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ETHICAL ISSUES IN DOCTORAL SUPERVISION: AN ANALYSIS OF INHERENT CONFLICTS AND ROLES IN SUPERVISION PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article aimed to provide new knowledge about *ethical issues in doctoral supervision* by analysing conflicts and roles that are assumed and acted out in supervision practice. This analysis was based on a literature review of various studies from the field of educational sciences, social pedagogy, doctoral supervision in theory and practice, and theories and practice of teaching and learning. The literature review identified several ethical issues relevant to doctoral supervision. These issues mostly arose from disappointed expectations, for instance, in the supervisor’s or doctoral student’s knowledge/competence, cultural viewpoint, roles, participation, language proficiency, and criticism/feedback. This analysis found that conflicts and the roles adopted and acted out during a supervision situation were not static – multiple roles could be assumed simultaneously, and the roles frequently changed. These changes provided opportunities to prevent or remedy ethical issues and conflicts in
supervision. Changes could also lead to the creation and replication of a stable relationship between the doctoral student and supervisor. To prevent ethical issues and conflicts, the relationship between a doctoral student and a supervisor should be characterised by mutual respect, responsibility, integrity, and recognition. These components were needed to: (1) create the conditions for successful knowledge development in supervision, (2) complete a third-cycle education programme, (3) qualify the doctoral student to hold a doctoral degree, and (4) prevent ethical issues and conflicts connected with doctoral student supervision, through the constructive alignment of various elements in the third-cycle programme.

**Keywords:** higher education teaching, social pedagogical practice, supervisor role, doctoral student role, social meaning, pedagogical meaning

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article was to gain new knowledge about *ethical issues in doctoral supervision* by analysing the conflicts and the roles assumed and acted out in supervision practice. The approach was to review and analyse relevant research in the following fields within the educational sciences: *Doctoral Supervision in Theory and Practice* (Lindén 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson 2007; Lee 2008, 2012; McCallin & Nayar 2012; Lindén et al. 2013; Brodin et al. 2020), *Theories and Practice of Teaching and Learning* (Fox 1983; Kolb 1984; Kugel 1993; Biggs & Tang 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie 2011; Bradbury 2019), and *Social Pedagogy* (Eriksson & Winman 2010; Hämäläinen 2012; Úcar 2013; Eriksson 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson 2016; Basic & Matsuda 2020; Janer & Úcar 2019, 2020; Úcar et al. 2020; Basic et al. 2021;
Greve et al. 2021; Kesak & Basic submitted). The literature related to educational science in the field of *Doctoral Supervision in Theory and Practice* contributed to the formulation of two fictitious cases that were grounded in real-world practices. These fictitious cases were: *Case 1*: Supervisor in the role of tour guide, and *Case 2*: Supervisor in the role of conveyor and modeller. These two cases were based on the analysed literature and the author’s own experiences in research, development work through an internship, and course studies in higher education pedagogy. The two cases were analysed by applying methods drawn from the literature in the other two fields within the educational sciences: *Theories and Practice of Teaching and Learning* and *Social Pedagogy*. The present study was focused on the actions of the actors (supervisor and doctoral student) in the supervision situation and their influence on each other in the interactive flow, before, during, and after the supervision situation.

The literature reviewed from the educational sciences (*Doctoral Supervision in Theory and Practice*) highlighted the fact that relationship-building between the doctoral student and supervisor was important in achieving a successful outcome through supervision. The literature also highlighted the importance of creating and maintaining a balance in the doctoral student-supervisor relationship. Furthermore, the literature suggested that deviations from this balance might give rise to conflicts and other issues in the supervisor-doctoral student relationship. Both too much distance and too much familiarity in the interactive flow between the doctoral student and the supervisor can lead to issues and role confusion in the expectations each party imposes on the other, before, during, and after the supervision situation (Lindén 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson 2007; Lee 2008, 2012; McCallin & Nayar 2012; Lindén et al. 2013; Brodin et al. 2020).
Based on the literature reviewed from the educational sciences in the field of *Theories and Practice of Teaching and Learning*, various theoretical models for teaching and learning processes were available. These models provided insight into the different roles that the teacher (supervisor) and student (doctoral student) could assume and act out. The literature showed that teaching and learning are not distinct from other social interactions. The components of teaching and learning include the teacher’s role, the supervisor’s role, the student’s role, the doctoral student’s role, the negotiated norms, the morals, the prevailing structure in the teaching situation, and the teachers’/supervisors’ and students’/doctoral students’ approaches to explaining and assigning meaning to different teaching situations. The common feature in these components is that they are all manifested and played out in a myriad of everyday interactions, both within and outside the context of the teaching situation (Fox 1983; Kolb 1984; Kugel 1993; Biggs & Tang 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie 2011; Bradbury 2019). In the framework of the present study, the supervision of doctoral students was analysed as a teaching situation linked to a number of ethical issues. These issues are acted upon, they unfold in supervision situations, and they constitute interpersonal interactions between doctoral students and their supervisors. These interactions contribute to the construction and reconstruction of different supervisor and doctoral student roles, which are played out in the relationship. In turn, these roles affect the dynamics of the situation and the future actions and perceptions of the actors involved.

Based on the literature, one of the roles a teacher/supervisor can assume and act out is the role of *conveyor*. A knowledge conveyor depicts knowledge as an object that is transferred from one place to another; that is, from the teacher (supervisor) to the student (doctoral student). When the supervisor adopts the role of a conveyor of knowledge, the doctoral student may view the supervisor as unaware
that the supervision situation lacks the appropriate context for deploying the knowledge imparted. In those situations, a supervisor might attempt to create a context during supervision that allows the doctoral student to participate actively.

Another role that a teacher (supervisor) can assume and act out is the role of modeller. A knowledge modeller treats knowledge as a static phenomenon that cannot be changed or developed; thus, to the modeller, teaching (supervision) is a process where the student (doctoral student) is shaped according to a predetermined pattern. When a supervisor adopts the role of modeller, the doctoral student may perceive the supervisor as acting through predetermined patterns or routines that the supervisor is reluctant to change (Fox 1983; Kolb 1984; Kugel 1993; Biggs & Tang 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie 2011; Bradbury 2019). Taking on the roles of conveyor and modeller can lead to role confusion for the doctoral student, who has developed and continues to develop knowledge in critical thinking through the university and through research generated at the university. Consequently, adopting the conveyor and modeller roles can lead to a number of conflicts in the supervision relationship. Some of these conflicts are highlighted and analysed in the present study.

Another role that a teacher (supervisor) can assume and act out is the role of tour guide. When a supervisor acts as a tour guide, knowledge production is treated as a process of exchange between the supervisor and the doctoral student; in this role, the supervisor helps the doctoral student navigate through difficulties and stimulates the doctoral student’s participation and knowledge development. The doctoral student is expected to participate actively in knowledge production in collaboration with the supervisor. Thus, the supervision is focused on the interactive process between the two parties (the supervisor and the doctoral student), who jointly undertake the process of developing the knowledge needed
for goal fulfilment in the student’s third-cycle programme (Fox 1983; Kolb 1984; Kugel 1993; Biggs & Tang 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie 2011; Bradbury 2019).

The analytical basis that helps create the conditions for knowledge development in supervision does not differ from the analytical basis applied to other teaching situations, where participating actors are expected to learn, formulate, develop, change (for the better through knowledge development), and socialise. In the teaching situation, the conditions for knowledge development are created through: (1) beneficial social interactions, (2) positive encounters, (3) good relationships, (4) good fellowship, and (5) changes for the better. These activities comprise a form of interactively anchored recognition of the actors in the educational situation, in both the social and pedagogical senses.

The social pedagogical perspective is based on theoretical and methodological reasoning, which argues that society is not governed exclusively from the top down. Furthermore, this perspective assumes that normality, in the teaching situation, and fellowship are not characterised by a clear structure or order, in either the social or the pedagogical sense. Social pedagogical order – or social pedagogical disorder – does not arise solely from normative guidelines in teaching situations that are related to the university’s and school’s (department) written and unwritten rules, routines, norms, values, and curricula. Instead, both social pedagogical order and social pedagogical disorder are produced and reproduced through interpersonal interactions, constitutive rules, meaning-making, conflicts, control, and monitoring. In addition, both social pedagogical order and disorder are influenced by the actors’ practical actions in different teaching situations (Eriksson & Winman 2010; Hämäläinen 2012; Úcar 2013; Eriksson 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson 2016; Basic & Matsuda 2020; Janer & Úcar 2019, 2020; Úcar et al. 2020; Basic et al. 2021;
Greve et al. 2021; Kesak & Basic submitted). When a supervisor is assigned to a doctoral student, the interactions between the two involve the production and reproduction of the social pedagogical order – and disorder – in teaching situations. Indeed, these phenomena appear to be created and recreated continuously in supervision situations, where a series of interactions and events play out that are observable and describable, reproduced, retold, and presented in a range of interpersonal interactions, both during the supervision situation and after it has played out.

The central point of the social pedagogical perspective is that it requires an analytical curiosity about the other, including the other’s interpretation of both social and pedagogical phenomena; the other’s actions, based on the interpretation; and the other’s interests, which are actualised in connection with those actions. This central point is about acquiring an awareness and turning the analytical focus towards: (1) the different social identities of the actors involved (e.g., ethnicity, gender identity, victimhood, class); the different pedagogical identities (e.g., student, pupil, doctoral student, teacher, supervisor, professor, successful pupil/student/doctoral student/teacher/supervisor/professor, or devalued pupil/student/doctoral student/teacher/supervisor/professor), which are acted out in situations and created and recreated (or constructed and reconstructed); and the interpersonal interactions involved (including written and oral descriptions and narratives); (2) the social and pedagogical codes, social and pedagogical control, social and pedagogical preconceptions, social and pedagogical monitoring, social and pedagogical devaluation of actors, and the sacrifices that are produced and reproduced in interpersonal interactions within social pedagogical practice; (3) variations in the perceptions, descriptions, narratives, and representations of the social and pedagogical aspects of learning, teaching, and nurturing; and 4) the representations, constructions,

The analytical concepts discussed in social pedagogical publications (e.g., an inclusive educational space/context, social pedagogical recognition, spatial dynamics in schools and universities, social pedagogical development, and educational collaboration) are relevant to university practices; first, with respect to the systematic quality of work carried out, or expected to be carried out, at the university level; and, second, with respect to the scientific analyses (research) that are conducted within the framework of research and development projects. The present study takes the analytical position that the inclusive teaching situation and social pedagogical recognition in the teaching situation (i.e., social pedagogical recognition of both the doctoral student and the supervisor) are two of the most important analytical aspects of the teaching situation that contribute to achieving the learning objectives (or other markers of success in the practical work on the third-cycle level) in subsequent steps. These precepts (i.e., inclusion and recognition) must be achieved in the supervision situation as a prerequisite for the other goals that the supervisor aims to achieve across different educational collaborations and in different educational situations in the third-cycle programme. If the analytical basis discussed in the social pedagogical literature and applied in the present analysis is not achieved in the teaching situation, then, the systematic quality work, employee competence development, and different higher education programmes that are carried out, or are expected to be carried out, at universities will be less likely to make an impact. Moreover, supervisors
will be less likely to make an impact in the supervision of doctoral students, which is an essential component of third-cycle education programmes.

A number of social and pedagogical phenomena related to ethical issues in the supervision of doctoral students remain unknown and should be investigated further. The present article describes a detailed investigation of some of these phenomena through a detailed analysis that centred around the following three questions: What ethical issues are apparent in the literature in connection with the supervision of doctoral students? How are supervision conflicts and the different roles adopted, or expected to be adopted in connection with supervision, related to the emergence of these ethical issues? How can these ethical issues be prevented?

Through the analysis, this study aimed to contribute to the development of knowledge, regarding: (1) the analytical management of ethics, supervision, conflict, and roles in supervision interactions; (2) social pedagogical recognition and lack of recognition of doctoral and supervisor identities at the university level; (3) identity creation and re-creation among doctoral students and supervisors in relation to ethics, supervision, conflict, and roles in supervision interactions; and (4) alternative approaches to analysis, compared to the standard legal perspectives. Furthermore, this study aimed to contribute to knowledge development related to the questions: How can the moralisations of doctoral students and supervisors function in the university’s organisational and practical framework? How do those moralisations function in relation to the ethics, supervision, conflict, and role expectations in supervision situations?
2. Methodological Starting Points

This narrative (or traditional) literature review is based on a qualitative method (Silverman 2015, 2006; Machi & Brenda 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Frels 2016; Basic et al. 2021: 4). The empirical studies and empirical sequences in these studies that are reanalyzed in the present analysis, are of a secondary nature (Wästerfors et al. 2013; Björk et al. 2019; Johnsson et al. 2021). The choice of the relevant empirical studies and the primary analysis of the empirical data in these studies were performed in relation with prior analyses (Fox 1983; Kolb 1984; Kugel 1993; Lindén 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson 2007; Lee 2008, 2012; Biggs & Tang 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie 2011; McCallin & Nayar 2012; Lindén et al. 2013; Bradbury 2019; Brodin et al. 2020).

<table>
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<th>Theoretical starting points for re-analyzis</th>
<th>Reviewed: doctoral supervision in theory and practice</th>
<th>Reviewed: theories and practice of teaching and learning</th>
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<td>2) The concepts of “social pedagogical recognition” and “educational collaboration” and the over-all perspective from social pedagogical work (Eriksson &amp; Winman 2010; Hämäläinen 2012; Úcar 2013; Eriksson 2014; Kornbeck &amp; Úcar 2015; Hämäläinen &amp; Eriksson 2016; Basic &amp; Matsuda 2020; Janer &amp; Úcar</td>
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Table 1: The corpus of studies that were reviewed and analysed in this literature review

Based on the purpose of the study, re-analysis is performed in the present literature study and the research question by re-analyzing the selected studies with the help of 1) interactionist, constructionist and ethnomethodological scientific theoretical starting points (Larochelle et al. 1998; Taber 2011; Farr et al. 2019; Krompák et al. 2021), (2) research particularly related to the concepts of “social pedagogical recognition” and “educational collaboration” and the over-all perspective from social pedagogical work (Eriksson & Winman 2010; Hämäläinen 2012; Úcar 2013; Eriksson 2014; Kornbeck & Úcar 2015; Hämäläinen & Eriksson 2016; Basic & Matsuda 2020; Janer & Úcar 2019, 2020; Úcar et al. 2020; Basic et al. 2021; Greve et al. 2021; Kesak & Basic submitted).

In the spirit of interactionism, constructivism, and the ethnomethodological approach, this narrative (or traditional) literature review analyses how doctoral students and supervisors themselves (in the analyzed literature) use identity-related and cultural resources (e.g., narratives, metaphors, vocabulary, roles, educational status symbols, Basic et al. 2021: 4-5) in the day-to-day interaction in the educational collaboration, such as when they talk about advantages in the educational interaction, describe working conditions, formulate criticism, and process their experiences. The fact that certain actors/types command an advantage in relation to others is important in the analysis of the present study in two ways: first, in the representation of relationships between doctoral students and supervisors (here, in the literature regarding social pedagogical recognition and educational collaboration in educational space/context), and second, in the
representation of the relationships of these doctoral students and supervisors to
the spatial dynamics in the organisational and practical work of universities. For
this study, therefore, the representation of working with doctoral students is
analysed less in terms of static typifications and more in terms of situational and
space-bound (institutionally and materially positioned) interactions described in
the analysed literature.

**Case 1: Supervisor in the role of tour guide**

A doctoral student was admitted to the third-cycle programme and was employed
as a doctoral student at a Swedish state university. At that time, the student was
given a ‘development assignment’ that the student completed to provide data for
the anticipated thesis. This development assignment involved scientifically based
development work, to be completed during an internship, in collaboration with
his/her future main supervisor. After the initial planning stages of the doctoral
study, the doctoral student and supervisor submitted an application to the Swedish
Ethical Review Authority. When the ethics application was approved, the
development assignment commenced, along with the collection of empirical data
for the doctoral study, which included documents from the internship,
questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

During the first two years, when completing the development assignment, the
doctoral student worked together with the supervisor and an assistant supervisor
at the same university to collect extensive empirical data. Those data were later
analysed and published in several scientific reports, with the doctoral student as
the sole author. During those first two years, the research group engaged in
regularly scheduled discussions regarding ethical issues. These discussions
started with an examination of documents that had previously been approved by
the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. The documents provided clear guidelines on ethically sound practices related to the ongoing development work in the internship. On several occasions, ethical issues related to the overall project were discussed at research seminars held at the relevant department, and the doctoral student actively participated in these seminars.

During this period, the doctoral student and supervisor maintained an informal professional relationship. The doctoral student and the supervisor rarely scheduled meetings; typically, they called each other by phone or met informally in the office, when they needed to discuss something. On several occasions, the supervisor praised the doctoral student in the presence of other staff and other doctoral students. This praise was related to the doctoral student’s social competence, which facilitated the collection of study data, and the doctoral student’s pedagogical competence in educational endeavours that the doctoral student was responsible for during the development programme.

The empirical data collected during the student’s development work was planned to be used as an empirical basis for the doctoral student’s thesis. When the development assignment in the internship was completed, and the scientific reports were published, the supervisor scheduled a meeting to discuss the doctoral student’s future thesis work. Due to the fact that the supervisor scheduled the meeting in advance, and the assistant supervisor was not called to the meeting, the doctoral student had the perception that the meeting was unusual and likely important. However, nothing out of the ordinary was discussed during the meeting. The doctoral student and the supervisor maintained an informal dialogue and the conversation was similar to previous conversations they had had during the development assignment in the internship. At the end of the meeting, the
doctoral student perceived that the supervisor was uncomfortable conveying information to the student.

The supervisor said that scientific language is the tool of our trade, when reporting research results, and that language must be high-quality in a doctoral thesis. The supervisor also said that the previously published scientific reports were written in good scientific language, but that the language used in the thesis must meet an even higher standard. The supervisor recommended that the doctoral student should contact someone that could advise the student on how to improve his/her academic language and writing. Furthermore, the supervisor informed the student that he/she had given the same advice to several previous doctoral students, even though they were native Swedish speakers, and that everyone, without exception, followed the advice. Most of the previous students had contacted a language workshop at the relevant university, where they received help in developing their academic writing skills.

The doctoral student agreed with the supervisor’s advice and thought that a language workshop would be a worthwhile investment. The doctoral student also said that he/she would immediately schedule an appointment with a language workshop and would inform the supervisor of the first meeting. The student soon made the necessary arrangements with the language workshop.

When the student agreed to attend the workshop, the supervisor breathed a sigh of relief, and said that he had been worried about how the doctoral student would take the information. The supervisor said that he was worried that the doctoral student might take it badly and feel discouraged by the suggestion. Then, the supervisor laughed, and informed the student that he had even talked about these concerns with his partner the day before the meeting. The doctoral student shared the same sentiment.
Case 2: Supervisor in the role of conveyor and modeler

A doctoral student was admitted to the third-cycle programme and was employed as a doctoral student at a Swedish state university. At that time, the student was given a ‘development assignment’ that the student completed to provide data for the anticipated thesis. This development assignment involved scientifically based development work, to be completed during an internship, in collaboration with his/her future main supervisor.

During an introductory course in the third-cycle programme, the doctoral student was informed that research in Sweden (i.e., scientific work carried out to acquire new knowledge or scientifically based development work) could not be conducted without first receiving ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. The doctoral student also noted, during the introductory course, that ethical approval was particularly important when the research aimed to collect data through personal contact with informants (research participants), and when there was a plan to publish the study results in a scientific journal.

The doctoral student expressed his/her concern to the supervisor about the planned doctoral thesis and suggested that, after the initial study planning, the supervisor should submit an application to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. The doctoral student explained to the supervisor that the internship portion of the development assignment was planned to be carried out on a scientific basis and, thus, the assignment was subject to applicable legislation in Sweden that applies to research. The supervisor informed the student that the assignment in the internship was collaborative, and that it was not covered by the legislation; moreover, the supervisor had never been involved in submitting an application to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority for such assignments. The doctoral student continued to seek clarification, saying that, when the development assignment in
the internship started, the collection of the empirical data would also start, and that data would include documents from the internship, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Moreover, the collected data was intended to be used for the doctoral thesis; thus, the doctoral student stated that, without ethical approval before data collection began, it would be difficult to use the data for a doctoral thesis. The supervisor referred back to his previous experiences, and assured the doctoral student that an ethics application for this type of collaboration assignment was not needed. The doctoral student continued to seek clarification, and pointed out that, in studies that included open-ended questions in a survey and an interview, there was no guarantee that respondents would not disclose information about their own violations of the law or their own sensitive personal information (e.g., ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sexual activity, sexual orientation, genetic data, or biometric data) that might uniquely identify the individual. Furthermore, the doctoral student’s understanding was that this sensitive information would become part of the study’s empirical data, and that the research group would have to process this information. The student explained that, according to his/her understanding, ethical approval was required from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority before the study data could be collected. However, the supervisor emphasised that this was not the case, according to the laws in force in Sweden; but at the same time, the supervisor agreed to consider submitting the documents and applying for an advisory opinion from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. Subsequently, the supervisor did not carry out that task after the supervision meeting, and the development assignment in the internship commenced without ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.
During the first two years of the internship, when completing the development assignment, the doctoral student collected the majority of the empirical data. Those data were later analysed by the doctoral student and published in several scientific reports. The supervisor and assistant supervisor commented on the content of reports and were listed as co-authors on the publications. The doctoral student felt that including the supervisor and assistant supervisor as authors was unwarranted, because the doctoral student performed the majority of the data collection and the majority of the analysis and reporting. The supervisor had previously informed the doctoral student (through the assistant supervisor), at the beginning of the work for the project, that it was common for all three members of the project (supervisor, assistant supervisor, and doctoral student) to be automatically included as authors of any publications published within the framework of that project. The doctoral student’s view was that the supervisor’s and assistant supervisor’s comments on the content of the reports were part of the supervision. The student knew that other doctoral students in the department (including some that also conducted a research or development project) had received similar comments from their supervisors, but those supervisors and assistant supervisors did not require co-authorship.

After collecting data in the first two years, the doctoral student attempted to analyse the data with the same theoretical starting points that the student had used in his/her bachelor’s and master’s studies for the same type of data. The doctoral student’s academic papers from those bachelor's and master’s studies received the highest possible grades, and before admission to a third-cycle programme, the student had published a scientific article with his/her supervisor, which concerned master’s studies at another university in Sweden. However, the current supervisor and assistant supervisor asserted that the theories applied in those papers were inappropriate within the framework of the current development project. They
reasoned that those theories were not suited to the analysis of the collected data, and they were not suited to the current research environment. The theoretical starting points that the doctoral student had proposed were not accepted theoretical starting points in that particular research environment.

On several occasions, the doctoral student reported his/her dissatisfaction, both to other doctoral students in the department and to senior lecturers and researchers in the department that were not members of the relevant research environment. The doctoral student’s dissatisfaction stemmed from both the plan for co-authorship and the refusal to accept the aforementioned theories, which, in the doctoral student’s opinion, were suitable for the analysis of the collected data. The doctoral student perceived that neither the supervisor nor the assistant supervisor had adequate general knowledge of social science theories and methods. The doctoral student also perceived that supervision situations and seminars in the research environment were insular and characterised by exclusivity, entrenched practices, and resistance to new approaches, which limited knowledge development for everyone involved.

During this period, the doctoral student and supervisor maintained a formal professional relationship. The doctoral student, supervisor, and assistant supervisor met regularly at pre-scheduled meetings, every four weeks, and ethical issues were discussed at several of these meetings, such as:

1) Is it ethical to obtain consent for study participation via text message?
2) Is it ethical to record interviews on the phone or is it only appropriate to record interviews on a dictaphone?
3) Is it ethical to record phone calls (audio) and video (via Zoom)?
4) Is it ethical to collect data via blogs?
5) Can an application for ethical approval be sent to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority after data collection has already commenced (and during ongoing development assignments in an internship)?

6) Is it ethical to be credited as an author solely due to participation in a project (publication ethics related to the requirements for the doctoral student’s independence)?

In the doctoral student’s opinion, neither the supervisor nor the assistant supervisor could answer the above questions adequately. In an attempt to obtain satisfactory answers to the above questions, the doctoral student submitted the questions, on several occasions, to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, via email.

The empirical data collected during the student’s development work was planned to be used as an empirical basis for the doctoral student’s thesis. When the development assignment in the internship was completed and the scientific reports were published, the supervisor and assistant supervisor scheduled a meeting to discuss the doctoral student’s future thesis work. However, nothing out of the ordinary was discussed during the meeting. The doctoral student, the supervisor, and the assistant supervisor maintained a formal dialogue, and the conversation was similar to previous conversations they had had during the development assignment in the internship. At the end of the meeting, the supervisor passed on important information to the doctoral student.

With reference to successful examples from previous supervision assignments, the supervisor said that the doctoral student should rework parts of previous reports for submission as scientific articles. Because these scientific articles were part of the development project, the supervisor and assistant supervisor would automatically become co-authors, which, according to the supervisor, would
strengthen the doctoral student’s position in public discussions and examinations. The supervisor also informed the doctoral student that an advisory opinion could be sought from the regional ethical review committee, which was connected to the university. Thus, the articles would meet the requirements of scientific journals for ethical approval of a study. The doctoral student agreed with the plan as presented.

The supervisor also said that the scientific language in the previous, jointly published scientific reports were written in good professional language, but that the language used in future articles must meet a higher standard. The supervisor recommended that the doctoral student should contact someone that could advise the student on how to improve his/her academic language and writing. Furthermore, the supervisor informed the student that he/she had given the same advice to several previous doctoral students, even though they were native Swedish speakers, and that everyone, without exception, followed the advice. Most of the previous students had contacted a language workshop at the relevant university, where they received help in developing their academic writing skills. The supervisor and assistant supervisor also suggested that they could help the doctoral student improve his/her language in future versions of scientific articles. The doctoral student agreed with the plan as presented.

Finally, the supervisor asked the doctoral student to act as a research secretary in the relevant research environment, and the doctoral student agreed. The supervisor informed the student that he/she would look into the possibility that, after the thesis was completed, the doctoral student might immediately serve as a third supervisor for a new doctoral student that would be employed next year in the research environment.
3. Analysis

There were eleven ethical issues and conflicts apparent in the literature related to the supervision of doctoral students, including: (1) lack of knowledge of the laws that govern the implementation of scientifically based research and development work, (2) cultural conflicts in the relationship between doctoral students and supervisors, (3) difficulties in maintaining professional distance between supervisors and doctoral students, (4) difficulties in distributing roles between doctoral students and supervisors, (5) deficiencies in the relationship between doctoral students and supervisors, (6) deficiencies in both supervisory competence and the doctoral student’s grasp of important prior knowledge that could have facilitated the completion of the third-cycle education programme, (7) lack of or no production of text by the doctoral student, (8) lack of feedback or no feedback from supervisors; (9) lack of language proficiency among doctoral students and supervisors, (10) difficulties in handling criticism, for both the doctoral student and supervisor, and (11) unfulfilled expectations in the relationship between doctoral students and supervisors.

The doctoral student’s position in the interactive flow of the relationship with the supervisor depended on the interplay between familiarity and professional distance throughout the relationship. When the professional distance was more dominant than familiarity (e.g., when there was a conflict between the supervisor and the doctoral student), a special relationship arose, where, although an

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1 The two cases that were the starting point for the analysis are about supervision of doctoral students and different strategies and what consequences they may have. Note that ethics is much more than the supervision process, it is also decisions about funding, data collection, publication, suitability in the choice of research questions and method, equivalence in terms, etc. - supervision is an arena where this is handled, consciously or not. If one imagines ethics as conscious, reflective, fundamental values and principles as they are handled in one supervision practice sometimes as reactions to decisions that are also outside the supervised practice.
individual was present, he/she was not an active actor, but a passive actor in the teaching and supervision situation. For example, Case 2 demonstrated a supervision situation, where the image of the active doctoral student (“The doctoral student continued to seek clarification, and pointed out that”) eventually changed to the image of a passive doctoral student (“The doctoral student agreed with the plan as presented”).

Creating the conditions for productive, successful knowledge development in the supervision situation requires a stable relationship between the doctoral student and supervisor. The relationship should be characterised by mutual respect, responsibility, integrity, and recognition in both the social and pedagogical senses (see Case 1: “On several occasions, the supervisor praised the doctoral student in the presence of other staff and other doctoral students”). Although there is an expectation of mutuality in the relationship between the supervisor and doctoral student, there is also a division of responsibilities that is important for the stability and success of the supervision relationship. The supervisor is responsible for creating the conditions for mutual respect, responsibility, integrity, and social pedagogical recognition before, during, and after the supervision situation.

The scopes of the roles of supervisor and doctoral student depend on the expectations in the respective supervision situation. The supervision of a doctoral student is not distinct from other social and pedagogical interactions. The supervisor role, the doctoral student role, the negotiated norms, morals, the prevailing structure in the teaching situation, and the approaches to explaining and assigning meaning to different teaching situations are all manifested in and play out in a myriad of everyday interactions, both within and outside the supervision situation.
The evolutions of both the supervisor’s and the doctoral student’s knowledge during the supervision situation can be analysed as a process of knowledge exchange between these two actors. The supervisor role includes helping doctoral students navigate through difficulties that may arise and stimulating and facilitating the doctoral student’s journey to the final destination – a doctoral degree. The doctoral student role includes acting, producing, and actively collaborating with the supervisor. It is also assumed that, within these interactive activities, knowledge development and knowledge production will occur organically. Here, it is important to note that the conflicts and ethical issues that arise in the supervision situation originate precisely in the interactive process between the actors involved. The roles adopted in the supervision situation and the unmet expectations contribute to the emergence of conflicts and ethical issues in the supervision relationship.

The different supervisor and doctoral student roles adopted in the supervision situation do not appear to be clearly defined – they can be negotiated and may even straddle the border between categories. Both the supervisor and the doctoral student act in several different roles simultaneously, and roles can change during a single supervision situation. For example, one individual will simultaneously act in a professional role (i.e., doctoral student or supervisor), a gender role, an ethnic role, and a class role. These roles can be analysed in terms of the self-ascribed position of the actor (doctoral student or supervisor). Moreover, because these roles are acted out in a social pedagogical situation (supervision), they can change during the interactive flow of the situation. Therefore, these roles can be analysed as an ongoing relational process between actors that perceive themselves to be acting at a distance from other categories, which are not, presumably, part of the process. Accordingly, the different doctoral student and supervisor roles that are actualised in the supervision situation can be analysed as
social-pedagogical roles, because they are based on a contrast between actors in the relationship, and they are related to social and pedagogical categorisations/phenomena.

The present analysis has revealed many of the supervisor and doctoral student roles that may be adopted and acted out in the supervision situation. Among the different supervisor roles, we could distinguish, for example: the insecure supervisor (“the supervisor breathed a sigh of relief”); the role of strategic supervisor (“Because these scientific articles were part of the development project, the supervisor and assistant supervisor would automatically become co-authors”); the role of the confident supervisor (“an advisory opinion could be sought from the regional ethical review committee, which was connected to the university”); the role of the politically correct and law-abiding supervisor (“published in several scientific reports, with the doctoral student as the sole author”); and the role of the tension-relieving supervisor (“the supervisor laughed, and informed the student that he had even talked about these concerns with his partner the day before the meeting”). Similarly, among the different doctoral student roles, we could distinguish, for example: the role of insecure doctoral student (“the doctoral student expressed his/her concern to the supervisor about the planned doctoral thesis”); the role of the confident doctoral student (“the doctoral student also said that he/she would immediately schedule an appointment with a language workshop and would inform the supervisor of the first meeting”); the role of the active doctoral student (“The doctoral student continued to seek clarification, and pointed out that, in studies that included open-ended questions in a survey and an interview”); the role of the passive doctoral student (“The doctoral student agreed with the plan as presented”); the role of the independent doctoral student (“published in several scientific reports, with the doctoral student as the sole author”); and the role of dependent doctoral student
(“Because these scientific articles were part of the development project, the supervisor and assistant supervisor would automatically become co-authors”).

Importantly, because the supervisor and doctoral student roles are not static, the content of the roles can change over time, and sometimes from one supervision situation to the next. This fluidity provides opportunities to prevent, and in some cases remedy, ethical issues and conflicts in supervision and to create and recreate a stable relationship between the doctoral student and the supervisor. Stability is required for a relationship characterised by mutual respect, responsibility, integrity, and recognition, in both the social and pedagogical senses. A stable relationship is necessary for both creating the conditions for successful knowledge development, in the supervision situation, and achieving the learning objectives that lead to completing the doctoral degree programme.

4. Conclusion

The present study aimed to gain new knowledge about ethical issues that arise in doctoral supervision through analysis of the conflicts and roles that are assumed and acted out in supervision practice.

In a postgraduate context, social pedagogical control and social pedagogical monitoring (related to curriculum, written and unwritten rules, schedules, tests, research and development work, and various practical teaching and research situations) contribute to the production and reproduction of different roles for doctoral students and supervisors. The social pedagogy defines who they are and who they are expected to be, what they know and are expected to know, what they believe and are expected to believe, and what they learn and are expected to learn. All these roles are played out according to the unique social pedagogical normative order in the university, which is an important pillar of the doctoral
student and supervisor identities. These identities are created and re-created during social and pedagogical activities.

Furthermore, the social pedagogical control and monitoring that occurs outside of the university is also important for the production and reproduction of different roles for the doctoral student and the supervisor. Interpersonal interactions related to family, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, control, monitoring, etc., contribute to the creation and re-creation of roles related to the expectations imposed on doctoral students and supervisors in a university setting and in society in general.

This analysis showed that the relationship between a doctoral student and a supervisor demanded stability and should be characterised by mutual respect, responsibility, integrity, and social pedagogical recognition. Within the framework of the present study, this type of relationship stability was required to: (1) create the conditions for successful knowledge development in supervision, (2) complete the postgraduate programme, and (3) achieve the learning objectives that lead to a doctoral degree. The remaining question is what can be done in postgraduate education practices within a university to achieve a stable, mutually beneficial relationship, which has the capacity to prevent the emergence of ethical issues and conflicts in connection with the supervision of doctoral students? One potential answer that became evident in the literature relates to the concept of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang 2011).

The concept of constructive alignment is based on the analytical argument that all teaching activities (including supervising doctoral students) that are carried out through interactions with students (or doctoral students) should be coherent. Thus, the different components of teaching should be connected to form a cohesive whole. In practice, the supervisor should, first, maintain a common thread when planning and formulating learning objectives, goals, and expected
learning outcomes for a doctoral student. These goals and outcomes should be related to the scientifically based research or development work that the doctoral student will undertake and to the postgraduate education programme as a whole. Second, this common thread should run through the subject content that the supervisor teaches and through the working methods and supervisory activities that the supervisor chooses to use. Third, this common thread should shape the approach the supervisor takes in supervising the doctoral student. Fourth, this common thread should shape the way the supervisor evaluates his/her supervision, and it should shape the doctoral student’s postgraduate education as a whole. It is essential that all four of these elements are included in the scientifically based research or development work that the doctoral student carries out and in the postgraduate education programme to which the doctoral student is admitted.

These four items may sound redundant at first; some doctoral supervisors may argue that their supervision activities are already shaped and implemented in accordance with the principles of constructive coordination. However, the literature has suggested that constructive coordination has declined in some supervision assignments. Indeed, this decline has been observed in the author’s own experiences in research, development work in the internship, and courses in higher education pedagogy. Moreover, the doctoral student’s subordinate position in the relationship with the supervisor has contributed to creating and recreating a culture of silence at the university in relation to “research supervision” (“Finally, the supervisor asked the doctoral student to act as a research secretary in the relevant research environment, and the doctoral student agreed. The supervisor informed the student that he/she would look into the possibility that, after the thesis was completed, the doctoral student might
immediately serve as a third supervisor for a new doctoral student that would be employed next year in the research environment”).

Ultimately, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to make changes and improvements to the supervision process and to prevent ethical issues and conflicts from arising in connection with the supervision. An interesting question that was raised during our work on this study was whether and how doctoral students and supervisors take note of the importance of leadership in the social pedagogical work with doctoral students at the university. Another important question is how narrative leadership is handled at the university in the supervisors’ social pedagogical work and in the doctoral students’ reproduction of supervision situations, in relation to the following issues: How can equivalent education for doctoral students be organisationally ensured? How can the quality of education (supervision of doctoral students included) be ensured for doctoral students? What teaching materials are suitable in a supervision situation? How can supervisor competencies be developed? How can universities create the conditions for successful collaborations between supervisors and doctoral students?

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