She Pushed Me, and I Flew:
A Duoethnographical Story From Supervisors in Flight

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Abstract: Sometimes the different versions of a story should not be reduced to a single "truth," although it is often the role of researchers to do just that. Duoethnography is a methodology that allows multiple views of the same event(s) to be examined, each from within its own context, without the expectation of a final resolution.

In this article we use a duoethnographical approach to explore the supervisor-doctoral student dynamic that occurred during the production of a creative thesis from within a science-focused faculty. We experiment with the idea that duoethnography can assist us to negotiate the power relations of pedagogy in telling the story of our relationship, without the need to privilege one voice over another.

The article has a dual focus: to inform supervision practices, and to show how we went about the process of "doing" duoethnography. It is (re)presented as a series of conversations, (re)constituted from many messy interactions that took place over a period of three months in 2012.

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1. Making a Start

"Do you realize it's been over 4 years since I submitted my PhD for examination?"

Jacquie squints uncertainly at her computer monitor as Mary's image alternately freezes and moves. The oral conversation moves smoothly although the visual stutters. These women have a history together, spanning almost a decade.

"I *finally* understand why you were congratulated on your supervision during my oral viva." [1]

Both women pause, remembering the events of that day. Jacquie's doctoral thesis had received glowing reports from her examiners, and the oral examination had been a process of affirmation for her rigorous yet creative work. Jacquie sighs as she remembers her shock when the examiners had, at the conclusion of the process, turned to Mary and congratulated her on the thesis.

Mary laughs. "I know you've never really understood the dynamics of that comment. What's changed?" [2]

Jacquie pauses, gathering her thoughts. "I'm feeling a little stressed, and quite afraid! I've just supervised a nurse who has submitted a creative thesis for her Master of Nursing degree. It's been a difficult process for us both, and I'm left feeling uncertain about the quality of my supervision. I'm also more than a little bit worried about whether I've found examiners who can understand what she's achieved in her thesis."

Mary doesn't speak, but nods understandingly and waits for Jacquie to continue.

"I keep thinking about our process when you supervised me. I wondered, Mary, whether you would consider exploring what happened for us during that time, and theorizing it by trying a new research approach with me?" [3]

"Hmm, looking at supervision would be a great project." Mary nods approvingly, "The events and experiences around your thesis are something I often think about, too. What kind of research approach did you have in mind?" [4]

Jacquie lightly touches the keyboard, then listens to the electronic "ping" indicating an e-mail sent. "I've just sent you an e-mail about an approach called 'duoethnography'. Have a look and see what you think. My thoughts are that it's a way of examining what happened for us, but honoring each individual voice and not forcing either of us into accepting a particular view. I've written a short piece about it." [5]

"I've got it." Jacquie's image freezes on Mary's machine in that moment. "You've disappeared from my screen," she says. "Look, this connection is impossible. I'll read what you've sent, and e-mail you later tonight. It's an interesting idea! I'm signing off now—but you have a great day, OK? Talk later!"

At her desk in Darwin, Australia, Mary clicks her cursor over the newly arrived e-mail, and settles to read. [6]

2. Duoethnography

Hi Mary

This is what I've learned so far, along with some thoughts about how we could engage with the methodology and what we might achieve.

Duoethnography is a collaborative research approach that is grounded in self-interrogation, dialogue, and difference. In their text of "first generation duoethnographies," Joe NORRIS and Richard SAWYER (2012, p.35) describe eight key tenets which I've paraphrased here: *currere* (Latin, meaning "to run the course") or self-interrogation, in which one's life is viewed as a curriculum; polyvocal and dialogic, with the voices of the researchers resting in juxtaposition; disruption of the metanarrative of self through the use of juxtaposition; the articulation (but not resolution) of differences in the stories; reconceptualization of

the past through inviting the Other into the stories; universal truths are not sought; the stories invite further stories from the researchers and audiences, so theory and practice become synergistic; the ethic of trust as essential to disclosure and rigor. [7]

My understanding of this, in relation to our project, is that we could try e-mail and skype as means to share our stories of supervision—yours as supervisor and mine as student—and to challenge each other to examine what was happening for us individually during that period. From my perspective, I think I'm still trying to process some of the changes that happened during my doctoral journey so I can apply them to what I'm doing in my current work as a supervisor. I'm especially interested in opening my story up to create spaces for new understanding from the literature, from other students and supervisors, and from you. I considered doing this as an autoethnography, but want to focus on the practice of academic supervision as a whole concept for supervisors and supervisees in the context of developing an academic practice, rather than revisiting my student experience. Since we will be so integral to the topic, teasing that out will be a challenge! What are the differences between a dialogic autoethnography using two researchers, and a duoethnography?

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Cheers

Jacquie [8]

* * *

Hello Jacquie

This sounds like a very exciting way forward. I'm struck by the potential of opening up our supervision practice by revisiting your doctoral project. I agree with Laurel RICHARDSON's (1997) notion that writing about a topic helps with the understanding, and even shapes understanding sometimes.

In answer to your question about autoethnography and duoethnography, I suspect that the difference is not only in the focus of the research—which is supervision, but also in the process, which invites the Other to "liberate the self from the self" (NORRIS & SAWYER, 2012, p.18). If you were to take an autoethnographical stance and examine your own experiences that way, you would be prioritizing your own story and emotion and then interpreting the meanings that are socially assigned to your narrative (ELLIS, 2004; KIDD, 2009). Our project uses our narratives as lens to understand and expand on our research topic.

I like the idea of allowing both of our narratives to stand, and not aiming to bring them together to create just one story. Let's get started!

Cheers

M [9]

3. Mary: "Master and Slave"

Mary sips her cup of tea, eyeing Jacquie thoughtfully over the brim. They have met in a café in the days leading up to a conference where they plan to present their emerging duoethnography. "I've done quite a lot of reflecting on our process since we talked last. I'm especially intrigued by your new experiences as supervisor and how they seem to be so similar to mine when I supervised your thesis." [10]

At Jacquie's encouraging nod, Mary continues. "I know that the congratulatory comment at your oral examination has really bugged you." She raises a hand to forestall Jacquie's interruption, and hurries on. "The conversation that happened around that time and also after the examination was over was focused on your examiners recognizing that I had taken a risk when I supported your creative thesis. Prior to that comment, I was of course aware that your use of fiction and poetry in your data analysis was contrary to the usual practice in our faculty. I had some moments of quite intense discomfort about the way your thesis was developing, and on one level I conceptualized that discomfort as risk taking. These conversations, though, have prompted me to think further about what risk means in supervision and how, as supervisors, we can work with it or refuse it." [11]

Jacquie waits a moment, checking that Mary has finished talking. Leaning forward, she says: "The idea of supervision as a risky endeavor seems important to understand. Although I have supervised several Masters students, it's still a concept I struggle with. Did you go into our relationship with a sense of risk?" [12]

Shaking her head, Mary says: "No, not really. You have to understand, though, that there's always risk at the beginning of a doctorate. In New Zealand the doctoral thesis is a stand-alone piece of research that contributes new knowledge in terms of methodology, findings, or both. It takes a minimum of three years to achieve, often considerably more than that. When I first meet a student I want to establish if they have an understanding of what's involved in doing a thesis, the academic ability, the perseverance, and the ability to think independently. I check academic transcripts and discuss their research ideas. I also want to know about their previous research experience, whether they've done any research projects and how they experienced supervision in those projects. This is also the time I explore with them their knowledge and preferences about methodological approaches. If they're fixed on an approach that's outside of my expertise, I suggest that they look elsewhere for a supervisor." [13]

"So you have worked out a way to assess the capability and 'fit' of a potential PhD candidate with the university and your own supervision style?" Jacquie asks. [14]

Mary considers this. "No, it's not so much about style; it's about looking at students in terms of their potential to complete a PhD in this university. I have to consider the risk to the university as well as to the supervisor and the student. As a supervisor, I have to consider my research interests, and also my professional credibility. Probably more important than anything, though, is that I want the

student to have the best possible chance to successfully complete their study. I
don't want them to struggle with something that they should never have started
on, I don't want them to be matched with the wrong supervisor, and I certainly
don't want them to waste three or four years of their lives and money on fruitless
study. I've found that my process sets a good baseline for the supervisory
relationship, but it gets cemented in those first few months when the full proposal
gets written."

Laughing ruefully, Mary remarks: "You know, in the beginning we were working
together on a fairly orthodox qualitative thesis! I do expect that a thesis will evolve
throughout the whole doctoral experience, as the student becomes more
knowledgeable and more confident. The changes that happened in your project
were out of the ordinary, though." [15]

"I guess I always viewed you as the expert," Jacquie says thoughtfully. "It made
me feel safe to know that while I pushed the boundaries, you held them. What
was it like for you when I pushed at you?" [16]

Mary extracts a file from her bag, pushing it across the table. "At the time I
experienced feelings of frustration, worry, and then a lot of pleasure when you
managed to come through the process as successfully as you did. Not that I
wasn't confident as we went along, but there were definite times when I felt
concerned for you.

These are some papers written by Barbara GRANT, a colleague who has
researched the process of doctoral supervision. I've used her body of work,
including a paper on the "master and slave dynamic" (2008) as a lens to look at
what was happening for me at that time. I made some notes about it. I'll read
them, shall I?" [17]

At Jacquie's nod, Mary extracts a yellow notepad from the file and reads:

> "I realize it's not fashionable at the moment to discuss doctoral supervision from the
> perspective of being the teacher, the expert, or the master. Nonetheless, the
> academy positions me pedagogically and ethically as the expert who 'teaches' and
> the student as the enactor of my teaching (GRANT, 2003). This is in contrast to the
> relatively recent move in the literature towards viewing supervisors as mentors and
> supervision as a collegial activity (MANATHUNGA, 2007), which is an appealing
> position for women in the academy. The notion of the more experienced academic
> supporting and guiding a junior colleague towards doctoral completion would seem to
> parallel the desire for more egalitarian work practices, and appears in GRANT's work
> as 'gendered, classed, ethnically situated ... these social positionings play out in
> supervision' (2005, p.344). Perhaps it is a feature of the strongly scientific drive of a
> medical faculty that supervisors here are still held to be experts and teachers.
> Regardless of the origin, these competing discourses render supervision a tense
> balancing act between achieving a viable product that demonstrates success for the
> student, the supervisor, and the university, and supporting a real person through
> some of the most mind-blowing changes they will ever voluntarily experience.

I find it reassuring and perplexing that Barbara GRANT (2003) suggests that
supervision is more chaotic, and actually less effective than we tend to believe." [18]

Mary places her notebook carefully on the table and stares down at it,
meditatively. "When we started this project, I felt very certain that I maintained the
'master' role, and that I still do in all my supervisory relationships. But then as I
reflected on how the thesis developed, I began to wonder if that descriptor
worked for me. I certainly put a lot of effort into supporting you, providing helpful
feedback that wouldn't destabilize you but would prompt more critical thinking and
writing." [19]

Jacquie interrupts, "Did you know that sometimes after supervision I'd cry all the
way home?"

Mary is startled, concern in her eyes. "No, I had no idea. Was I so hard on you?
No, I don't think I was," she answers her own question.

Waving off the interruption, Jacquie says, "Sorry I interrupted you. I'll come to
that point when it's my turn." She laughs, "Keep going, please!" [20]

"OK," Mary says doubtfully. "Well, I guess that illustrates my point. I tried to be
supportive, but when it came down to pushing you to go the extra distance, then I
chose to be the expert. I chose not to allow you to deliver less than I knew you
were capable of. That probably defines my supervision practice in a much more
honest and real way than theories about mentoring and being collegial. In fact, at
that point in a student's academic career, we're not colleagues in the truest sense
of the word. That doesn't mean I don't care about what happens to you, or about
what's going on in your life. It means that you've chosen me to do a job for and
with you, the university has chosen me to do this job, and I'm going to do it to the
best of my ability. So now, I'm back to my original position of recognizing the
master and slave dynamic, but from a slightly different perspective. I'm thinking of
that kind of relationship as a safety position for you, like a solid baseline of
expectations from which I can expect you to fly." [21]

"That idea works for me," Jacquie nods. "The particular times I relied on that
dynamic were around the data analysis." She laughs again: "The conversations
around my decision not to analyze my narrative data were particularly difficult! But
I held in my head that if I was going to create a new way of analyzing sensitive
topics (KIDD & FINLAYSON, 2009), then if I could get your approval then the
examiners' acquiescence would be a walk in the park!" [22]

Both women laugh, the shared memory echoing across the years. The
conversation shifts to everyday topics as they gather up their handbags and
papers, preparing to walk to the conference venue. [23]

4. Jacquie: "Becoming"

It's late in the evening. Jacquie and Mary are again attempting a virtual conversation. This time, both images are stable and the connection appears strong. Jacquie is at her home, while Mary, in her earlier time zone, has stayed late in her office. [24]

"The presentation last month went well, I think," Mary begins, "although there are always areas for improvement. I feel more confident with our methodology now that we've presented it to our peers. We need to explain more about duoethnography in the future, and give more information about how we worked with it. It was also interesting that although your thesis wasn't the subject of the research, the majority of the audience questions related to your doctorate! Perhaps you need to explain it a little?" [25]

Jacquie smiles, "Yes, it might resolve unanswered questions. That was an audience response I wasn't expecting. It's never easy to summarize a whole PhD in a short time, but I came up with a précis. I'll read it to you:"

> "My doctoral research explored the perspectives of nurses who have themselves experienced mental illness (KIDD, 2008). I used an autoethnographical approach to describe and examine my own experience as a nurse who has experience of a mental illness, and also collected the stories of 18 other nurses. The research tapped into some very sensitive issues of distress and loss of identity during the data collection, which led me to feel that I could not and should not deconstruct the nurses' stories for my own gain. In response to that feeling, I drew on FRANK's (2002) notion of using my own stories and poems to interpret the nurses' stories, looking for emotions and identifying motifs that moved among the stories (KIDD & FINLAYSON, 2009)." [26]

"As I recall it, the research seemed fairly straightforward to start with, but once the data started to come in, things shifted for you," Mary comments. "I could see that you were beginning to struggle with the sheer emotionality of the stories." [27]

"Oh, yes," Jacquie agrees. "Conducting the research from home meant that there was no distance between all aspects of my life and the pain that seemed to be pouring in from nurses who were responding to my call for participants. I had almost 40 phone calls!

I knew intellectually that the research was important, but I began to seriously doubt the ethics—no, it was more like doubting the morality—of looking for something in the nurses' stories that they hadn't overtly shared with me. At that point we were having intense discussions about the difference between reifying the stories and respecting them." [28]

"Have you changed your thinking about that time, now that it's behind you?" Mary asks.

"No, I haven't changed my mind at all," Jacquie replies with a smile. "I'm actually glad that I went through that process of identifying the parts of the research that didn't sit well with me, because it's shaped the kind of researcher and supervisor I've become: Emotionality in research is a very strong feature of autoethnography (ELLIS, 1997), and I was also reassured by Ruth BEHAR's assertion that research 'that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing' (1996, p.177). So I had a level of validation from the literature, which was helpful." [29]

"But it was more than that for you ..." Mary prompts.

"Yes, I had this other layer of emotionality happening for me, and that's the area that has moved me most as a researcher and supervisor. I started to connect deeply with the culture and ethnicity from my grandmother's side of the family: being Māori. I have a mixed heritage of French, Irish and Māori ancestry that have all become enmeshed in what I conceptualized as a very neutral 'New Zealander' identity. As a young woman I had strong feelings of connection to my Māori side, but for reasons I didn't (couldn't?) articulate at that stage, I kept those feelings to myself. Looking back now, of course, I can clearly see the impact of racism in New Zealand, as well as the far-reaching consequences of colonization (JACKSON, 1992). It wasn't until I was in a position of having great power over the stories of these vulnerable nurses that I was confronted with the fact that if I chose to conform to the conventions of the academy, I would be contributing to the oppression and *Othering* of these women because of their mental health issues. [30]

I have been reading about the ways ethnicity, culture, ancestry, race and indigeneity have been constructed. They have been the subjects of national and international interest for decades, from social, political and biological perspectives (CALLISTER & DIDHAM, 2009; KUKUTAI & DIDHAM, 2009; MERLAN, 2009; SISSONS, 2005; WILSON, 2004). Official ethnicity in New Zealand has historically been based on biology and the caste system of determining race, but now uses a more contemporary approach that assumes ethnicity is not static and predetermined, but is socially constructed and can change over time and context (CORMACK, 2010; KUKUTAI & DIDHAM, 2009). Enculturation by exposure to genealogical knowledge, land and language is explicit in the literature about having a Māori identity (EDWARDS, 2009; MOEKE-MAXWELL, 2006; NIKORA, 1995). Skin color, facial features and behavior are no longer considered to be indicative of ethnicity in New Zealand, but are still frequently used as indicators of ethnicity by observers (CALLISTER, 2008). This is consistent with recent research examining social recognition and racism in the US (KRIEGER et al., 2011) and earlier studies in which some fair-skinned Māori women describe being externally judged as being 'not real Māori' by virtue of their appearance (BEVAN, 2000; GIBSON, 1999). [31]

It seems to me that it would be very difficult for anyone without stereotypically Māori features and/or a strong connection to Māori tribal networks to assert a Māori identity. When combined with the poor health outcomes and inequitable levels of social deprivation experienced by Māori, one must ask why anyone

would choose to be Māori when they could easily pass as *Pakeha* (non-Māori)? There's no easy answer to this," Jacquie continues. She feels a level of anxiety in her body as her heart rate increases and her muscles tense. "I don't have the knowledge of language and land, but I do have an understanding of my genealogy. I have white skin, and have definitely had the experience of being judged as 'not real Māori'—and in some ways I agree with my critics. Yet this sense of belonging, and the need to act on it, won't go away. And it is affecting everything I do. When I look at my doctoral journey through this lens, I can see what a life-changing process it really was. In essence, I became a whole different person. That explains, to some extent, why I cried after our supervision sessions. I felt that I was being torn apart, and I had no words to articulate what was happening or any clues about how to resolve it." [32]

Mary is silent for a moment, then reflects softly: "It was difficult to watch you go through the turmoil of that time. I still don't fully understand what happened, but I can see from your current work with Māori and vulnerable populations that it was profound. As your supervisor, all I could do was to keep encouraging you to read, think and write about it!" [33]

"Have I ever thanked you for that?" Jacquie asks with a slightly tremulous smile. "I'm sure that was a lot more than you signed on for in the beginning. And now, in my own supervision practice, I've been through a similar experience with a student who needed to defy conventions. I'm drawing on the skills you demonstrated, as well as my experience with researcher-supervisor-university tensions. The student is a mature woman who is due to retire within a few years," she continues. "Finishing her Masters thesis is a life goal for her, so she's more interested in the inner integrity of her work than in being externally applauded for her achievement. That has meant that her goals have sometimes been at odds with my goals as her supervisor, and with my professional need to have her succeed. Like you, I've found myself encouraging her to read widely, reflect on what she's learning, and write about it. Also like you, I have confidence in her ability but anxieties about how to negotiate the demands of her need for authenticity, my need to support her to succeed, and the university's need for timely completion and a passing grade." [34]

Jacquie leans forward, looking intently at Mary as she speaks, "The risks we take as supervisors stay relatively personal throughout the supervision process, while we work intensely with the student and perhaps with co-supervisors. But then we have to take that work and expose it to the critical scrutiny of examiners who only see the end product of our efforts. But it is in the taking of risks that we discover our own capacity to grow as academics, supervisors, and indeed as people. Remember, that's how we came to use the metaphor of flight to illustrate our individual growth as supervisors."

> "'Come to the edge.'
>
> 'We can't. We're afraid.'
>
> 'Come to the edge.'
>
> 'We can't. We will fall!'
>
> 'Come to the edge.'
>
> And they came.
>
> And he pushed them.
>
> And they flew" (LOGUE, 1969, pp.65-66) [35]

Mary nods, agreeing with her colleague. "Right now, I think you're right. I'd like to take some time to reflect on this, though. We have more work to do, and another presentation to give. The voices of our audiences might come into our process and help us see other dimensions!" The conversation shifts again to a less intense level as they prepare to sign off and resume their everyday lives. [36]

5. (In)Conclusions

How do we end a conversation that has no end? How do we provide a tidy finish using a methodology that eschews tidiness? Traditional writing would have us synthesizing our voices into a universal truth, which is antithetical to the tenets of duoethnography. We do not have any "truth" to assert as a fitting conclusion to our labor. We do, however, have some aspects of our stories that could provide guidance for doctoral supervisors, advisors and students. For example, we can expect and even welcome the struggle experienced by the student and the supervisor to give birth to a thesis that creates new knowledge. Without the struggle, Jacquie's thesis may have been merely pedestrian. Without the struggle, Mary might have accepted work that was not rigorous or well crafted. Further, the stories have illuminated our understanding that supervision is a risky enterprise for both parties. Recognizing and working with risk has been an area of developing expertise for Mary throughout her supervision career and for Jacquie as a new supervisor. [37]

The duoethnographic ideal of juxtaposition and maintaining the integrity of each story, whilst also using each other's experiences to challenge and expand our own understanding was problematic for us. The process of creating this article troubled the academic tradition of presenting a single truth, and highlighted the differences in our academic status. The two dozen researchers contributing to Joe NORRIS, Richard SAWYER and Darren LUND's book (2012) are by no means homogenous, but none of them have come into their duoethnographies with such an interpersonal power imbalance within the researcher and topic relationships. This project has blurred the boundaries between the researcher and the researched because the relationship between us forms a part of the exploration of doctoral supervision. In this sense, we have entered into the power relations (spoken and unspoken) in the supervision relationship to explore them from our new position as colleagues and friends. Nothing can erase the power of the supervisor over the student, or even the senior colleague and mentor over the

junior colleague and mentee, yet we have attempted to transcend the power dynamic and position ourselves as academics with individual dynamic, questioning and evolving supervision practice. That we are at different levels of comfort, expertise and experience in our practice is perhaps less important than the fact of its ever-changing nature. [38]

Our work on this article has included a dual focus; to inform supervision practices, and to show how we went about the process of "doing" duoethnography. However, the process of duoethnography has been streamlined and simplified in this (re)presentation. In fact our process was conducted among phone calls, visits and e-mails that had purposes far removed from research. Our understandings have emerged from a context of sharing stories about family (especially grandchildren), work frustrations and triumphs, shared meals, laughter, weather reports from our respective countries, and Christmas holidays. The messiness of life has distracted us, sent us on fruitful and fruitless detours, and on the way has enriched the research. Our project has been a constant thread weaving among our interactions, and it is only in the writing that the pattern has been drawn to the surface so it can appear with clean lines as though it is incontrovertible and static. The power of duoethnography is that our stories can give rise to other stories, providing a dynamic and practical challenge to the "truth" of the written word. [39]

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