



CROSS-CULTURAL SUPERVISION

Supervisor and Coordinator Perspectives

I think there are cultural expectations, what supervision actually means varies from culture to culture. I often find that international students coming to an Australian university might have a different cultural understanding of what the role of a supervisor is. Students often come in thinking I might have to meet with my supervisor every day and their supervisor might have to say, "Well, actually no. Maybe it's once a week once a fortnight." International students' understandings of plagiarism can be extraordinarily different from what constitutes plagiarism in western societies ... I've seen a few students who've just outright plagiarised articles, who've literally copy and paste some articles into their research and their supervisors said, "You can't do this." But then the student doesn't understand actually what they've actually done is wrong because they've grown up in a academic system which copying and pasting is – I guess a little lenient than it is here. Sometimes there can also be misunderstandings due to English language skills, sometimes on the part of the supervisor whose first language isn't English and sometimes on the part of the student whose first language isn't English. And likewise, if you have student and supervisor neither of whom the first language is English.

Cross-cultural issues may also arise for Indigenous supervisors and students. There are so few Indigenous people trained in research across Australia, there's always going to be, you know, greater demand for Indigenous supervisors than there is supply. I think a lot of students would ideally like to have at least one Indigenous person as a supervisor. And some students are really quite strong about that. Others will say, "Well, no. I'm okay. I can cope if I don't have an Indigenous person as a supervisor." But then, what that person might do is actually find an Indigenous person to mentor them. So not be on the panel but to offer them just some mentoring. Or they might already have a good network of Indigenous people that can support them. Without an Indigenous supervisor, there's the possibility a student may tend to slide back into a dependency role. And often, non-





Indigenous supervisors don't even realise that that's what they're doing; that they're actually perpetuating this paternal relationship. And it's paternal not just in the sense of managing the logistical stages of going through a research program, but it's also paternal in terms of the intellectual development that's happening within that relationship. However, there can also be difficulties if the Indigenous supervisor is seen to have a role as a cultural broker only.

