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Researching Supervision: An Interview with LDJ 4 editors, Sabine Little and Michelle Golledge



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The Learner Development Journal is the Learner Development SIG's annual online publication of research and writing on special themes relating to learner development. The fourth issue of the journal, which deals with supervision in multicultural/multilingual contexts, is due to be published this autumn under the editorship of Sabine Little and Michelle Golledge, and with articles by Theron Muller and Tracy-Ann Tsuruoka, Dai O'Brien and Vicky Crawley, Jim Ronald and Stachus Peter Tu, David Hyatt and Sally Hayes, and Ken Ikeda. Alison Stewart, a member of the journal's steering group, talks to Sabine and Michelle about their collaboration on the forthcoming issue.

Alison: Sabine and Michelle, as the editors of Issue 4 of *The Learner Development Journal*, I wonder if I could start by asking you about your theme, "Supervision in Multicultural/Multilingual Contexts". Could you tell us how you came up with your proposal for this issue? Am I right in thinking that you yourselves are in a supervisor-supervisee relationship?

Sabine: Michelle and I "met" on the iPGCE, an international Postgraduate in Education programme, where she was a student, and I am programme director. We both have an interest in international teaching contexts, which is obviously a core focus of the programme. During the year, I came across a call for papers for London Review of Education, on global education. It seemed a great opportunity to write about the iPGCE, but I felt that such a paper should not come from the director alone--instead, I wanted to pursue a more collaborative approach, where the students, who are teachers themselves, would be actively involved as both co-researchers and co-authors. I had previously edited a book on student-staff partnerships in higher education, where each chapter was co-authored by staff and students, and felt that such publications were still underrepresented. I asked the students on the programme whether anybody would be interested, and four students, including Michelle, came forward. Together, we worked on the paper, and I think it is fair to say that we all gained from the experience, as a way to extend the "standard" supervisor/supervisee relationship, especially since our little author team brought together experiences from multiple nationalities, languages, countries, and cultures. The call for future issues of *The Learner Development Journal* came out around this time, and I thought that it would be useful to gather such experiences, to explore how the supervisor/supervisee relationship links to language and culture, and how this is experienced, processed, and built upon. We knew that intercultural supervisory

relationships were very common, and when we put out the call, we realised what variety there was in experiences, and seeing the papers currently taking shape is very rewarding.

Alison: I'm interested that you say your shared experience working on a paper for the London Review of Education was valuable in enabling you to "extend the 'standard' supervisor/supervisee relationship". I wonder what that "standard" relationship is for you, Sabine? And I whether you Michelle initially envisaged a different kind of supervisor/supervisee relationship?

Sabine: I guess what I mean by a "standard" relationship in this instance is that, no matter what the circumstances, part of the supervisor/supervisee relationship is that there is ultimately a focus on assessment for the supervisee. This places, by default, certain boundaries: the supervisor can aid, advise, correct, suggest, encourage, facilitate...but ultimately, the assessed work is the student's, and, in my view, a supervisor's primary job is to help the student to develop their own "voice", critically, sensitively and ethically. Writing collaboratively is obviously a different experience--especially, as in our case, in a group of five. I wouldn't pretend that any authority or power interpretations within the relationship immediately disappear, but in collaborative writing, it is more about creating a coherent whole out of a number of voices, and trying to do so as equitably as possible.

I hope I am expressing that clearly?

Alison: Yes, that's very clear and it definitely resonates with my experience of supervising, as well as reviewing and editing. I guess my next question should be directed to Michelle who, as well as being one of the editors of the Special Issue on supervisor/supervisee relationships, is (or was?) also Sabine's doctoral (I think?) supervisee.

Michelle, how do you understand this concept of "voice"? And how do you see your relationship with Sabine, for example, and with other people you work with on your research, in terms of the development of your own voice? (I hope this isn't being too intrusive!)

Michelle: During the time I decided to do the iPGCE I was employed (and still am) at an International School in Germany. My teaching career has always been centred around International Schools which don't tend to require formal teaching qualifications. I have taught for many years but I came to feel that I needed a teaching qualification and I was keen to look at the state of what the latest research is in the teaching profession and especially within my field, English as an Additional Language. I started looking for an International course which would help me dive deeper into research. Our school college counsellor did her Masters at Sheffield University and she recommended Sheffield to me. The course was a good fit for my needs as an International School teacher, and so that's where I applied. I found that collaboration formed an integral part of the course. Although we were all located in different parts of the world, we still formed solid academic friendships with each other and with our supervisors. All in all, it was a very good experience, one which I would recommend to any teacher who wishes to further themselves academically.

During this time on the iPGCE, I had many writing assignments, with each paper building upon the previous one, so as to give me the opportunity to find my own writing "voice". It was a very exciting process through which I got to know many researchers in my field (on paper) and started to recognise their "voices". Having a very supportive supervisor (Sabine) added to my motivation to carry on with my academic pursuits. I feel that with the guidance of my supervisor and my teacher colleagues on the course, the huge exposure to research has helped me to find my "own" voice in writing. I could always ask Sabine about the subjects I was researching and, when I stumbled upon something that I wanted to find out more about, she was the first person I would write to. We would discuss it further and she would always point me towards some new directions of thought. Finding my own "voice" is a very important part of academic writing for me and something I am still developing. I also believe that this process of development is continuous, or at least I hope it is in my case.

Alison: That's really interesting, Michelle. From what you say, I sense that "voice", for you, is about your personal development as a practitioner-researcher, but it also seems to be, at a deeper level, about your identity as a relative newcomer in the field. I'm really struck by what you say about the importance of finding your own voice, as well as learning to recognise other, more established voices in the field. Personally, I've struggled in my own research and writing to assimilate myself (my voice) to current academic practices and at the same time to be true to myself and to the people I do research with and on. I would say you have been incredibly fortunate to have entered this field in the company of like-minded colleagues and a supervisor, who not only provided direction, but also access to opportunities for writing for publication and now, for editing a journal.

A final question to both of you, Sabine and Michelle: Coming to this project as co-editors of the 2020 issue of *The Learner Development Journal*, and given your previous experiences of writing collaboratively, how do you see your role here? It must be quite different, given that some of the authors you are working with are located at the other side of the world.

Michelle: As soon as I heard of the opportunity to be part of an online academic writing team, I expressed an interest. Not only did it benefit my learning experience in academic writing, but I also provided me with an opportunity to interact with different authors internationally. During that time, I was an international student working on my iPGCE, which meant most of the time, I was writing alone. This collaborative exercise provided me with a platform to experience collaborative writing in a team, and of course dealing with the fact that all of us were located in various parts of the world. Luckily the various time zones did not surface as being problematic and we all worked together, each doing their share. It was a fantastic learning experience, one I would recommend to anyone who has the opportunity to do something similar.

Sabine: I think that editorial teams are a more enjoyable experience than going it alone, and I think the publication benefits from multiple heads being involved. But co-editing with somebody also carries quite a workload, and most people don't edit until they have written. I feel really lucky that Michelle and I were able to undertake this journey together, from co-authoring a paper to co-editing the journal, and conscious of the additional workload on Michelle's other full-time roles as teacher, student, and parent! We have had only positive feedback about our roles, and I think it did, in some cases, break down barriers and encourage experimentation for the author pairs, too, simply by seeing that we were committed to student-staff partnerships across the whole issue, from writing to editing. Our edition seeks to consider both the supervisor and the student as learners, and so it was great that everybody embraced the new experience. The time difference really was irrelevant - the iPGCE, where all this started, has about 70+ students in 35 countries each year, so working across all timezones is just another day at the office. The experience has made me think about looking for ways to facilitate more of our students to share our voices, because they make such valuable additions to learning and teaching discourse, and so the iPGCE will soon have its own online journal where students can share their research with a wider audience, which will hopefully pave the way for more student voices from around the world being heard.

Alison: Thank you both. It's really amazing to hear about your collaboration as co-writers and now as co-editors. Hearing about your plans to expand the possibilities for collaboration and publication for your students inspires me to think about how I might do something similar for--and with--my own students. Good luck to you and the writers in the crucial final months of writing and preparation for publication of your issue of the LDJ.