—whether or not those writers have sufficient supervisory writing support—by acknowledging the importance of reflexivity about writing for anyone who seeks to nurture someone else's development as an academic writer.

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