Journal of Academic Language & Learning
Vol. 19, No. 1, 2025, 61-79. ISSN 1835-5196
https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/985

Article

"She was almost like an older sister": PhD students' perceptions of a coaching program and implications for institutions

Frank Song and Juliet F. Lum

Graduate Research Academy, Macquarie University, Macquarie Park NSW 2109, Australia.

Email: frank.song@mq.edu.au and juliet.lum@mq.edu.au

(Received 26 September, 2024. Published online 3 March, 2025.)

Doctoral training has traditionally been delivered primarily in one-to-one mode, but as the PhD learning ecology has expanded beyond the supervisory space (Lum & Mowbray, 2024), one-to-one coaching has emerged as a promising intervention for developing PhD students' personal and professional skills, such as self-management, self-efficacy, resilience, and confidence to complete. While some researchers recommend embedding coaching within supervision (McCarthy, 2012; Wilson & James, 2022), others emphasise the benefits of external coaches (Godskesen & Kobayashi, 2016; Lech et al., 2022). Yet how PhD students perceive external coaches, how "external" coaches need to be, and whether such resource-intensive programs can be made feasible for institutions have not been explored. We report on a 12-week PhD Coaching Program which offered research students one-to-one sessions with PhD-holding, professional (non-faculty) staff. Reporting on their experiences in surveys and interviews, coachees' perceptions of their coaches and the coaching sessions suggest that a contained period of individualised coaching by these staff can effectively complement supervision. Coachees commented on the personalised holistic support, likening it to that provided by a mentor, counsellor, tutor or sibling. That the coach was external to the student's enrolling department contributed to a flattened hierarchy and fostered a safe environment to share struggles, while their holding of a PhD lent credibility to their support. Universities' PhD-qualified, professional staff represent a unique and sustainable source of coaches, whose academic and professional experience within and beyond academia can be leveraged to support the next generation of researchers in the form of one-to-one coaching.

Key Words: one-to-one support, PhD coaching, professional skills development, doctoral supervision, university professional staff.

1. Introduction

In higher education, it is within PhD programs that one is most likely to find one-to-one instruction as the primary mode of training. Even in countries following the North American model, where doctoral programs include several years of coursework, graduate students are still assigned a supervisor or advisor with whom they are expected to meet regularly on a one-to-one basis to receive guidance on their research project. The master-apprentice model of PhD training has, however, been criticised in recent times as outdated and inadequate for twenty-first century

doctoral candidates, who need not only to complete their research projects but also to position themselves for research careers beyond academia (Carter & Laurs, 2014; Nichol et al., 2022). For many, the doctoral journey is "ambiguous, unsettled, or unresolved" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 998), encompassing a multitude of challenges across intellectual, contextual, and personal levels (Eliott, 2022), and the attrition (non-completion) rate remains alarmingly high (Larcombe et al., 2022; van Rooij et al., 2021), reaching up to 70% (Jones, 2013).

Over the last couple of decades, it has become widely recognised that doctoral candidates benefit from sources of research training and support beyond their supervisors (Carter & Laurs, 2014; Lum & Mowbray 2024; Sharmini & Spronken-Smith, 2020) and evolving national research agendas have offered incentives for institutions to provide this additional support, such as the Australian Government's Research Training Scheme initiated in 2002 and its *Initiatives to enhance the professional development of research students* (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014) and the UK "Roberts' money" implemented in 2003 (reviewed in Hodge et al., 2011). In most universities operating in the western tradition PhD candidates are now offered skills training and wider support through graduate research schools, library staff, careers and employment services, and wellbeing or counselling units.

One-to-one or "personal" coaching has emerged as a highly effective intervention strategy to enhance performance and self-management skills in high school, undergraduate (Chaplin, 2007; Lim et al., 2023; Marino et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2011), and graduate students (Griffiths, 2006; Lech et al., 2018). Academic coaching has been defined as an "individualised practice of asking students reflective, motivation-based questions, providing opportunities for formal self-assessment, sharing effective strategies, and co-creating a tangible plan that promotes accountability" (Lim et al., 2023, p. 70). It differs from academic advising in that a coach is not required to have content expertise or expected to provide answers to students' questions and problems; rather, "with a coach's expert facilitation, coachees create their own agenda for change, reflecting that they are the best experts in what is ideal for themselves" (Deiorio et al., 2022, pp. 1-2). One-to-one coaching is not new to the doctoral space; almost a decade ago, Godskesen and Kobayashi (2016) observed that one-to-one dissertation coaching services were being offered all around the world to doctoral students by "support centres" within or external to universities. Research has shown that one-to-one coaching can build PhD students' resilience and time management skills and reduce self-sabotaging behaviours and attrition rates (Godskesen & Kobayashi, 2016; Kearns et al., 2008; Lech et al., 2018).

The doctoral education literature suggests two approaches for who should be coaches. The first approach suggests that doctoral supervisors should integrate coaching strategies into supervision meetings (McCarthy, 2012). Recently, Nichol et al. (2022) adapted an existing coaching model for embedding coaching in doctoral supervision and identified the skills and responsibilities that supervisors-cum-coaches need. However, given the increasingly heavy workload pressure supervisors face with teaching, research, outreach and administrative expectations from neo-liberal university agendas, a potential concern remains whether PhD supervisors have capacity to coach students in areas such as resilience, stress tolerance, time management and motivation, in addition to advising on discipline content, reviewing drafts, collaboratively co-authoring papers, and acting as publication brokers (Thomson & Kamler, 2013).

A different approach has coaching provided by coaches external to the supervisor relationship, with a specific focus on PhD students' professional life, for example, post-degree career plans and goals beyond meeting PhD research milestones. According to Godskesen and Kobayashi (2016), because external coaches have "no expertise, interest nor intent to judge the work of the student" (p. 149), they can foster the atmosphere of trust which is conducive for the student to share "sensitive matters, reveal doubts and show weakness" (p. 149). Griffiths (2006) suggests that external coaching succeeds because of the collaborative "equal partnership" relationship between the coach and coachee, one in which each party holds power or has control over different

aspects of the relationship. For example, the coach has the responsibility for or holds power in steering the coaching session and offering advice, whereas the coachee holds power in determining the topic for discussion and making decisions. Furthermore, as highlighted by Lech et al. (2018), the tendency of many PhD students to engage in self-sabotaging behaviours (Kearns et al., 2008) and to feel like imposters in their fields (Kearns, 2015) can impact not only their thesis progress but also their capacity to interact with their supervisors and other faculty staff. Rather than threaten or compete with supervisory support, Godskesen and Kobayashi's (2016) study suggests that externally-delivered coaching can positively impact the supervisor-student relationship.

It appears from the literature, then, that offering coaching to PhD students by individuals who are external to the student's supervisory team may have advantages over expecting all supervisors to provide this kind of support; indeed, Pearson and Brew (2002) argue that supervisors do not actually coach, as their "coaching strategies" are more akin to mentoring than to coaching. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, "mentoring" is typically applied to relationships where a senior or more experienced professional shares advice, insider-knowledge and/or career-enhancing opportunities to a less experienced member of their profession, whereas coaching involves "unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance [and] helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (Whitmore, 2017, p. 7; see also Guccione & Hutchinson, 2021). At the very least, one-to-one support from an external coach can be a useful complementary resource for doctoral students. Existing studies of PhD coaching, however, tend not to specify how "external" the coaches ought to be or how feasible it is to expect institutions to provide such a service; for instance, whether coaches need to be completely disconnected from the student's university, or could be employed within the student's school or institution but simply outside of his/her doctoral advisory group. Similarly, scant details are provided on the coaches' coaching expertise or training; their academic credentials and background; and their research experience. Whether any of these details of the coach would affect a coachee's perceptions or impact the effectiveness of the coaching intervention, is unknown. In fact, there is little research on PhD students' perceptions of the different individuals with whom they meet one-to-one for advice and support and how they view their respective roles, particularly vis-à-vis their doctoral supervisors.

To investigate PhD student coachees' perceptions of an "external coach", we initiated a 12-week one-to-one PhD coaching program with the following eligibility criteria for the coaches: PhD holders, employed as professional (non-academic/faculty) staff at the PhD students' university. Through a series of surveys administrated before, during and after the program and semi-structured interviews, we elicited coachees' perceptions not only on what (if anything) they gained from the program but importantly: what role(s) they saw their coach as assuming (Research Question 1); what impact (if any) their coach's educational credentials had on them (RQ 2); and what impact (if any) their coach's employment position had on them (RQ 3). The responses to these three research questions could assist institutions in allocating time, funding, and resources more efficiently and effectively to support PhD students' research progress and degree completion and their development as confident, well-balanced, and resilient researchers.

2. Method

This section begins with an overview of the PhD Coaching Program (PCP), an intervention for doctoral students trialled at a medium-sized Australian university in the first semester of 2024. We describe the participants, the data, and the analytical methods used to investigate coachees' perceptions of the external coach, particularly in comparison to their supervisors.

2.1. The PhD Coaching Program (PCP)

The PCP was an intervention whose aim was to enhance doctoral candidates' capacity to make progress on their projects by improving skills such as project management, self-management, self-awareness, accountability, resilience, stress tolerance, and adaptability. The program was

advertised to all PhD candidates enrolled at the University by email, posters, and other online announcements. Promotional material included an invitation to participate in the research project, emphasising that participation was not a requirement of joining the PCP itself. To be accepted as a coachee in the program, students needed to meet the following eligibility requirements:

- currently enrolled in a PhD at the University,
- have progressed beyond their first year of candidature, and
- have not engaged in the Program within 12 months of their current iteration.

Supervisors of students applying to participate in the program were sent an information sheet clarifying the goals of the program and emphasising how the role of the coach differed from that of the supervisor; the actual wording used was, "a coach is not intended to be a substitute for the supervisory team. Coaches will not provide subject-specific advice, feedback on research content, review drafts, or advise on writing and communication."

PCP coaches were staff members employed at the PhD students' university. As mentioned above, to be eligible as a coach, the staff member needed to be employed on a continuing (i.e., permanent) professional (i.e., non-academic or non-faculty) contract at the University and to hold a PhD. Coaches were not paid a fee but assumed coaching responsibilities on top of their regular work, so written approval to participate was sought from the staff member's direct manager. Fourteen staff members agreed to take part in the PCP, and thirteen progressed to coaching a student. Coaches provided personal details to the program organiser such as the academic discipline of their PhD degree, their work experience both inside and outside academia, and their current role at the university. There was a mix of male and female coaches representing a range of academic discipline backgrounds, from Science and Medicine to Humanities, Arts and Social Science. The coaches were employed in different business units across the University, e.g., Student Access and Success, Teaching Development, the University's pathway college, and the graduate research school. All thirteen coaches had completed their doctoral studies at Australian universities, although this was not a criterion for participation.

Over the 12 weeks, coachees were recommended to meet with their coach eight times for one-to-one meetings of around 30 minutes duration. Meeting times and locations (either in-person or online) were agreed upon by each coach-coachee pair and scheduled by the coachee. In-person meetings took place on the University campus, usually in meeting rooms.

Before the 12 weeks of coaching meetings, coachees and coaches were required to attend separate introductory sessions. Both sessions provided an overview of the program's objectives, the respective responsibilities of coachees and coaches, and the format and expectations for typical coaching meetings. The session for coaches also included a training component led by an external International Coaching Federation-accredited coach trainer, which clarified the coach's boundaries (vis-à-vis PhD supervisors, psychological counsellors/therapists, careers advisors, researcher developers, etc.) and outlined specific strategies and models that could be used in coaching meetings.

After the introductory session, coachees completed a Pre-Program Survey, detailing their thesis goals for the 12-week period, the professional and personal skills they aimed to enhance, and the challenges they were facing at the time. Coaches were then paired with a coachee by the program organiser, roughly based on an alignment between the coach's professional background and the coachee's goals and expectations for the program. Where possible, students were not matched with coaches of the same disciplinary background to reinforce the role and boundaries of the coach: being from a different discipline, coaches were less likely to provide advice on disciplinary content (supervisor's role) or disciplinary careers (mentor's role).

At the end of the 12 weeks, coachees and coaches were surveyed on how they felt about the coaching program, what they had gained, and the program's strengths and weaknesses. Two weeks later, all coachees and coaches were invited to a face-to-face celebration event, where

highlights (aggregated data only) from the Post-Program Surveys were shared and appreciation was expressed particularly to those who had volunteered their time to be coaches.

2.2. Participants

We used a purposive sampling technique to recruit participants from the PCP coachees, with seven out of the 13 consenting to participate in the study. As a result, our sample size was constrained by the limited number of PCP participants. As "determining the sample size of qualitative projects is … often a pragmatic exercise" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 211), we purposefully aligned our sampling approach and sample size with the exploratory nature, scope and purpose of the study, while also taking into account local constraints. The seven participants were from a range of academic disciplines; their disciplines and other demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. Interestingly, all coachees in our study identified as female. All but one were enrolled full-time and studied on campus at least some of the time.

Table 1. Research participants' demographics.

Participant pseudonym	Discipline	Study location	Student status	Gender	Study load	Language background
Daniela	Physiotherapy	On campus	Domestic	F	Full time	English L1
Maira	Computing	Mixed	Domestic	F	Full time	EAL
Prisha	Cultural studies	On campus	International	F	Full time	EAL
Cathy	Accounting	Mixed	International	F	Full time	EAL
Haley	Linguistics	On campus	International	F	Full time	EAL
Amber	Finance	On campus	International	F	Full time	EAL
Lissa	Education	Offsite	Domestic	F	Part time	English L1

2.3. Data collection

The study adopted a primarily qualitative design, suited as it is to exploring individuals' perceptions and identifying nuances in perspectives. A variety of data were collected at different stages of the 12-week program: before the program (Pre-Program Survey), during the program (Weekly Surveys), and after the program (Post-Program Survey and semi-structured interviews), as outlined in Table 2 below.

The Pre-Program Surveys elicited coachees' demographic data, their expectations, and their thesis-related goals for the 12-week program. Weekly Surveys were administered online via LimeSurvey (Version 3.28.66). The Weekly Surveys tracked key aspects of the one-to-one coaching meetings, such as attendance, meeting length, student satisfaction, challenges discussed, and action items. These data served as a broader context for understanding the ongoing coaching meetings and enabled the authors to ask targeted questions in the subsequent interviews.

The Post-Program Survey, administered via LimeSurvey, focused on students' perceptions of their coaching experiences and their coach's roles. Survey questions relevant to this study were as follows:

- Overall, how did the support you received from your coach differ from support you have received from other sources at the university, such as your Supervisor, your Faculty/Department, the library, or the Graduate Research Academy?
- What did you like most about the PhD Coaching Program?
- How could the PhD Coaching Program be improved?

Because relying solely on the surveys would have limited the depth and breadth of coachees' responses and risked missing out on themes that are best shared through free speech (Brannen & O'Connell, 2016), follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview questions asked of each coachee were as follows:

- Overall, how did you find the coaching experience?
- Did the program surprise you in any way?
- Were there any ways that your coach or the coaching program provided you with help, insights or guidance that you couldn't get elsewhere?
- What did you know about your coach's background, credentials and their official role at [this University]? Do you think those affected you in any way?

Seven interviews (one per student) were conducted over Microsoft Teams video call, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The transcripts, eventually totalling 30,223 words, were automatically generated by MS Teams and manually checked and cleaned by both authors.

Table 2. Data gathered for the study.

Data instrument	Number of questions	Estimated time to complete	Total analysed
Pre-Program Survey	15	10 minutes	7
Weekly Survey	10	5 minutes	84
Post-Program Survey	23	10 minutes	7
Interview	7	30-45 minutes	7

2.4. Analytical methods

The datasets were analysed separately. Given the study's emphasis on its qualitative component, this section focuses on the analysis of the qualitative data, namely responses to open-ended questions in the Pre-Program and Post-Program Surveys, and the Interview data.

Investigator triangulation was implemented as a measure to enhance the trustworthiness of the data analysis process and, in turn, the findings. The authors independently read the interview transcripts multiple times to develop a thorough understanding of the data. They both conducted thematic analysis and then met to review, discuss, and scrutinise the accuracy of the coding and reach a consensus on the themes. The analysis began with initial coding (Charmaz, 2006), using the interviewees' original words to identify emerging patterns and meanings. During this process, codes were constantly compared, and codes with similar meanings were then sorted into groups. Each group was labelled with a theme. For instance:

Excerpt from Lissa's interview	Code	Theme
*She's just there to support me. She was almost like an **older sister** that had been through the process and come out at the other end.*	older sister	Coach's role

This process, akin to focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), ensured that themes were internally consistent and distinct from one another. Themes were also cross-referenced with previous findings, allowing them to be both grounded in the data and informed by existing literature. Themes were established to represent the overarching patterns and meanings within the data. Finally, connections between the main themes were explored to integrate them and address the research questions.

3. Results

This section integrates the key findings and themes that emerged from the multiple datasets, namely the Weekly Survey, the Post-Program Survey, and the post-program interviews. We report on coachees' perceptions of what they gained from the PCP, and then present findings related to each of the three Research Questions, namely their perceptions of the coach's role (RQ1), the impact of the coach's educational credentials (RQ2), and non-academic employment status (RQ3) on the support they received.

3.1. Coachees' perceptions of the benefits of the PCP

Each coachee completed the Weekly Survey each week, regardless of whether they met with their coach that week. So, while 84 surveys were gathered, only 45 meetings were conducted. On average, coaching pairs met six times across the 12 weeks. According to the weekly surveys, the average duration of a session was between 30 and 45 minutes, with none of the participants reporting a session taking less than the recommended 30 minutes.

Without exception, students were either "Satisfied" ($n = 25$) or "Very Satisfied" ($n = 20$) with the meeting, pointing to their coach's emotional support, personal connection, practical advice, and sense of accountability as contributing to their satisfaction.

To the question about what was most liked about the PCP, responses consistently highlighted the benefits of the "individualised", "personalised" or "tailored" support provided by these sessions with support focused on their personal and professional development.

In terms of program improvement, coachees suggested extending the duration of both the program and the sessions to provide them with more suppport. Students also recommended allowing for occasional check-ins or follow-up sessions beyond the program to ensure their sustained progress.

3.2. Coachee's perceptions of coach vs. supervisor roles

When asked how the coach's support differed from any they had received from other sources at the university, coachees' responses emphasised that their supervisors focused primarily on providing advice related to their research project, whereas their coach's support focused on practical, professional skills development, networking skills, and strategic career advice. Coaches also took a holistic approach, providing mental and emotional support that helped coachees manage both academic and personal challenges along their PhD journey.

These themes recurred in the subsequent interviews, further illustrating coachees' perceptions of the role of the coach and the differences between coaching and PhD supervision. The distinctions are organised into two categories. The first category manifested in the focus or scope of support. As Amber noted, supervision prioritises the development of "hard skills" required to conduct academic research, whereas coaching facilitates the development of "soft skills" needed for professional and personal growth.

> *The support from the supervisor [is] mainly about hard skill, or academic stuff. So right now, my coaching is more about soft skill. It means how I can improve myself like in a professional way. So the skills I learned from him about how to network effectively, how to keep continuous learning, how to manage my stress, deadline, and time.*

This distinction was also exemplified in Maira's experience. Maira mentioned that although she was confident in her presentation skills, she sought coaching to enhance her social and networking skills for interacting with other academics at conferences.

> *I was preparing for a conference. With the supervisor, my discussion was mostly focused on my research area, like, how well we can present this thing in the conference, or how well we can convince the public that our research is very viable… But I'm very good at presentation. When it comes to going and*

> *asking somebody about how they think or what's their perspective about my work, or maybe asking someone about the collaboration of my work with theirs, this was something I really learned from my coach.*

While the coach training emphasised the coach's boundaries vis-à-vis other 1:1 support available to PhD students, some coachees reported that their coach provided a range of advice, from academic to career-related to emotional. For instance:

> *She's a tutor and also a mentor. Tutor is someone who gives you messages on how to do research; how to look at your PhD projects; how to push your PhD project [forward]. A mentor is someone who cares about your mental wellbeing. I think the coach not just cares about my PhD project, but also my perspective on my worries about a future career … So she's a bit combined.*

Haley used the terms tutor and mentor to emphasise the holistic support she felt her coach provided. The guidance she perceived on conducting and progressing her research was akin to that from a tutor, and the career-related support and advice was akin to that from a mentor.

Haley also expressed that her supervisors seemed unwilling to engage when she shared her concerns about future job prospects with them; in contrast, her coach addressed her stress and worries and also shifted her focus onto what skills she could start developing now, as areas within her control.

> *[My supervisors] did not give me a direct answer… They only said "We can figure [that] out; oh, you can find a job." So they just mentioned it very briefly. They did not seem to engage in it. I talked with my coach about the career problem, [because] I feel very stressed when I think of finding a job, I cannot get a way out. She reminded me that maybe I overthink about the future; I worry too much about the future because the future is uncertain. She suggested maybe I need to focus on what kind of skill I can gain during the PhD, and this kind of skill is unique and irreplaceable.*

In contrast to Haley's perception of her coach's approach, Amber recognised that her coach would refrain from giving her direct advice, but built her confidence and agency to problem-solve. Her coach actively listened to her challenges and occasionally shared his experiences, which inspired her to brainstorm solutions, make her own decisions, and take autonomous actions.

> *He's not directly telling me something. He's the one who unlocks my potential. He kind of helped me to find solution myself but he unlocked the key [to questions that] I haven't had that answer before. But when talking with him and listening from him, and then I found the answer myself.*

The second category centred on emotional support, as reflected by the roles students attributed to their coaches: *therapist*, *friend*, or *sibling*. Cathy likened the role of her coach to that of her *psychologist*, noting that she felt comfortable sharing personal topics. This comfort and confidence reflected a deep level of trust and openness, which led her also to see the coach as a *friend*, someone she could confide in.

> *I feel that I'm talking to my psychologist. I feel confident to talk to her [my coach]. I don't feel ashamed to talk about my relationship with my supervisors, my relationship with my colleagues, or the problems that I've been facing in my research. I think she has become like a friend that I open up myself to. I've never done that before.*

Interestingly, Cathy emphasised that the clinical psychologist she was also seeing acknowledged the importance of the coach's holistic support and recommended she continue the coaching sessions. Cathy even recognised her coach's perspective or strategies being adopted by her psychologist:

> *I do have a psychologist. She always asked about my coach. Yes, she recommended me [to work with a coach] because she looked at my personal life. The coach is more focused on these deadlines, my PhD, academic themes, and my PhD program journey. And it's great because I can share with her some perspectives that I got from my coach. Sometimes she works from the coach's perspective.*

Lissa, an offsite, part-time PhD student, took it further and viewed her coach as an "*older sister*" who had been through a similar journey. The student appreciated her coach listening actively and with interest to her current situation and struggles and then collaborating on finding solutions.

> *She's just there to support me. She was almost like an older sister that had been through the process and come out at the other end. I think my coach's greatest skill is she listens. She was just like: OK, tell me what you're dealing with; tell me how you're struggling with that; and then let's work on how we can improve that moving forward.*

The diverse roles of coaches, as perceived by their coachees, resonate with the personalised support coaches provide to accommodate the specific circumstances, needs, and challenges of different students.

Coachees felt that their coaches took an holistic approach, which allowed them to be seen as whole persons with struggles and emotional wellbeing. Cathy shared that her supervisors sometimes overlooked her as a person and the obstacles she encountered and disregarded her struggles as excuses for not putting in effort and making progress. In contrast, the coach was more open to hearing about her challenges and offering advice on how to overcome obstacles and maintain momentum on her project.

> *The coaching is totally different from my supervisors because with my supervisors, we are just turning to – attending my thesis goals. But we don't look at the person that's behind that PhD, who is doing that PhD and faces some problems as well. For example, if I've been facing some problems and I'd share* [those] *with him* [supervisor] *and the next time I won't be* [as] *productive as I was last year, he'd say that I'm just giving him excuses for not finalising that paper. But with the coach it's different because I share my personal problems and also my paper's deadline. And she would look at both sides and try to* [help me] *find a way to overcome these issues that I've been facing and also attend to deadlines.*

3.3. Coachees' perceptions of their coach's academic credentials

All participants reported that having a coach with a PhD was either important or very important (n = 2 and n = 5, respectively) in their perceptions of the support. The interviews reinforced this sentiment, as coachees expressed that their coach's PhD experience enabled them to understand first-hand the challenges and pressures they were facing and to provide practical guidance in completing the degree. For instance, Daniela noted that her coach's PhD experience provided her with knowledge of resources that addressed her specific challenges.

> *Definitely their experience from their PhD was useful … It was the benefit of having someone that I can discuss how I'm currently working through a problem and they can then point, have you considered doing this? Have you looked at this resource? So yes, having that background where they know where to look for other ways of problem solving.*

It may appear from this extract that the boundaries between the coach and others such as the PhD supervisor, researcher developer or careers advisor occasionally blurred. However, rather than refuse to discuss certain problems, coaches were encouraged to hear whatever complex challenges their coachee brought to the session, and it may be possible that coachees perceived as advice

what were in fact active listening questions intended by the coach to prompt further exploration and new perspectives.

Lissa valued her coach's shared understanding of the emotional challenges along the PhD journey. The participant emphasised that she would not have respected or trusted the advice from a coach who had not been through a PhD journey.

> *She explained that she's got a PhD, so I knew immediately she knows the struggle. And she got to the end. I wouldn't have respected someone if they hadn't had a PhD. ... And if someone hadn't felt those feelings of being overwhelmed and dealing with such a longitudinal research project, I probably wouldn't have ... not only maybe listened as much, but they probably wouldn't have had such practical advice to help me get through it either, right. I just don't think they would have been equipped.*

3.4. Coachees' perceptions of their coach's professional status

Participants' perceptions of their coach's employment status as a non-academic/faculty staff were mixed. Four participants reported it was important while two were "not sure" and one felt it was "not important at all". Lissa felt a certain freedom in her coaching sessions because her coach had no responsibility for assessing her research or ensuring her project milestones were being met; similarly, she felt confident to problem-solve because the coach had no expertise in her research area and treated her as the expert and manager of the project. Unlike her supervisors who "just don't have the time", her non-academic coach "made the time" to encourage her to come up with her own insights and solutions to the challenges she was facing:

> *For me, [my coach's professional status] actually took the pressure off. I knew I wasn't talking to someone that was going to judge where I was at in my project, how long I was going to take to finish. There was none of that.*
>
> *She wasn't telling me. She was like drawing from my experience in the project as the primary researcher to get it from me, she drew it out and the supervisors just don't have time for that. But she did. She made the time. Yeah, it was very specific to my project. That's why the coaching is good. It's one-to-one figuring out with the person.*

Haley did not believe that a coach's employment category (academic or professional) would affect their effectiveness as a coach, but like Lissa, her response suggested that she felt that non-faculty staff have more time to engage in coaching practice than academic staff.

> *I don't think so* [i.e., that the coach's professional status had an impact]. *It does not mean those who are doing academic will work better* [as a coach]. *Probably someone who is doing academic is too busy to take care of my well-being. Yeah, I don't think that's important.*

While it is the case that university professional staff can have just as heavy workloads and as many projects and pressing deadlines as academic staff, the impression that these two and perhaps many PhD students have is that academic staff tend to be "*too busy to take care of* [students'] *wellbeing*".

4. Discussion

Our surveys and interviews with PCP coachees confirmed the benefits of one-to-one coaching for PhD students highlighted in previous studies (e.g., Godskesen & Kobayashi, 2016; Lech et al., 2022), and also revealed a range of roles that coachees perceived their coaches as assuming in the sessions: tutor, mentor, psychologist, friend, and older sibling. These perceived roles of coaches hint at the diverse challenges, deep needs, and complex circumstances that PhD students encounter throughout candidature. While some of these role labels may suggest that coaches

overstepped boundaries into areas in which they may lack expertise, it is important to remember that these were coachees' impressions based on how they felt in their coaching sessions, not necessarily how the coaches presented themselves or conducted the session.

In the rest of this section, we suggest that the effectiveness of PhD coaching sessions in developing students' personal and professional skills is related to how they differ from academic supervision meetings in two key ways: focus, and interpersonal and power dynamics. We then present implications for institutions considering offering their PhD cohort a one-to-one coaching program that complements one-to-one supervision.

4.1. Focus

Our findings indicated that coachees perceive coaches as playing a distinct role that complements rather than competes or overlaps with the traditional responsibilities of supervisors. The roles could remain distinct because of the goals and topics discussed in the respective meetings. In supervisory meetings, supervisors were seen by coachees (e.g., Amber, quoted in Section 3.2) as dedicated to overseeing the student's research project and developing their expertise in their field, whereas in the PCP, coaches were seen as supporting students to develop self-management skills and to find ways to overcome challenges that were impacting their PhD progress and that they were facing in and beyond the academic settings. For instance, Lissa felt that, unlike her PhD supervisor, her coach was "*not gonna … care whether* [she's] *got any papers or* [she was] *writing chapters*"; that was not the aim of coaching. Cathy's impression was that her PhD supervisors' focus was solely on research progress and outputs and they were not interested in the "*person that's behind that PhD*"; indeed, her expressions of personal problems were regarded by her doctoral supervisors as "excuses" for not meeting thesis deadlines, which could be interpreted as irrelevant to supervision meetings. In contrast, Cathy felt her coaching sessions reframed her personal problems as relevant and legitimate obstacles that needed attention to overcome. The freedom to devote time to discussing personal problems in the coaching meetings was likely a result, as suggested by Godskesen and Kobayashi (2016), of the coach having no stake or investment in the quality or quantity of the student's research outputs.

While not all PhD students would perceive their supervisors as unwilling or unable to empathise or discuss personal challenges they are facing, it is not surprising that many would sense this boundary in their interactions. Doctoral supervisors are expected and uniquely qualified to advise research students in their specific disciplinary fields, which can limit their involvement beyond research advising (Martinsuo & Turkulainen, 2011). This narrow focus can be reinforced by the institutional emphasis on research output metrics, such as publications, grant success, and PhD completion rates. Moreover, typical academic career paths do not equip faculty staff with skills needed for mentoring, coaching, or fostering personal development in others. As Nichol et al. (2022) point out, many PhD supervisors are not offered or refuse to undertake formal training in these areas. And while there are PhD supervisors who can and do actively provide personal and professional skills support in addition to academic advice (Riby & Rees, 2024), our findings suggest that it can also be effectively provided through appropriately trained university staff external to the supervisory team.

4.2. Interpersonal and power dynamics

In their Post-Program Surveys, all participants reported that coaches created a psychologically safe environment where they could comfortably discuss personal and professional challenges. Research shows that personal challenges, competing demands, perfectionism, feelings of inadequacy and incompetence, and imposter syndrome have significant impacts on PhD students' research progress and ability to complete their doctoral studies (Kearns et al., 2008), yet such struggles are difficult to share with colleagues and peers and especially with superiors such as supervisors. Creating a safe space for open dialogue fosters greater self-awareness and self-regulation, which – rather than reinforcing feelings of inadequacy or incompetence – can enhance students'

self-efficacy and agency (Sun & Cheng, 2022) and empower them to take control of their research journeys. Interview results further illustrated this process as coachees highlighted the unique interpersonal dynamics in their coaching relationship and their perceptions of the coach as a friend, sounding board, or even older sister. We suggest that this psychologically safe environment was a result of two factors: the reduced power difference that is possible to achieve in an independent coaching relationship (Griffiths, 2006) and the delivery of consistent one-to-one support over an extended period.

The relationship between students and their supervisors is shaped by the role of supervisors and the academic and disciplinary hierarchies they represent, which contribute to a power imbalance that prevails in their interactions. As mentioned above, supervisors have a vested interest in their student's thesis, sharing responsibility for its quality, progress, completion, and outputs. This interest is increasingly fuelled by co-authoring publications with students during their candidature (Wang et. al., 2024). Even after graduation, many PhD students continue to rely on their supervisors' networking and references to boost their career prospects, which further intensifies these dynamics.

Related to Research Question 3 about the coach's employment position, it appears that coaches' non-academic status positively impacted the interpersonal and power dynamic in a PhD coaching relationship. One contributing factor is that coaches have no stake or role in assessing their coachees' academic outputs, research quality or performance. In addition, in our study, none of the coaches worked in the same department, school, or faculty as their coachee; nor did they have any connection to their coachees' academic discipline. This distance may have reduced the likelihood for potential biases or conflicts of interest to interfere with coach-coachee interactions, and was more conducive to fostering a balanced, non-hierarchical relationship between them (Godskesen & Kobayashi, 2016; Griffiths, 2006). This non-hierarchical relationship we argue is an important feature of the program as power imbalances are increasingly being recognised as a contentious issue in the evolving neo-liberal doctoral educational context. While the role of supervisors remains critical, PhD programs have become more structured and standardised, leading to institutional involvement in monitoring students' progress as well as expanded support from other academic and professional staff (McAlpine et al., 2020). The hierarchical culture within departments has also been criticised, suggesting that an egalitarian structure can foster a more inclusive and vibrant intellectual climate and promote student wellbeing (Ryan et al., 2022). In this context, the more equal coach-coachee relationship can play a key role. Given their focus in fostering students' professional and personal growth and maintaining wellbeing, coaches can serve as a critical support mechanism to contribute to students' completion, retention, and satisfaction, key priorities in contemporary neo-liberal doctoral education discourse (McAlpine et al., 2020).

Related to Research Question 2 about the impact of coaches' academic credentials on coachees, our findings indicate all participants regarded their coach's PhD credentials as an asset in the PhD coaching setting, as it implied that they themselves had developed the personal and professional skills required to complete a PhD and find employment post-PhD, and it lent credibility and weight to their advice, questioning, and sharing.

The PCP's duration also appeared to contribute to trust. Unlike many one-to-one support services offered to university students, the PCP provided frequent and consistent support across a semester, allowing the building of rapport with the same coach, as well as time for students to reflect on their behaviours and thinking, build momentum, and consolidate their learning for long-term impact beyond the program. Furthermore, as structured reflection practices for engaging students in their personal and professional development have been highlighted as a fundamental component in the development of graduate attributes (see Manathunga et al., 2007), such development may also support the building of trust that the sessions were worthwhile. That coaches were able to build trust with their coachee in just six to eight 30-minute sessions may also reflect the

effectiveness of the coaches' training with its emphasis on active listening and strengthening students' agency. At the same time, the 12-week program distinguished it from PhD supervision which extends across the entire duration of candidature; the contained (time-restricted) duration of the PCP meant that students were not only likely to remain committed to coaching meetings but also less likely to grow dependent on their coach for accountability or guidance; rather they would be motivated to develop their own problem-solving and self-management skills. While it is worth considering students' suggestion to extend the program in the future to allow for a longer period of support and sustained progress (see Section 3.1), restricting the program to 12 weeks can make the program more feasible for coaches and sustainable in the long term, as will be described in the next section.

4.3. Recommendations for institutions, graduate research schools and academic learning centres

Given its effectiveness and practicality, we propose that structured one-to-one coaching programs such as the PCP be integrated into universities' existing doctoral training programs to complement supervision. Our study suggests that externally-delivered PhD coaching works particularly well when the coaches themselves hold PhDs. Whether coaches are employed in an academic or non-academic role seems less important, but they need to be sufficiently distant from the coachee's academic department or school to foster the ideal environment of minimal power difference and disinterest in academic outcomes or research outputs. It may be possible that academics from outside the student's department/school could function as effective coaches. On the other hand, peer or "near-peer" mentors may not be suitable as PhD coaches; while fellow students may be well placed to provide advice based on direct experience (Lim et al., 2020), they lack the credibility implied by PhD credentials, which were highly valued by the PhD students participating in the PCP.

Our findings also suggest that all stakeholders in the PhD learning ecology (Lum & Mowbray, 2024), namely PhD students, coaches, supervisors, researcher developers and other support providers, are best served when there is a clear understanding of each person's role. Clarification of roles – particularly of the coach vis-à-vis the supervisor – and program goals should be emphasised in pre-program communications, documents for PhD supervisors, coaches' training sessions, and at coachees' introductory sessions. Similarly, to maintain the focus on professional and self-management skills, coaching should be kept distinct from the provision of academic literacy support. Coachees bringing thesis writing challenges to a coaching session can be encouraged to explore strategies to address these, such as joining a doctoral writing group, taking a writing course, or booking an appointment with an Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practitioner or researcher developer.

Not only is role delineation important, but the provision to coaches of information on referral services and of training in coaching strategies such as active listening and open questioning is also highly recommended; these strategies minimise the risks of coaches assuming the role of academic advisors, researcher developers, careers advisors or psychologists and of coachees becoming dependent on the coach, and maximise opportunities for coachees to develop their own agency and self-management skills.

At the institutional level, we concede that the provision of ongoing one-to-one support at scale is notoriously resource intensive, so institutions may either relinquish responsibility and expect students to source and fund their own coaches external to the university or argue that coaching be embedded within the existing one-to-one supervisor-student relationship. While the former option raises equity issues, privileging those with greater financial and/or social capital, the latter option does have support from the literature, as we outlined in the introduction section. However, introducing formal one-to-one coaching within supervision would likely necessitate substantial organisational modifications such as adapting institutional frameworks, policies, and regulations, providing training, and monitoring compliance and quality. Furthermore, as emphasised above,

many of the self-management skills that develop through coaching require minimal power distance between the coach and coachee, which may be very difficult to achieve or foster in the doctoral supervisory space due to the inherent power imbalance and supervisors' academic standing (Nichol et al., 2022).

Our study, on the other hand, has highlighted the benefits of coaching being delivered by individuals who are external to the students' academic advisory team but not completely disconnected from the students' institutional context or PhD experience. To mitigate financial, time and workload burdens on coaches, their business units/managers, and the wider institution, we would recommend offering a coaching program with features similar to the PCP, namely:

- Coaches are existing, permanent employees of the University;
- The program is strictly time bound;
- Sessions are limited in duration and number; and
- Students are limited in the number of times they can take the program.

To explain each of these features briefly, PCP coaches are paid staff on permanent contracts at the University and are invited but not paid to coach; the program can readily be promoted as a professional development and networking opportunity. As explained in the previous section, the PCP is kept strictly to a maximum of eight sessions spread over 12 weeks; 12 weeks is not only the length of a typical semester in Australian universities, but also a "goldilocks" duration in that it provides sufficient time for trust to be built and for the student to set and meet at least one significant goal, and yet does not risk the student becoming dependent on the coach or place a protracted burden on the volunteering staff member. Participation in the program required coaches to volunteer a total of eight hours of face-to-face time: a two-hour training session, eight 30-minute sessions, a one-hour mid-program meeting, and a one-hour celebration event; eight hours spread over a semester is feasible for many staff members. And while our study did not explore why coaches joined the PCP, we speculate that many non-faculty PhD-holding university staff would relish the opportunity a formal, contained program like the PCP offers them to acquire new skills and build networks across the university for their own career development and to use their doctoral experience to benefit future generations of PhD students. Future research is needed to investigate coach's motivations and perspectives.

Our final recommendation concerns supply and demand or uptake challenges that institutions may encounter if one-to-one coaching is offered to PhD students as a free but non-mandatory service. On the one hand, there may be too few coaches to meet the needs and demands of the many PhD students who request or require coaching. To address this issue, organisers could consider other sources of PhD-qualified personnel such as PhD alumni, sessional or early career academics, and retired staff with a PhD. On the other hand, like other optional support services offered to students, a PhD coaching program carries the risk of being perceived as a remedial program and thus being rejected or resisted by students due to being seen, by peers or even by themselves, as struggling or needing extra help. Promoting coaching as a proactive strategy in elevating performance and success in and beyond the PhD and using terms in the program's name that communicate achievement can overcome this impression; La Trobe University's *Accelerated Completion Program* (https://www.latrobe.edu.au/research/red/initiatives/acp) is a good example of such promotion.

4.4. Limitations and future research

While the PCP appeared to boost students' well-being, agency, progress and professional skill development, having positive implications for the coaching approach as a strategy for doctoral training, we do acknowledge that our study has some major limitations. First, although appropriate for an exploratory study, our findings are based on a small sample of students within a single university which may limit their generalisability. Of note, our sample included only female-identifying students, which may be interesting as a future research question in itself (*Are coaching programs more attractive to female than male students? If so, why?*), but should be expanded to

include the perspective of non-female coachees. More broadly, future studies should examine doctoral coaching programs with larger and more diverse samples of students (in addition to gender, variables could include candidature stage, work experience, discipline, study load, and/or cultural and linguistic background) and across institutions. Moreover, subsequent studies could adopt a longitudinal design and measure the coaching approach's long-term impacts on thesis completion and career advancement, both within academia and beyond (Sharmini & Spronken-Smith, 2020).

We also acknowledge that the findings may have been affected by the participant's relationship to the researchers, namely social desirability biases (i.e., participants may have been inclined to provide more positive responses than what might be accurate to align with the researchers' expectations, possibly because such responses tend to present a more favourable image of themselves (see e.g., Carian & Hill, 2021)). This possibility arises because one author coached a participant, and the other was the program organiser. The authors' involvement can have dual effects. On one hand, it provided the authors with experiences and insights to ask relevant questions in the surveys and interviews. On the other hand, it was also likely to lead participants to provide more positive responses than they might have otherwise. To minimise the potential biases, the interviewer assured participants that the interviews would be kept confidential and anonymised. Post-Program Surveys were also used to counterbalance any potential biases that might have affected the interview results. Future research is encouraged to take more robust measures to mitigate these biases and thus yield more reliable and trustworthy findings.

An interesting finding worth more investigation is the perception by some coachees that academic staff can be "too busy to … care" and that non-academic staff have more time to attend to students' wellbeing. This perception may arise from academic staff being more visible to students or more vocal in emphasising their heavy research and teaching workloads, whereas the roles and workloads of professional staff across the university can be more varied and less visible to students. The prevalence, causes, and effects of this perceived difference are worth exploring in more depth.

Finally, to delve more deeply into the focus and interpersonal dynamics of coaching sessions and particularly the strategies of coaches, future research should investigate the perspectives of coaches. Coaches' voices could be captured through interviews or surveys, as well as by collecting other types of data, such as recordings of coaching sessions.

5. Conclusion

The PhD Coaching Program (PCP) was initiated in response to calls for broader support for doctoral students to develop skills and attributes needed to cope with challenges related to thesis completion, retention, and post-doctoral career prospects both within and beyond academia (Berman & Pitman, 2010; Guerin, 2021; Ryan et al., 2022). Coachees' positive perceptions of their experiences and the role of their coach, such as seeing them as a trusted "older sister", suggest that one-to-one coaching can complement supervision, thus contributing as a valuable support mechanism to existing doctoral pedagogy.

Contributing to ongoing discussions (Bordogna & Lundgren-Resenterra, 2023; Nichol et al., 2022) about whether coaching should be embedded into supervision or sourced externally, our study suggests a novel, viable approach by recruiting coaches external to supervision but from the university's PhD-holding professional staff, including but not limited to "third space professionals" (Berman & Pitman, 2010; Guerin, 2021). Uniquely positioned within the university, these staff members make particularly valuable coaches, providing focused and contained support drawing on their own academic experiences and professional insights. Students perceive this "giving back" as both relevant and contextually informed. Unlike sourcing coaches completely externally to the university, which may not be financially viable or sustainable, our program taps into coaches from within the university, providing a relevant path of professional development for

these staff members while supporting the PhD cohort. Our findings indicate that these coaches' previous PhD experiences and non-academic employment status encourage the creation of an interpersonal dynamic that is less hierarchical with reduced power differences, which makes them well suited for the one-to-one coaching approach that focuses on guiding students to come up with their own solutions to challenges along their PhD journey. Further, in contrast to the proposal of integrating coaching into supervision – which would require significant pedagogical and structural shifts – we argue that the PCP, with its carefully designed structure and duration and its intentional delineation of the roles of coaches from supervisors and other advisors and support staff, represents a more feasible and flexible option. This one-to-one coaching program minimises workload requirements for both coaches and coachees, allowing for practical replication and adaptation across universities, and maximises opportunities for rapport building and targeted discussions that strengthen doctoral students' agency, self-management skills, and confidence within and beyond the PhD.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the student coachees who contributed to the study and the staff members who volunteered as coaches in the PhD Coaching Program. The authors also thank the Graduate Research Academy of Macquarie University for its ongoing support of the program. Finally, appreciation is paid to the anonymous peer reviewers whose feedback and suggestions greatly improved this paper.

Declarations

1. **Ethics Approval:** The study was approved in April 2024 by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) with Project ID: 15902.

2. Competing / conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Australian Government Department of Education. (2014). *Initiatives to enhance the professional development of research students*. Canberra, Australia. Retrieve December 8, 2024, from https://www.education.gov.au/download/2363/initiatives-enhance-professional-development-research-students/19626/document/pdf

Berman, J. E., & Pitman, T. (2010). Occupying a 'third space': Research trained professional staff in Australian universities. *Higher Education, 60*, 157–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9292-z.

Bordogna, C. M., & Lundgren-Resenterra, M. (2023). Integrating and normalising coaching as a routine practice in doctoral supervision. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *18*, 99–118. https://doi.org/10.28945/5096

Brannen, J., & O'Connell, R. (2016). Data analysis I: Overview of data analysis strategies. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & R. B. Johnson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of multimethod and mixed methods research inquiry* (pp. 257–274). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199933624.013.18

Braun, V., & Clarke. V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *13*, 201-216. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846

Carian, E. K., & Hill, J. D. (2021). Using frameworks of social desirability to teach subjectivity in interviews. *Teaching Sociology*, *49*, 381–393. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X211017195

Carter, S., & Laurs, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Developing generic support for doctoral students: Practice and pedagogy*. Routledge. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mqu/detail.action?docID=1659167

Chaplin, S. (2007). A model of student success: Coaching students to develop critical thinking skills in introductory biology courses. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *1*(2), Article 10. https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2007.010210

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. SAGE.

Cumming, J. (2010). Contextualised performance: Reframing the skills debate in research education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *35*, 405–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903082342

Deiorio, N. M., Wolff, M., Moore, M., & Hammoud, M. M. (2022). Coaching in the Academic Environment. In M. M. Hammoud, N.M. Deiorio, M. Moore, & M. Wolff (Eds.), *Coaching in medical education: The AMA MedEd innovation series.* (pp. 1–4). Elsevier.

Elliot, D. L. (2021). A 'doctoral compass': Strategic reflection, self-assessment and recalibration for navigating the 'twin' doctoral journey. *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*, 1652–1665. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1946033

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *The American Journal of Sociology*, *103*, 962–1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294

Godskesen, M., & Kobayashi, S. (2016). Coaching doctoral students – a means to enhance progress and support self-organisation in doctoral education. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *38*, 145–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2015.1055464

Griffiths, K. (2006). Personal coaching: A model for effective learning. *Journal of Learning Design*, *1*(2), 55–65. Retrieved from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/168455/

Guccione, K., & Hutchinson, S. (2021). Surviving and thriving in academia: Coaching and mentoring for academic development (1st ed.). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/9781789739077

Guerin, C. (2021). Researcher developers traversing the borderlands: Credibility and pedagogy in the third space. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *26*, 518–524. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1894551

Hodge, A., Bownes, M., Burgess, R., Chambaz, J., Dodson, E., Johnes, G., Loving, C., McVitty, D., O'Carroll, C., & Ritchie, E. (2019). *Review of progress in implementing the recommendations of Sir Gareth Roberts, regarding employability and career development of PhD students and research staff*. Research Councils UK. Retrieved December 8, 2024, from https://hdl.handle.net/2134/9232.

Jones, M. (2013). Issues in doctoral studies - Forty years of journal discussion: Where have we been and where are we going? *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *8*, 83-104. https://doi.org/10.28945/1871

Kearns, H. (2015). *The Imposter Syndrome: Why successful people often feel like frauds*. Thinkwell.

Kearns, H., Gardiner, M., & Marshall, K. (2008). Innovation in PhD completion: The hardy shall succeed (and be happy!). *Higher Education Research & Development*, *27*, 77–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360701658781

Larcombe, W., Ryan, T., & Baik, C. (2022). What makes PhD researchers think seriously about discontinuing? An exploration of risk factors and risk profiles. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *41*, 2215–2230. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.2013169

Lech, A. M., van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Jalloul, S. (2018). Understanding the experience of PhD students who received coaching: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research & Practice*, *11*, 60–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1381753

Lim, S. M., Shahdadpuri, R., & Pua, C. Y. (2023). Coaching as an educator: Critical elements in a faculty development program. *The Asia Pacific Scholar*, *8*(2), 70–75. https://doi.org/10.29060/taps.2023-8-2/sc2802

Lim, S. Y. S., Koh, E. Y. H., Tan, B. J. X., Toh, Y. P., Mason, S., & Krishna, L. K. R. (2020). Enhancing geriatric oncology training through a combination of novice mentoring and peer and near-peer mentoring: A thematic analysis of mentoring in medicine between 2000 and 2017. *Journal of Geriatric Oncology*, *11*, 566–575. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jgo.2019.09.008

Lum, J., & Mowbray, S. (2024). Establishing a Sustainable HDR Writing Ecology. In S. Gasson, J. Blacker, I. Stoodley, A. Winter, & C. Bruce (Eds). *Confident supervisors: Creating independent researchers*. James Cook University. (pp.45–56) https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/confidentsupervisors/

Manathunga, C. (2005). Early warning signs in postgraduate research education: A different approach to ensuring timely completions. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *10*, 219-233. https://doi.org/10.1080/1356251042000337963

Manathunga, C., Lant, P., & Mellick, G. (2007). Developing professional researchers: Research students' graduate attributes. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *29*, 19–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/01580370601146270

Marino, M. T., Vasquez, E., Banerjee, M., Parsons, C. A., Saliba, Y. C., Gallegos, B., & Koch, A. (2020). Coaching as a means to enhance performance and persistence in undergraduate STEM majors with executive function deficits. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, *20*(5), 94–109. https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v20i5.3040

Martinsuo, M., & Turkulainen, V. (2011). Personal commitment, support and progress in doctoral studies. *Studies in Higher Education*, *36*, 103–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903469598

McAlpine, L., Castello, M., & Pyhaltö, K. (2020). What influences PhD graduate trajectories during the degree: A research-based policy agenda. *Higher Education*, *80*, 1011–1043. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00448-7

McCarthy, G. 2012. The case for coaching as an approach to addressing challenges in doctoral supervision. *International Journal of Organisational Behaviour, 17*(1), 15–27. Retrieved from https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20130717151544/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10282/20130718-0100/www.usq.edu.au/business-law/research/ijob/articles.html

Nichol, L., Cook, J., & Ross, C. (2022). Adopting coaching for doctoral supervision: Opportunities and challenges for HRD. *Human Resource Development Internationa*l, *25*, 488–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2018.1547038

Parker, D., Hoffman, S., Sawilowsky, S., & Rolands, L. (2011). An examination of the effects of ADHD coaching on university students' executive functioning. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, *24*, 115–132. Retrieved from https://www.ahead.org/professional-resources/publications/jped/archived-jped/jped-volume-24

Pearson, M., & Brew, A. (2002). Research training and supervision development. *Studies in Higher education*, *27*, 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070220119986c

Riby, D. M., & Rees, S. (2024). Personal Development of Doctoral Students. *Encyclopedia*, *4*, 743–752. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia4020047

Ryan, T., Baik, C., & Larcombe, W. (2022). How can universities better support the mental wellbeing of higher degree research students? A study of students' suggestions. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *41*, 867–881. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1874886

Sharmini, S., & Spronken-Smith, R. (2020). The PhD – is it out of alignment? *Higher Education Research and Development*, *39*, 821–833. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1693514

Sun, X., & Cheng, M. W. T. (2022). Conceptualising manifestations and shapers of doctoral student agency: A subject-centered approach. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *46*, 898–912. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.2020222

Thomson, P., & Kamler, B. (2013). *Writing for peer reviewed journals: Strategies for getting published*. Routledge. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mqu/detail.action?docID=1092713

van Rooij, E., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & Jansen, E. (2021). Factors that influence PhD candidates' success: The importance of PhD project characteristics. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *43*, 48–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2019.1652158

Wang, J., Liardét, C., Lum, J., & Riazi, M. (2024). Co-authorship between doctoral students and supervisors: Motivations, reservations, and challenges. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2354253

Whitmore, J. (2017). *Coaching for performance: The principles and practice of coaching and leadership* (5th ed.). Nicholas Brealey.