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Student-generated metaphor in research supervision: An arts-based method

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Abstract

Previous research has highlighted the impact and importance of the use of client-generated metaphor in psychotherapy (Cott, 2020). While researching this topic, we began to incorporate student-generated metaphor into the research supervision process. This was found to enhance the supervision relationship, providing a quick and immediate insight into the supervisee's lived experience and pastoral needs at each stage of the research journey. This work developed into an arts-based research supervision method, which reduced the power differential in the supervisory relationship, and made space for the supervisee to communicate their learning experience on their own terms. In this paper, we will set out the rationale for using student-generated metaphor in research supervision and share further student feedback on this process, including future ideas for research and practice. We argue that theory and research on research supervision often neglect its pastoral component, and that providing excellent pastoral support to postgraduate researchers is key. The paper will conclude by making the case that the use of student-generated metaphor in research supervision can be a simple and effective way to bring the supervisory relationship into focus.

KEYWORDS
arts-based methods, counselling psychology research, decolonising research, metaphor, reflective practice, research supervision

1 | INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we will share with you a creative method to facilitate rapid access to relational depth at an appropriate level within the supervisory relationship, using student-generated metaphor within supervision meetings. First, we will outline how our method evolved, within the 'crucible' of the research supervision relationship. While the authors had not encountered duoethnography as a method at the time of this work (Hills et al., 2023), there are similarities in how our use of student-generated metaphor in supervision evolved during interactions between the first and second author over the 5 years of our supervisory relationship. So, while no specific method framed or guided the development of this way of working, the relational process which gave birth to it mirrors the relational depth we want to encourage in research supervision. The following section sets out the process through which student-generated metaphor in research supervision emerged.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Origins of student-generated metaphor in research supervision: A supervisee case report

We trace the origins of our method to an early supervision meeting, where we were exploring the second author's initial ideas for a research topic. I (the second author) had the experience of feeling that I had been closed or narrowed down too soon, and I felt frustrated. I did not recognise this fully until after the meeting. When I reflected on my experience afterwards, I felt that I had to take action to improve the communication in the supervisory relationship.

I began to look for a way to fully capture my overall experience—my own unique research experience, as a way of both helping me make sense of it, to problem solve and to communicate my experience to the supervisory team—including any difficulties in the relationship itself. One of the early metaphors I used was 'peeling an onion', where it seemed that while developing the research proposal, there were many layers of interest. I reflected that it looked like all I had, at first, was a pile of layers to be sorted. This then led to some grouping and delineation of ideas, with emerging possible research questions.

Early encouragement from my supervisor (the first author) led me, as a way of routinely preparing for the meetings, to incorporate a self-generated metaphor onto the agenda of the supervision meetings to capture and convey my experience. This seemed highly appropriate, given the topic of the research (client-generated metaphor in therapy), and soon developed into a useful and creative parallel process alongside the doctoral project.

The most interesting and helpful metaphors were those that I developed in detail, without interpretation from the supervisor. All the metaphors were highly memorable, and it was often the case that both the insights and the imagery continued to develop over time. We coined the term 'student-generated metaphor' to describe this phenomenon, that is, evoking a metaphor to describe a current situation/challenge, using those metaphors to develop and enhance ideas, and using metaphors to reflect on previous experiences. The initial metaphors gave some good colour and interest to the meetings, and this gave a kind of context for the rest of the discussion. Giving my metaphors space in the meetings felt like giving me space, and I then found the rest of the meeting more satisfying and productive.

We formalised this so that whenever preparing for a meeting with the supervisory team, I incorporated a metaphor, self-generated, onto the actual agenda to capture my personal experience of that stage of the research project. This provided insight into my personal reactions and emotions evoked by the relationships I was developing with the project, the supervision team, the University's processes and the research participants. Through this technique, I noticed that a deeper exploration of a student-generated metaphor could reveal unexpected, tacit dimensions and new insights and innovative solutions. This use of a reflective approach to bring alive the topic area in a pragmatic way overlaps with combinatorial play (Wingate, 2011),

Implications for Practice

- Research supervisors can improve their supervision practice by incorporating student-generated metaphor into research supervision meetings.
- Asking students for a metaphor that expresses their experience at different stages of the research process is a simple way of opening important conversations.
- Making space for and exploring the meaning of students' metaphors in supervision helps to assess their pastoral and supervisory needs at different stages.

Implications for Policy

- Doctoral academies or graduate schools should provide training to research supervisors from all backgrounds to use this simple method to expand the pastoral skills of their supervisors.

creative approaches to supervision (Lahad, 2000), literature on the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) and reflective writing (Bolton, 2014; Hunt & Sampson, 1998). I read back over some of the early meeting minutes and noticed one where I said 'Driving a car with someone grabbing at the steering wheel'—my guess is that many supervisees have this sort of experience, where you feel as though you are being pulled away from the direction you set out in!

I found it easy to come up with the metaphors. Sometimes, they were less developed and a bit rushed. Sometimes I had explored them a lot beforehand. There were a few, for example—where I pictured a multi-level birthday cake that was flipped in mid-air (representing my view of the method and outcomes from the thematic analysis, where the base layer of the cake represented the total data set, the next layer relevant data extracts and, finally, the candles represented themes) or where I envisioned a 'Match of the Day' deconstruction (representing a way of weaving together different data extracts or highlights and perspectives into a coherent narrative)—where I had spent a lot of time playing with the metaphor imaginatively, and checking if it fitted the experience. This preparation of a metaphor did not feel like a burden. What was helpful was using it to sum up my experience. I think it is important to say that, for me, the metaphors were visceral—not simply conceptual. I felt them, I was in them, they were in me.

2.1.1 | Next steps

The first author then started to incorporate student-generated metaphors into supervision with her other supervisees, to good effect. At this point, the first and second authors felt this approach deserved further dissemination. For example, the first author conducted a workshop entitled *Playing with metaphor in supervision* at

the 7th Community Psychology Festival; the theme of this conference was the seriousness of play in any work with a social justice lens (Ramsey-Wade, 2023). The call for this special edition of *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* was circulated during discussions around a potential paper on student-generated metaphor. In advance of both the workshop and the production of this paper, supervisees who are currently using student-generated metaphors in research supervision were approached and asked for feedback, which will be detailed below.

To give context before sharing this data, we will first briefly summarise some of the literature on relational aspects of research supervision, and metaphor as an arts-based method. A brief scoping review of the literature on the supervisory relationship in research, focusing on publications that explored the relational nature of research supervision and the pastoral component of this relationship, was conducted for this paper. This is integrated in the following section with a brief review of the literature on the use of metaphor in psychotherapy.

3 | LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 | Research supervision and the supervisory relationship

Much has been written about research supervision and best practice (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020; Denicolo et al., 2020b; Hon Kam, 1997; Kreber & Wealer, 2023; Lee, 2008). Within the literature, models of the supervisory relationship abound (Denicolo et al., 2020b; Lee, 2008). There are common themes to these models. Several conceptualise the success of the supervisory relationship as residing within the interaction between students' changing expectations and needs and the supervisor's changing supervisory style. The student may be more or less dependent on the supervisor at different points of the research journey, and therefore, the supervisor sensitively adapts in response to these nonlinear changes (Denicolo et al., 2020b; Hon Kam, 1997). Several authors in this area point out that one's supervisory style often emerges relatively unconsciously, from our own experiences as supervisees—either in terms of emulation or in terms of avoidance and improvement (Denicolo et al., 2020b; Lee, 2008).

Lee, for example, has written extensively on research supervision and the supervisory relationship (Lee, 2008, 2018, 2019), and her five-factor model is cited widely in the literature. She and others (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020) critique the literature and training for research supervisors as being overly policy or task-focused, with little acknowledgement of the importance of the quality of the supervisory relationship, leading to a lack of conceptualisation of relational factors by supervisors (Kreber & Wealer, 2023). To remedy this, one of her five factors of successful research supervision is the development of a quality supervisory relationship (Lee, 2008). The multiplicity of models of research supervision (Denicolo et al., 2020b) points to the importance

and complexity of the supervisory relationship (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020). While a strong research supervisory relationship may be key to timely completion, we as yet have no evidence that any of the current models of research supervision have improved these rates (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020).

Good research supervision is inarguably inclusive research supervision (Lowe, 2020), which entails getting to know each supervisee as an individual within a real, human, working supervisory relationship (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020). Inclusivity is both morally important and makes for more creative, productive research and research teams (Lowe, 2020). Cultural differences that can affect the quality of the supervisory relationship include direct vs. indirect communication styles, one's relationship to time, levels of physical expressiveness, and how one uses or maintains personal space (Lowe, 2020). In addition, each supervisory relationship is likely to be heavily influenced by the attachment histories of both the supervisee and the supervisor, rendering the attachment styles of both parties key to a successful supervisory relationship (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020). Many authors therefore highlight the need for continuous training and development for supervisors (Denicolo et al., 2020b), as continuous skill development leads to a greater range of skills over time, and the capacity to try out and practice new approaches. Andriopoulou and Prowse (2020) argue that, as the quality of the supervisor's pastoral support is likely to rely on their interpersonal awareness and capacity to provide a secure base, attachment theory should be included in such training.

Continuous professional development around supervision is particularly needed due to the nonlinear student research experience; there are likely to be slumps along the way, which can be easily missed (Denicolo et al., 2020b). This is where reflective practice is particularly important, in order to track enthusiasm and energy levels as well as progress (Denicolo et al., 2020a). Reflection on current or past work is key to creative thinking in research, and in general. Time and space to play, ponder and experiment enhances experiences, including the doctoral experience, and can be a part of inspirational supervision (Denicolo et al., 2020a).

3.2 | Supervising counselling psychology, counselling or psychotherapy research

Reflection is a cornerstone of psychotherapeutic training, so should come naturally to therapist researchers. After all, these are the same skills employed by the trainee when writing a process report or presenting a case in clinical supervision. While reflection within research supervision has been argued to be a feature of effective research supervision in any area (Denicolo et al., 2020a, 2020b), it is likely that psychotherapeutic trainees would expect reflection and reflexivity to be a part of research supervision, and would need the pastoral component of this relationship to be strong and containing. Lee (2018) explored the needs and experiences of students on professional doctorates, who are often more experienced, part-time or mature students. She assessed that her five-factor model for

effective research supervision (Lee, 2008) still held here—with some adjustments. Supervisors of these researchers need to account for supporting students who are juggling more demands, and who are often having to move from an expert role back to being a student again. They will also often require support over a longer period than a full-time PhD student.

Bager-Charleson et al. (2023), Bager-Charleson and McBeath (2021, 2022) have written extensively on the particular supervision needs of counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology researchers. They report that whereas at one time our trainees were mostly focused on becoming effective therapists, with research seen as an unpleasant or at least challenging requirement to complete on the road to certification, now trainees are less negative about becoming researchers as well. In their survey of 50 supervisees and supervisors on such programmes (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2021), they found that participants highlighted the importance of research supervision. Supervisees also reported that an empathic supervisor was just as important as an experienced supervisor. This was confirmed by a further survey of over 200 therapist supervisees and supervisors (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2022), where both groups of participants highlighted the importance of relational depth and emotional connection in the supervisory relationship.

Another feature of the literature highlighted by Bager-Charleson and McBeath (2021, 2022) and other authors (Denicolo et al., 2020b) is the level of distress involved in the research process, which is often not disclosed. Doctoral research can take its toll on trainees' mental health and well-being, and they argue that supervisors are well placed to track students' well-being. Ways of coping with the impact of conducting research could include journaling or 'developing 'other mediums' to help to go 'where words wouldn't go'' (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2021, p. 6). They reference Etherington (2004) and Finlay (2011), who write about the role of the body in research, arguing that consciously embodied research is better research.

These points echo the topic of the current paper. Metaphor can serve to bring the body back into research supervision, as they can be embodied expressions which cross linguistic, visual and physical boundaries, articulating the ineffable. For instance, it is interesting that the majority of Bager-Charleson and McBeath's participants used metaphor to express their experience of the research journey (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2022). Research is like sailing, dancing or riding a horse bare-back, and a helpful research supervisor is like a navigator, midwife or driving instructor (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2022). Their research highlights our need for metaphor to express meaningful experiences, and its effectiveness as a communication tool.

Using metaphor in research supervision could speak to both the containment and compassion factors in Bager-Charleson et al.'s (2023) relational three-factor model for research supervision for therapist researchers. Supervisors who invite the use of metaphor into research supervision could help to develop a sense of safety within the relationship for the supervisee, as their experience is seen, witnessed and heard, engendering an experience of empathy. This could be particularly important at the beginning of the research journey, when establishing or forming a working research supervisory relationship. At this stage of the research process, supervisor and supervisee often have different agendas. The supervisee may have an exciting and ambitious vision for their research. The supervisor's role at this stage often involves elements of strategy and pragmatism, to ensure the project can be completed within the envelope of a professional training programme, for example. Students often struggle with this stage of the research journey, and challenge, rupture and repair are common. As can be seen above, the second author was no exception, but this became the crucible from which something powerful and creative emerged.

3.3 | The use of metaphor in helping relationships

Metaphor is 'a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable' (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). Metaphor relies on 'linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of *as if* it were the first'. (Hawkes, 2017, p. 1).

Metaphor belongs to a broader category of figurative language, or 'language which doesn't mean what it says' (Hawkes, 2017, pp. 1–2). It therefore differs from standard or literal uses of language. Conceptual metaphor theory defines metaphor as 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson (2003) assert that our ideas about our worlds are metaphorical, derived from embodied experience, and that such thoughts and speech are mostly unconscious.

It is likely that, without conscious attention, metaphors generated by supervisees in the research supervisory relationship may go unnoticed or be unwittingly altered. Two studies from interactions in therapeutic contexts provide a cautionary note. For example, Whynot's (1994) survey of 14 family therapy sessions found a total of 78 metaphors used by family members, with the therapist responding to only two of those metaphors (cited by Sims and Whynot, 1997). Similarly, Skelton et al.'s (2002) concordance-based study of patient-general practitioner (GP) interactions, involving a database of 373 consultations by 40 GPs, found that GPs make only limited attempts to enter patients' conceptual worlds, typically preferring to reinterpret patients' 'vivid and unique descriptions' into their own metaphors.

Without conscious attention, there is a potential for the generation and use of metaphors to be undermined. For example, Angus and Rennie (1988) identified collaborative and non-collaborative styles of metaphor generation in therapy, through a qualitative, phenomenological study of four therapy dyads. Two patterns of metaphoric communication were identified: discovery-oriented—a collaborative process associated with the development of a mutually shared understanding of the meaning of a metaphor; and a non-collaborative process of meaning derivation frequently associated with a joint misunderstanding of the meaning of a metaphor.

3.3.1 | What kind of skills are needed?

Battino (2002, p. 2) asserts that the most effective use of metaphors is in the 'precise use of vague language in order to create an image or evoke a feeling'. Three protocols to guide therapists working with client-generated metaphor show some commonality (Kopp, 1995; Lawley & Tompkins, 2000; Sims & Whynot, 1997). While the use of metaphor in the supervisory relationship is unlikely to require the full implementation of these, they provide useful pointers and will therefore be briefly described.

Kopp's Metaphor Therapy was developed in a psychotherapy context. The approach aims to shift the client from a predominantly descriptive/verbal/logical mode of cognition to a depictive/imaginal/analogical mode (and back again), according to Kopp and Craw (1998). The process has four phases, each with several steps. It begins with the therapist noticing and evoking metaphors. The second phase involves encouraging the client to focus on, explore and identify with the metaphor. The third phase involves inviting the client to consider and make changes to the metaphor, and the fourth phase involves reflecting on parallels between the changed metaphor and the client's life situation.

Sims and Whynot's (1997) approach was developed in a family therapy context. Like Kopp's protocol, it involves an itinerary consisting of several stages (in this case, seven). Sims and Whynot place their emphasis on a sensibility towards metaphor, as a 'neglected linguistic resource' (p. 342), and provide less guidance in terms of the sorts of questions that the therapist might use at each stage. The actions of hearing, highlighting and validating the family's metaphors are fundamental competencies in this approach. Sims and Whynot also take an encompassing view of metaphor, where touch, gesture and drawing, in addition to spoken language, are included if they offer a resemblance between two things.

Sims and Whynot (1997, p. 342) advocate 'postponing making sense' of the metaphor in favour of a process of 'exploration and expansion of the range of associations from which meaning will eventually arise'. This is achieved through a singular focus on the words used by the client, rather than habitual interpretation. Sims and Whynot (1997, p. 343) emphasise the experience of playfulness that emerges when focusing on metaphor; in their experience, this focus 'often produces an atmosphere of relaxation, delight and humour'.

Lawley and Tompkins' (2000) Symbolic Modelling method is based on David Grove's (Grove & Panzer, 1989) pioneering psychotherapeutic methods, and incorporates Grove's 'Clean Language' methodology. Clean Language questions are built using the raw material of the client's own words and are designed to guide the client's attention to an aspect of their experience (Lawley & Tompkins, 2004). An organisational research study by Tosey et al. (2014) used Lawley and Tompkins' (2000) Symbolic Modelling approach to investigate how managers' metaphors for work-life balance can be elicited and explored with minimal 'contamination' by the researcher. Their findings support a view of the importance of researchers' strict and deliberate use of language to minimise their influence over the metaphors that emerged from participants.

4 | HOW TO INCORPORATE STUDENT-GENERATED METAPHOR INTO RESEARCH SUPERVISION

Our method is a practical way for researchers to access, condense and share their experiences during all stages of the research process. Its aim is to generate insights that will help both the researcher and the supervisory relationship. It involves consciously evoking and exploring metaphors as a preparation for supervision meetings, and then further exploration through those meetings.

At its simplest, it involves student researchers asking themselves a question that will evoke a metaphor: 'this stage of the project is like …?'. The researcher's response to this question may be a rough image, idea, phrase or a feeling. They then develop this further by asking themselves additional questions, such as, 'what kind of x is that x?'. Such questions are recommended in the practice literature on the use of client-generated metaphor (Lawley and Tomkins, 2000). It can be particularly helpful at these early stages for the research supervisor to avoid interpretation, but instead to simply assist the supervisee to develop the properties of the metaphor. Insights most often come later through the exploration of the metaphor in research supervision meetings.

The next step is for the student researcher to share their metaphor with their supervisors—and for the researcher and supervisor to make space for dialogue about and further exploration of the metaphor. Again, interpretation is to be avoided, to allow further insights to emerge from the 'unwrapping' of layers of meaning condensed in the metaphor.

There are therefore many parallels between our method and arts-based research methods in general, in which photographs, pictures, poems or objects—anything that represents their lived experience—can be selected and brought by participants to interviews, to support the opening of a dialogue (Charurua & Wicaksono, 2023). Here, we are inviting research supervisees to bring an image to their supervision meetings, to open a dialogue around their lived experience as developing researchers. In both these moves, the conversation is much deeper for the introduction of art into the relational space. As with arts-based research methods in general, the introduction of student-generated metaphor into supervisory meetings can help to make the supervisory relationship more democratic and culturally sensitive, as the supervisee has free reign to bring whatever images speak most to her or him at that stage of the project (Charurua & Wicaksono, 2023).

4.1 | Current practice: Further case reports

A range of metaphors were generated by the second author over the course of his project and revisiting these for this paper years later immediately brought back memories of key points in the project and in the supervisory relationship. Such is the strength of metaphor, to quickly and clearly evoke where and how the supervisee is. As a supervisor, I (the first author) found this incredibly helpful, in terms of shaping my guidance or focus at each meeting. As indicated in the

literature (Denicolo et al., 2020b; Hon Kam, 1997; Lee, 2008), the needs of trainee researchers will vary over time—sometimes requiring more of a pastoral focus on confidence building or coaching, and sometimes more on training to build research skills. Student-generated metaphors provide the supervisor with a 'hotline' to the supervisee's current experience and thus their needs at each meeting.

The second author successfully completed his doctoral research (Cott, 2020), and the first author has since continued to use this method with her other trainees. The range of metaphors created in supervision continues to impress and delight. For example, a metaphor for generating the research question was 'not seeing clearly through the clouds'. The process of qualitative analysis was likened to 'a pot starting to bubble' or 'a ruminating cow', highlighting how qualitative research involves stirring, combining or chewing things over—even digesting data. Race metaphors for the research journey are common, including 'reaching the half-way mark' or 'the last few miles of a marathon' when preparing the draft for submission.

For the purposes of this paper, three current research supervisees were approached for feedback on their experience of using student-generated metaphors in research supervision. Supervisees were sent copies of previous supervision meeting minutes with their metaphors as prompts. They were then asked the following questions by correspondence:

- What was your experience of producing these for our meetings? And of how they were used in our sessions?
- Did it feel like a burden? Or was it helpful to you? Or both?
- What was unhelpful or helpful about it?

All chose to respond. Their responses are quoted here anonymously with permission. Metaphors used to express the experience of using student-generated metaphors in research supervision are underlined.

Student 1: I have found the use of metaphors in supervision a great tool to try and capture feelings and a snapshot of the present moment where I have found myself at that juncture of the research journey. In my experience, metaphors can take us deeper within ourselves, into a more exact awareness and understanding of our processes. But also, they can become multidimensional representations of experiences that are universal and therefore help to bring greater understanding by others, and in this instance you as my supervisor.

Student 2: I adored using the metaphors. I loved the reflexive process it invited, allowing me to go inwards and then express something in a creative, freeing, playful and truthful format. It felt very inviting and feeling to me. The metaphors are kind of tiny poems, and I would love to do more of it. I think it invites right hemisphere/big picture processing which even in this tiny soundbite form is a welcome relief from the academic rigour of the rest of the thesis process. I also felt cared for by you in your asking, as for me it suggested a sort of "ok but how are you really doing question" and acknowledges that (1) this is a process with many stages which might

feel different at each stage (2) that there is a beginning and, importantly an end. Really really love it. Couldn't recommend it more.

Student 3: My experience of producing metaphors was very positive as it engaged my creative side and helped to express my feelings better and more visually. I found it helpful that they were acknowledged in our sessions, as I felt more understood. No, it did not feel like a burden at all, I enjoyed it, and it was not time-consuming, just helpful. There was nothing unhelpful, and I found it helpful that expressing my feelings in this way somewhat helped to reduce stress, like painting a picture of my feelings.

5 | DISCUSSION

This paper sets out the evolution of the use of student-generated metaphor in research supervision. This method was co-produced from the start, and supervisees have been involved and engaged in providing feedback on its current use. Thus, in its implementation and evolution, this method reduced the power differential between supervisor and supervisee—a hierarchy that harkens back to the historical colonising dynamics of higher education (Charurua & Wicaksono, 2023). It should also be a flexible and culturally sensitive method, which could allow for supervisees from a diverse range of religious and language traditions to bring metaphors from the myths and legends of their cultures to the supervisory relationship, enhancing belonging and reducing dissonance between home and research environments (Charurua & Wicaksono, 2023; Hills et al., 2023). The method is disseminated here to enable immediate and widespread integration, play and experimentation within research supervision for counsellors, psychotherapists and counselling psychologists, and perhaps even research supervision more generally. It is envisioned that this method could work well in a variety of helping relationships, including clinical supervision or a mentoring relationship. It could perhaps work well within doctoral research supervision in non-therapeutic fields, providing an accessible method to working at relational depth and building an empathic supervisory relationship where supervisors are not also qualified therapists.

Possible limitations of this approach have been discussed elsewhere in the literature on the use of poetic language in therapy (Ramsey-Wade & Devine, 2018). Arts-based methods involving language or creative writing may be less accessible for people with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, those who had difficulty engaging with poetry or fiction in school, or those who speak English as a second language. However, as a metaphor can be very visual or image-based, and as this method primarily focuses on spoken dialogue, there are opportunities here to adjust this way of working according to supervisees' strengths.

Future practice-based research is now needed to explore the impact of student-generated metaphor in research supervision. This could involve administering valid and reliable outcome measures for the strength of the supervisory relationship to supervisory pairs who use this method and who do not use this method, to empirically evaluate whether using student-generated metaphor affects the quality of

the supervisory relationship at all. Timely completion of doctoral projects where student-generated metaphor was and was not used in supervision could also be compared, with the quality of the supervisory relationship acting as a potential mediator. Qualitative research with supervisees and supervisors using arts-based methods would also be particularly appropriate and an interesting way to unpack what student-generated metaphor brings to the experience of research supervision. Areas of exploration could include how best to elucidate and work with such metaphors, and how to make this process inclusive for supervisees from different cultures, language traditions, or with different ways of thinking or interacting with the world.

6 | A GUIDE FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

To enable replication in research and quick adoption in practice, here is a summary of our method of using student-generated metaphor in research supervision:

1. Invite the trainee to create a metaphor for this stage of the research project, or their current experience of the research process, as part of preparing the agenda for the next research supervision meeting.
   a. Invite them to expand this metaphor further in their own words. Avoid interpretation at this stage (and in general).
2. At the meeting, invite the trainee to tell you more about their metaphor—what it means and signifies for them. Reflect on what is being communicated here and use this to guide your interaction in that meeting.

A copy of a supervision meeting template is included in Appendices, for illustration.

7 | CONCLUSION

Playing with student-generated metaphors in supervision provides an accessible method for doctoral research supervisors from any field to provide empathic support to trainee researchers. It is particularly useful when supervising the research of trainee counsellors, psychotherapists or counselling psychologists, who are accustomed to reflective practice and likely to expect a strong pastoral component within the research supervision relationship. All doctoral research supervision could be enhanced by a greater focus on the quality of the supervisory relationship; this method provides a quick and simple way of doing so, even for those supervisors who are not trained in counselling skills. Further research is now needed to measure its impact on the quality of the supervisory relationship and timely doctoral completions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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APPENDIX

SUPERVISION MEETING TEMPLATE

Meeting date

Attendees:

Apologies:

Personal tutoring [experience of/any issues in modules so far this year; progress/issues in placements/personal therapy (if relevant); any other personal, health or well-being issues that the supervisee would like to raise]:

Research

Metaphor for this stage/current experience of the research process:

'This stage of the project is like....'

'What kind of x is that x?'

Progress the supervisee has made since the last meeting:

Review of the project plan, recording completed tasks and agreeing new actions:

A review of any publications, plans to publish or other dissemination activity:

A review of the supervisee's professional development needs and training opportunities:

Date of next meeting:

Agenda for next meeting:

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Christine Ramsey-Wade, CPsychol, AFBPsS, SFHEA, works as an Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol). She has delivered poetry therapy in groups, and she has researched and lectured on the therapeutic benefits of writing and poetic or figurative language for many years. She teaches and provides research supervision on the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology programme at UWE Bristol. Forthcoming publications include chapters in *The Routledge Handbook of Arts and Health* and *The Art that Tells the Truth: Creative Methods in Guidance and Counselling*.

Dr Matthew Cott completed a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Counselling at Roehampton Institute London, a Master of Science in Occupational Psychology at Birkbeck College and a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at UWE Bristol. He is now a Chartered Psychologist with the British Psychological Society and an HCPC Registered Psychologist and is currently working primarily in physical health psychology. Special interests include the use of metaphor and creative expressive methods in therapy and supervision, and meditation.