

Developing democratic doctoral supervisory practices: experiences of using arts-based and embodied activities to support professional learning

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Research Domains

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Abstract

Supervision is pivotal to doctoral students' experiences, yet opportunities for doctoral supervisor development remain limited. This paper reports on preliminary findings from a case, that sits within a cross-national project on education for democracy, AECED. The case explores the development of democratic supervisory practices through arts-based and embodied activities and uses a participatory action research approach. Doctoral supervisors engaged with the project's activating resources to design, trial and evaluate an aesthetic and embodied activity to support their reflection and learning around an aspect of doctoral supervision.

The paper will share learnings from the case, and report on the areas of practice explored and their connection with the principles of democracy-as-becoming; the arts-based and embodied activities employed and their contributions to professional learning regarding democratic doctoral pedagogy; and the process of engaging in participatory research. Implications for doctoral supervisors will be shared, alongside those for the wider AECED project.

Full paper

This paper introduces an approach to developing democratic doctoral supervisory practices that trials arts-based and embodied activities to support professional learning and development through a participatory action research approach (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). The focus on democratic doctoral pedagogies recognises calls to pay more attention to democratic education in doctoral pedagogy (see Kandiko Howson, Kinchin & Gravett, 2022), and also the pivotal role that supervisors play in doctoral students' experiences (e.g., see Halse, 2011). While there is increasing interest and investment in doctoral supervisor development, it is still a relatively under-developed area (Huet & Casanova, 2022), particularly, we would argue, in terms of the development of more relational, emotional and embodied aspects of supervision, as opposed to those that are more procedural and regulatory. This case reported here, with its focus on doctoral supervision, sits within a wider project that is concerned with education for democracy.

AECED is a three-year project funded by Horizon Europe and UKRI which aims to enhance and transform the role of aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy (full title: Transforming Education for Democracy through Aesthetic and Embodied Learning, Responsive Pedagogy and Democracy-as-

becoming). The project involves six European partners - Finland (coordinator); Croatia; Germany; Latvia; Portugal; and UK - and covers all phases of education: early years and primary; secondary; higher education; and professional and adult learning.

The project is built on the premise that insufficient attention is given in current discourses and frameworks concerning education for democracy to people's feelings, emotions, and senses; thus pedagogical approaches, that employ aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy, are needed. Drawing on understandings of a holistic approach to democracy (Woods, 2021: pp.331-332), the work of the project is informed by a concept of democracy-as-becoming, underpinned by democratic values to be nurtured in education, and using arts-based and embodied approaches and responsive pedagogies. The project is designing an innovative prototype pedagogical Framework and associated Guides for Practice, prototypes of which are being tested in multi-case action research trials in partners' respective countries across different educational phases. Results of the trialling will be the basis for refining and further developing the framework and guides for launch and dissemination and exploitation.

This presentation will share the preliminary findings of one of the two UK cases. The case focuses on the professional learning of doctoral supervisors and aims to support the development of more democratic supervisory relationships and more democratic doctoral pedagogy. The case introduces creative ideas around pedagogy for learning and associated resources (including the prototype Framework and Guide) to support reflection and professional learning through arts-based and embodied approaches. It involves differently constituted groups of supervisors working through stages of participatory action research, which comprise introduction to the project; familiarisation with the Framework and the Guide to Practice, as activating resources that will support the creation of innovative arts-based and embodied pedagogies; facilitation of the planning of the arts-based and embodied professional learning activity based on participant priorities and focus; trialling the activity; and then a final evaluation session, which uses arts-based and embodied data collection methods (Culshaw, 2023), to gain understanding of the process to support further development. The research began in May 2024 and will be completed by the autumn of 2024.

The presentation will share preliminary findings from the trialling being undertaken in the case. The discussion will focus on:

- The areas of supervisory practice that the supervisor participants chose to explore, and how those areas interconnect with the principles of democracy-as-becoming;
- The arts-based and embodied activities that the supervisory groups designed into their professional learning opportunity, and the extent to which their use fostered reflection on practice, professional learning, more democratic supervisory relationships and more democratic doctoral pedagogy;
- The process of engaging in this kind of research, exploring positionality and the blurring of the researcher and participant role in the different cycles.

The preliminary findings will be discussed in light of existing approaches to supervisor development and professional learning, to doctoral pedagogy and supervisory relationships, and to wider discussions about education for democracy. Implications for supervisor development and those who support their professional learning will be shared, along with implications for the development of the AECED Pedagogical Framework, Guides for Practice, and associated resources that arise from this specific case.

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