CHAPTER 6

Attributes and Relationships in the Supervisor – Supervisee Partnership: An Autoethnographic Study

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Abstract

This chapter traces my experiences as a postgraduate supervisor over many years. Drawing on the Habits of Mind (HOM) and Critical Pedagogy (CP) frameworks, and using an autoethnographic methodological approach, I explore my personal attributes as a supervisor and my supervisor - supervisee relationships from an academic, social and emotional perspective. During my supervision of postgraduate (MEd/PhD) students, I aimed to develop my students to transform from neophytes in knowledge production to critical thinkers and producers of academic texts. I recognised that activating students' belief in their own potential was a foundational factor in countering their self-identified legacies of marginalisation. My reflexive narratives about students' negotiation of their relationship with me as their supervisor acknowledge the need to balance my desire to activate critical thinking and being empathetic of their worldviews and backgrounds. Critical hope was considered as a way of acknowledging the realities of the authentic challenges that students face, whilst directing them towards a quest for greater equity and social justice in their efforts to realise their potential. The HOM framework that lists the attributes to focus on in this inter-relationship is expanded to include elements of critical hope as a beacon towards which student success is directed. Developing an empathetic social and emotional engagement with students in relation to their studies is an important dimension that builds the supervisory relationship. These relationships are not free from power differentials; the critical pedagogical framework alerts one to the need to not impose the

responsibility for student success on students alone. Supervisors should play a pivotal role in re-ordering deficit discourses amongst marginalised students and scaffolding them dialogically to success.

Keywords: Supervisor - supervisee relationships, Critical Pedagogy, Habits of Mind, marginalised students, critical hope

1 Introduction

The chapter reports on my experiences as a postgraduate supervisor over 22 years. Drawing on the Habits of Mind (HOM) framework, it further explores my personal attributes as a supervisor and my supervisor - supervisee relationships from an academic, social and emotional perspective. HOM is a composite of many skills such as creativity, working independently, etc. (see Table 1) that have a bearing on supervisor - supervisee relationships, impacting on productivity and in achieving the wider goals of societal transformation.

Production of new knowledge in an increasingly ICT-dominated world driven by 21st century artificial intelligence and social problems is one of the main foci of postgraduate studies linked to economic and skills development. Since knowledge and skills transfer are largely associated with the production of postgraduate students as the main goal of Higher Education, supervision of such students is always under scrutiny. Supervision is an intensive, sustained form of engagement. Van Rensburg *et al*. (2016:1) emphasise that the role of the supervisor is to nurture supportive, constructive engagement during the supervision process and is 'important in the development of next-generation practitioners who have the correct educational and skills mix to fulfil the future needs of the profession'. To retain and sustain student enrolment, more nuanced analysis of experiences of the supervisor - supervisee relationship is required to understand the complexity of the relationships and pressure from universities to transform and improve the quality of their interconnectedness (Maistry 2022; Robertson 2017). Thus, honest revelations and a critical reflexive analysis of supervisors' and supervisor - supervisee experiences are required. An auto-ethnographic process and method are one of the ways to achieve this goal.

I draw on my own memories and reflections to explore how HOM via 'critical hope' has been nurtured and co-produced in sustained and deliberative ways (Bozalek *et al.* 2014). Critical hope 'reflects the ability to realistically assess one's environment through a lens of equity and justice while also

envisioning the possibility of a better future' (Bishundat *et al.* 2018: 91). I expand this notion as I describe the complexity of my supervisor - supervisee journey in narratives using the lens of HOM. It is a journey of excitement, sometimes daunting, always a push, struggle and effort, sustainment, tension, then final elation at graduation. The research questions addressed are: 'What personal attributes of HOM contribute to supervision practices and how does HOM manifest and impact the supervisor - supervisee relationship?'

2   Literature Review

Several aspects of supervision contribute to postgraduate students' successful completion, but the partnership relationship varies from academic issues to individual attributes. This literature review reflects on three dimensions influencing individual supervisory relationships: personal attributes (of students and supervisors), dealing with academic matters, and managing emotional experiences.

2.1   *Personal Attributes*

Individuals' personal attributes are highlighted as HOM that contribute to productive, meaningful relationships (see the later discussion of these habits) (Costa & Kallick 2008). Mantai and Marrone (2022) state that, more specifically, within a supervisory partnership the supervisor's cognitive and interpersonal skills, and personal attributes are traits that are more in demand by students as they negotiate the supervisory partnership. Albertyn *et al.* (2008) found that personal attributes, support from supervisors, and institutional support contribute to students' success. The majority of the PhD candidates that participated in their study at a university in the United Kingdom recognised the importance of enterprise skills and HOM attributes, particularly those linked to communication, confidence, goal orientation, persistence and problem-solving (Lean 2012). The authors concluded that whilst some skills and attributes are developed well through a PhD study, others, such as working with people, are not. These personal dimensions are, therefore, the focus of my reflections on how I drew on my resources and HOM as a supervisor.

2.2   *Academic*

Scherer and Sooryamoorthy (2022) note that young scholars often articulate

their own inquiries, and suggest that professional encouragement alongside supportive intellectual guidance is also needed for successful postgraduate programmes in Africa and mentorship of young academics. However, important social and psychological goals should also be set and the critical purpose of education should be scrutinised. An important aspect of postgraduate work is thus to develop, instill and promote a value system based on HOM that serves to empower students to become progressive, critical, and valuable members of society.

2.3   Emotional Experiences

Poor mental well-being, especially among postgraduate students who are part-time teachers/working professionals who confront daily stress at their school/workplace can have grave consequences, both for students and their supervisors, affecting their quality of life, drop-out, and erratic or no academic outputs. Recent times have witnessed a growing number of PhD candidates who experience psychological problems (Wollast *et al.* 2023). Wollast *et al.* (2023:12) add that a lack of emotional well-being is the result of stress that manifests in several ways, including 'constant demand for results, increasingly marketized publications systems, financial pressures, uncertainty about doctoral processes, sense of belonging in scholarly communities and so on'. White and Ingram (2023) concluded that students' experiences are defined by a 'complex array of emotions that interact closely with appraisal, motivation, and behaviour. They have a deleterious or beneficial impact on core dimensions of learning and wellbeing including engagement, cognitive flexibility, and social connectedness' (p. 1).

The literature suggests that postgraduate supervision is a complex process with many integrated elements and forces that implicitly and explicitly influence the process. In general, a motivated student and support from the institution and supervisor are pivotal to success.

3   Conceptual Framework: Habits of Mind (HOM)

Costa and Kallick (2008) explain the 16 HOM attributes (see Table 1) that human beings display when they behave intelligently in seeking solutions in their daily lives. They characterise what people do when they are confronted by problems, the solutions to which are not immediately obvious and they seek

to resolve such in an intelligent manner. In the quest to succeed, people value one pattern of intellectual behaviour over another; this implies making mindful and skilful choices about which patterns of behaviour one should use at a certain time in a particular context.

These HOM have cognitive, emotional, and social components that are a significant feature of postgraduate studies and are reflected in the supervisor - supervisee relationship; hence my rationale for selecting HOM as a conceptual framework.

Table 1: Habits of Mind (Adapted from Costa & Kallick 2008)

1. Persisting
2. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
3. Managing impulsivity
4. Gathering data through all senses
5. Listening with understanding and empathy
6. Creating, imagining, innovating
7. Thinking flexibly
8. Responding with wonderment and awe
9. Thinking about thinking (metacognition)
10. Taking responsible risks
11. Striving for accuracy
12. Finding humour
13. Questioning and posing problems
14. Thinking interdependently
15. Applying past knowledge to new situations
16. Remaining open to continuous learning

4 Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy

My work in postgraduate education involves Critical Pedagogy (CP) (Darder *et al.* 2017; Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). The power relations between supervisor and supervisee are initially characterised by supervision as pedagogical in nature, based largely on the authority of the supervisor. Proponents of CP are aware of the oppressive situations that can arise in this

relationship and take steps to ensure that students manage their own work, for example, beginning to take control of their writing early in their programme as they generate meaning in the texts themselves (Bizzell 1991). In arguing for a nuanced notion of power, Bizzell (1991: 848) adds that 'we should differentiate uses of power under the rubrics of coercion, persuasion, and authority and recognize the positive uses of power-as-authority in resolving our dilemmas'. Critical pedagogy offers hope to explore the relevance of our work, to engage in current critical debates on power differentials and their historical and social context, to plot the way forward in addressing issues that afflict us in terms of social justice and to use our 'writing and voice' as tools of power. Within the CP framework, supervisors' role is thus also to make students cognisant of their role as agents of transformation in their communities. Critical hope which embeds HOM can help to sustain supervisor - supervisee relationships in postgraduate supervision (David 2020).

5 Methodology

The methodology for this research study is autoethnography. A critical genre of ethnography, it is a process, method and product that seeks to describe and analyse personal experience in a reflexive way in order to understand cultural experience (Cohen *et al.* 2017). It also seeks to enhance sociological understanding by looking at oneself in the broader socio-cultural milieu. Autoethnography enables the researcher to 'examine his or her pedagogical and research practices from his or lived evocative experiences' (Belbase *et al.* 2008: 86). I chose this method because it provides a forum to share my personal collective experiences of supervision. Working from personal knowledge enables me to give the collective experiences of my students a 'voice'. Wall (2006: 146) explicates that autoethnography is linked to 'growing debate about reflexivity and voice in social research'. While it is viewed by some critics as navel-gazing, blending my personal experiences in moments of interaction with my postgraduate students with reflexivity can lead to deeper under-standing of supervisor - supervisee relationships. Autoethnography often has an intentional political, social, critical theoretical and emancipatory agenda (Belbase *et al.* 2008). In this regard, using reflexive narratives in qualitative research, I share both my postgraduate students' and my struggles through HOM in achieving our respective academic goals. Autoethnography captures feelings and struggles as it attempts not only to evoke empathy but to transform

and act (Cohen *et al.* 2017). In contrast, Anderson (2006) argues for an analytic stance and reflexivity while Chang (2016) identifies criteria such as authenticity, trustworthy data and scholarly contribution to judge the quality of autoethnographic work.

5.1 Methods of Data Generation and Analysis

Autoethnography uses field notes, documents, self-observation and observation of others, interviews, reflexivity, relationships, power and social life, etc. (Cohen *et al.* 2017). I used stimulated recall of events from memory, observations I made over the years, conversations I held, and my diary notes together with email correspondence and an analysis of the documents used during supervision. I recorded the name of each participant and then recalled critical incidents and conversations, and searched my diaries and computer data for correspondence with the participants pertaining to supervision. I then wrote the narratives freestyle, initially without any corrections. Some narratives included oppression and marginalisation that I felt emerged that have some bearing on my supervisor - supervisee relationships. I read and rewrote the narratives several times to make reflexive sense of my experiences. Taking a reflexive stance, I searched for bias in my writing and for excessive 'evocative' style and claims and removed irrelevant data not related to the study. I then used my literature search as a guideline to explore temporary categories of phenomena for emerging postgraduate conceptions such as 'emotional wellbeing', 'social experiences' etc. and rearranged the narrative under these categories. Four categories finally emerged from this analysis, namely, personal attributes of the supervisor and three categories in the supervisor - supervisee relationship from an academic, social and emotional perspective. I analysed the categories using the HOM conceptual framework and the CP theoretical framework. As the narratives are storied in autoethnography, I chose to present the data, findings and discussion as an integrated whole to capture supervisor - supervisee experiences.

5.2 Ethics and Limitations

Autoethnography as a lens is highly subjective as data generation is based on one's formal and informal experiences. It can fall short of its ideological promise due to a lack of distance that results from the subject and the researcher

being the same person, and because it can be challenging to translate personal experience into sociocultural and political action. In this regard, I first wrote some narratives and a few weeks later, I returned to the data with a critical and reflexive mind, looking for 'self-indulgence' in the writing. Individual or single-authored autoethnographies also suffer scope constraints, in that the potential pool of participants (I only describe six narratives due to space constraints) and the research foci are limited (Lapadat 2017). Using autoethnography as a lens can be quite challenging as I avoided descriptions that can lead to contestation. I excluded age, race, language and ethnicity, country of origin, topics of studies, and details that might add more insight to the participants' background. Hence, I used pseudonyms in this study.

6 Autoethnography: Data Generation, Findings and Discussion
This section presents firstly, my own evolving development as a supervisor (6.1) before engaging with the kinds of perspectives one needs to accommodate in developing a relationship with one's students. Three categories (6.2) of establishing the supervisor - supervisee partnership are discussed: academic, social and emotional. These perspectives are illustrated via six narrative reflections on how they came to be enacted in my practice. My own learning from these narratives and the dialogue with the literature and theoretical framework are presented alongside each narrative.

6.1 Aligning my Personal Attributes and HOM
This section reflects on my evolving trajectory and how my HOM evolved in the execution of my supervisory practices.

6.1.1 From an Early Age
As a school learner in the late 1960s-1980 in racially-segregated South Africa, I always found myself in different cultural worlds - the abstract world of science and my cultural background contradicted by the westernised Eurocentric apartheid world I grew up in, living and schooling in segregated areas. My family worked on a small home plot where we grew fresh produce and I *learnt a number of skills* from this - I acquired knowledge of the soil, weather, agriculture, seeds, use of water and relationships between plants, animals and human beings. I developed a love for nature and appreciation of

biodiversity. I was always keen on *inquiring about phenomena,* experimenting and so found school practical work exciting. As a BSc student, I studied for long hours including weekends and also worked part-time. As a teacher posted away from home, I always ensured a high standard of work from my learners. I studied part-time and with critical hope, much struggle and good HOM such as perseverance, I completed three postgraduate degrees in science. I truly felt that I was now a scientist, which boosted my confidence and skills as a science teacher. I felt creative, learnt new skills in computing and co-published my first science journal article. I was excited to study further but family responsibilities and a new job as a college lecturer took their toll and delayed my PhD.

6.1.2   Reflections on My Own Supervisors' Attributes

My MSc supervisor was demanding and very busy, researching and supervising many students. Emotionally it was draining as I had no one to turn to and physics research was novel. My PhD in physics education was part-time, but completed as a fulltime student. It was *enjoyable* and a steep learning curve in postgraduate education. I travelled several times from Durban to Cape Town to meet my professor for discussions. I learnt *to work independently*, battled with new concepts in education and attempted to be creative in my writing. My supervisor guided me into unknown territory with books, readings and discussions on qualitative research. He allowed me *to be creative* and was socially, financially, and emotionally *supportive*, especially when family problems came to the fore. These experiences with professors and supervisors and their positive attributes aided me when I became a supervisor.

6.1.3   Experiences as a Novice Academic and Supervisor

Due to my postgraduate qualifications, I became a lecturer at a college of education for 12 years. Here, I also externally examined Masters' dissertations and PhD theses. I attended a few general mentorship courses on supervision and published my first paper in education, years after my PhD. It was not easy being a novice researcher and supervisor in education as there was little mentorship. While teaching rural teachers, I conducted research on Cultural Astronomy to enhance their understanding of science. This led me to my niche field of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and I began supervising MEds and later PhDs in this field. I drew on all my experiences to promote students' own

research agenda within an interdisciplinary science education. I believe that the HOM (in Table 1), especially the *will to succeed* and *contribute to new knowledge* was the driving force in my academic development. Research confirms that a supervisor's positive personal attributes are an important element of the supervisory relationship (Albertyn *et al.* 2008), but how these are acquired is complex and individualised.

6.1.4   Reflections – My Positionality within Critical Pedagogy

Almost all my postgraduate students, as well as myself have come from the 'powerless' group in South Africa, disadvantaged by apartheid and colonised in many ways. Resource and financial constraints at home and school render it difficult to develop positive personal attributes (as in HOM in Table 1). I have also experienced marginalisation and know how hard it is to reach the higher echelons in academia. My interdisciplinary studies in Science Education, especially in rural areas attest to struggles for access and raise questions of legitimate knowledge, whose knowledge, whose voices and who gets recognition - these exclusions have marginalised African societies in particular (Apple 2013). The task of becoming a scholar, especially coming from an historically disadvantaged home, is arduous, not only in terms of completing postgraduate study but even more so in developing as a critical scholar as it is demanding and complex, but enlightening (Bozalek *et al.* 2014: xvi). In my supervisor - supervisee relationships, I am cognisant of students' backgrounds and endeavour to use the resources I have to maximise their HOM potential and success in academia.

Supervisor - student power abuse can lead to acrimonious situations. Cohen and Baruch (2022) note that abusive supervision has negative consequences as students minimise interaction with their supervisors and the feelings of loathing, social exclusion, anxiety, and stress that arise may lead to unethical practices, such as plagiarism. I experienced a few cases of student abuse; in one case, the student wanted to change supervisors due to gender and race - I took a strong stand.

6.2   The Supervisor – Supervisee Relationship

The personal experiences outlined above were shaped further when I negotiated with the unique individual postgraduate students whom I came to

supervise. I have chosen only six narratives to illustrate my autoethnographic experiences and learning about being and becoming a supervisor with these students. The emergent learning is grouped according to three categories: *academic, social* and *emotional* perspectives on the supervision partnership.

6.2.1 Academic Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership

The key element in successful supervision is to understand students' experience in relation to their academic work (Sayed *et al.* 1998). With new students, I often assess their HOM and skills through informal conversations, seeking to understand their academic experiences, skills etc. To assess their writing skills, I ask them to provide an initial proposal and I support them with readings. Their initial proposal is a good guide to understand their thinking and writing attributes and to plan the support needed. Finalising the proposal and preparing for the examination for defence is challenging and time consuming as the institution sets due dates and quality standards.

Narrative 1 - MEd student: In this first reflective narrative, Ruth completed her MEd coursework and nurtured good HOM. Her academic writing, copious reading and critical thinking were indicative of her strong cognitive ability and focus and reflected her sound schooling background. However, the stress of work and motherhood took its toll on her mini-postgraduate dissertation. I had several casual conversations with her about skills such perseverance and achieving one's goals, as well as HOM that worked for me. I continued communicating with Ruth until she eventually completed her studies with a good pass. As supervisors, we often tend to ignore gender effects in academia and the demands of time, completion date and sustained commitment among working women with young children (Adams *et al.* 2023). Toffoletti and Starr (2016) add that, if the work-life balance is not well-managed, it leads to women academics' failure. I am of the view that supervisors and management (Kossek *et al.* 2023) need to be empathetic and support women academics in ways that enable them to succeed with minimal disruption to their family lives.

Narrative 2 - an international PhD student: The case of Dane highlights why a critical hope perspective should be encouraged. Developing HOM of critical reading is difficult and is a developmental process, especially for marginalised second language English speakers. After communicating with me via email, one day, he unexpectedly pitched up at my office. I was surprised as he was

here to study full-time and came all the way from West Africa. I had little choice but to accept him. From informal conversations, I discovered that he subscribed to patriarchal views. However, he had a jovial personality of concern, care and hard work (HOM 8,10 and 12), evidence that he could cope with a difficult topic. Nonetheless, he had serious difficulty in writing and interpreting in English. He would often come to me and ask for an explanation of statements. However, with much guidance in writing, deep reading, and actively participating in the monthly PhD cohort workshops, Dane progressed. I bought books for him on his topic and he engaged in several robust discussions in informal meetings. His patriarchal views and stereotypic beliefs changed over time and he became a vociferous supporter in addressing gender discrimination. I think the fact that he was motivated and focused from the start and that his institution supported him for full time study encouraged him. It was a proud Dane that stood on stage being capped for his PhD!

Narrative 3 - an international PhD student: Sally travelled from North Africa to register for a PhD in science but I offered her fulltime study in IKS related to her field. She was quite independent and made all her travel and accommodation arrangements. She was a good writer and we often spent time discussing her ideas and new developments in her field. She spent valuable time in the field collecting dense data that enhanced her study. She was consistent in her writing, took her work seriously and attended most workshops. Sally could take a standpoint on her work and shared it on different platforms, from seminars to conferences. She was creative in her data generation as she went back to her home country to collect data and returned determined to complete her studies in due time. She made copious notes during feedback and responded timeously. She made a lot of academic and social friends and so was quite at ease in South Africa. I think the daily conversations, meetings, and social and academic interactions enabled her rapid academic growth. Her journal article published in a quintile one journal was testimony of her academic skills that she developed while studying for her PhD. There is evidence that due to her personal attributes (HOM), including an industrious nature, and her unwavering focus, she completed her studies in due time, even though she suffered a personal tragedy and lived apart from her spouse for a while to make this commitment to her study.

Writing as the key challenge: Academic writing, even a paragraph, is quite

demanding and I have often found that my students write from their own experiences and rarely support it with logical arguments and appropriate quotations from the latest research articles. Support from supervisors and the academic literacy workshops provided by the college helped some of my students to understand the difficult process of academic writing. In my experience, this is a slow process for most students and harder for many international students from Africa. My students come from diverse language backgrounds; some spoke Igbo, a dialect in Nigeria, another Portuguese, two spoke Shona and one spoke SiSwati. However, they all attempted to speak and write in English. Numan Khazaal (2019) notes that academic writing is critical to present students' arguments in a logical and structured format so that they can arrive at conclusions based on their data and analysis. One of the difficulties in writing is to move away from the linear process and learn to interact with other texts. There will thus be frequent references to relevant ideas, one's own thinking and research by other relevant authors. In developing HOM 2-6, I have observed that most students need training in certain writing skills and I provide them with explicit exemplars to follow, usually a well written and easily understood paper in their field. The HOM - *attention to technical details* requires more emphasis as technical errors can be very frustrating for the supervisor and examiners.

The absence of students' 'voice' is often highlighted by examiners. Hyland (2002) asserts that 'Academic writing is not just about conveying an ideational 'content'; it is also about the representation of self. Recent research has suggested that academic prose is not entirely impersonal, but that writers gain credibility by projecting an identity invested with proper authority, displaying confidence in their evaluations and commitment to their ideas' (p. 1091). Khazaal (2019) suggests that *summarising* encourages students to develop their steps in writing, starting with traditional pen and paper, to writing a short story and article and ending with the most updated paper or chapter. Summarising, which is also necessary for literature analysis, is hard mental work that students shy away from and often leave to the end of their chapter or study. However, sustained writing is essential in summarising different pieces of work into a critical framework. Shahsavar and Kourepaz (2020) found that most students, even proficient ones were not able to synthesise, critique, or explain the literature in their writing. These were among the academic issues faced by most of my students.

The HOM of encouraging students to reflect and talk about their key

ideas can be developed, as I found out in informal conversations with my students. Writer's block does occur and my students are requested to take a break, read casually and then come back to writing. Rahmat (2020:4) adds that 'Perhaps one reason why writing is not a favourite among some, especially students, is that in order to write academic topics, the writer needs to read first'. Here, HOM-3,12,16 can assist as I found my students have overcome these situations and avoided depression. In pursuit of a writing path as a regular HOM, Dane and other students were advised as follows: read easy texts at first and then more difficult academic pieces, and after reading a paragraph, summarise the main ideas, check the meaning of words for comprehension, and then write in your own words to avoid plagiarism. PhD students are required to publish while writing up their research, but very little guidance is given. Their papers are often presented in a confused format, so I direct students to the finer points of writing a paper for a journal from their PhDs to make a unique contribution. It is not often that they realise that they can be creators of new knowledge and that their voices are also important (see HOM-2).

Feedback during supervision: Since around 2010, the literature on supervision research has shifted to view feedback as a process that students undertake where they make sense of information about work they have done, and use it to improve the quality of their subsequent work. In this view, effective feedback on students' writing produces successful outcomes with significant changes to their writing and thinking. My experience is that only a few confident postgraduates critique the feedback given to them due to power differentials and if it is not clear, they ask for clarification. I sometimes think that I do not provide sufficiently detailed feedback and this can frustrate the student who is trying to improve his/her work. As in Dane's case, coming from another culture can make it difficult to interpret the written feedback offered; hence, I often offer telephonic advice. Tian and Lowe's (2013) study on cross-cultural postgraduates shows that feedback presents students with cognitive difficulties and psychological and emotional challenges, especially during the early stages of a degree. They add that supervisors need to be 'more aware of the nature and sources of stress that such students face and to which feedback may often be adding rather than contributing to enhanced learning' (p. 580). The difficulty of joint supervision arises when feedback is contradictory which can be confusing or can highlight the nature of thinking from different perspectives in academic writing. I explain to students that there are contestations

in theories, design and methodology and one has to rationalise the feedback best suited to their study. Guerin and Green (2015) found that, while beneficial, team supervision can be confusing due to the diversity of opinions expressed.

Independent thinking: HOM-2,7,9,14 has to do with independent thinking and is a critical requirement for PhD students in producing original findings. Engaging in a thesis requires independence of thought but it takes students time to realise that they are responsible for the generation of new ideas. Over time, a process of reading, arguing, reflecting on their ideas, sharing, presenting their work and discussing it with their supervisors results in novel work (Polkinghorne *et al.* 2023). Students interrogate and are interrogated in cohort supervision groups which allows for a diversity of ideas to flourish. Addae and Kwapong (2023:1) comment that 'students perceived research seminars in doctoral education as spaces evoking manifold purposes—constructive advice; discrediting students' work; varied views; and 'muffling' students' voices'. My participation in a cohort helped me to grow in terms of the support given to students and the focus on the research problem and theoretical aspects of a PhD. A useful and holistic resource that my students use is the PhD guide designed, printed and workshopped by Michael Samuel of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). This helps them to organise, direct and reflect on their PhD and to seek links between chapters, something students do not visualise at the beginning of their study.

At what point should we emphasise the importance of critical thinking as it is a developmental process? It is easy to say, 'think out of the box', but this involves knowledge, wrestling with philosophical ideas, connections made from different models, reading and a consolidated knowledge base (Whitty & van der Hoorn 2023). Students' initial research problem and brainstorming their research questions and methodology in proposal writing is a good start but some will need a lot of guidance as the initial proposal writing is not a predictor of their success. Other HOM such as thinking with clarity, persistence and writing literacy come to the fore as they progress. Lai (2011) notes that, while critical thinking involves cognitive skills, dispositions such as HOM that include inquisitiveness, a propensity to seek reason etc. are also important.

Narrative 4 - a Southern African student: Thandi was a lecturer who registered for a PhD in science education. She worked quite strategically and independently even though she came from a very poor country. When

requested, she travelled to Durban and spent Saturdays with us discussing her work. Most of her work was submitted via email. She was shy and respectful of our position as supervisors such that she was initially afraid to question us. From the beginning she presented her chapters clearly and logically. There was evidence of her daily hard work but I was concerned as she worked alone and could not attend the local workshops and cohort groups. Her academic isolation from peers came to the fore in one of our discussion sessions where she expressed her concerns. Harrison *et al.* (2023) note that loneliness in postgraduate studies can lead to mental health problems and peers can help to create social support and a safe sharing environment. The feedback given to Thandi was timeously acted on and she queried if she did not understand the details. In her analysis, she could think *differently from the norm and present different creative theoretical models* of her work to us. I feel that she developed excellent personal attributes for academic work, and her emotional and social skills were strengthened during the course of her study. Her persistent good HOM included being *methodical, persistent* and *focussed* and she published three journal articles from her own inspiration.

6.2.2 Social Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership

My relationships with PhD students took on a more personal, creative and critical route due to the requirements and length of this journey and the relationship of trust required to evolve with students. I often invited my PhD students home for meals and they would sometimes work from my home - this strengthened our social bond. At the beginning of their study, students would contact me with their broad ideas and I would refer them to the work I have done, seek links to their own work and suggest feasible methods. I learnt that its best to throw down the gauntlet to students, find something that they are deeply motivated by (as in my PhD), read around it and then request a short proposal. From this initial submission, I could immediately tell the students' potential and HOM: their writing skills, dedication and quality of work in terms of using readings that I also direct them to. While it is understood that the proposal may be a draft, I seek ideas and innovation and especially the potential to complete a PhD. From a social perspective, I encourage initial enrolling students to contact and approach me and share their ideas as early interactions can strengthen the relationship, or students might move out of their field or leave one for other supervisors with whom they can easily communicate.

I supervise growing numbers of students from other parts of Africa through referrals from previous graduates. Studies report the many difficulties experienced by marginalised international students (Ramchander 2022; Watson & Barton 2020). They include an increased risk of mental health problems because of language differences and pressure to adjust to unfamiliar cultural environments, including diet adjustments. It seems that the university administrative authorities are sometimes out of touch with international students' daily issues. Forbes-Mewett (2019: 674) supports this claim, stating that there is often a 'mismatch between the broader structural context and the intricacies of micro-level practices and services'. Although these students have access to university support such as face-to-face and online counselling when experiencing mental health issues, many delay seeking help because they feel embarrassed, afraid and anxious.

Acculturation is among the challenges confronted by international students from Africa in coping with their new setting. Fortunately, most of our students speak English, identify with local churches, and are able to make contacts easily especially with regard to accommodation, and they do adapt to the familiar African context. However, the academic process is more challenging, together with the recent xenophobic incidents in South Africa and occasional xenophobic statements. For example, when Dane used a local taxi and was spoken to in isiZulu, he replied in English and was asked 'Why are you not speaking Zulu?'. Smith and Khawaja (2011) add that language, administrative and practical stressors, and educational, socio-cultural and discriminatory practices affect international students. The narratives that emerged from Chinyamurindi's (2018) data analysis highlight the formation of an in and out group mentality amongst international students and students' sense of belonging and acculturation experiences. There is a dearth of studies on how international students in Africa cope with academic and everyday life challenges (McAlpine *et al.* 2022). There is a strong argument that such students' success may be linked to their persistence and academic effort – an important HOM that was highlighted several times by Dane during a recent conversation. International students' challenges are magnified when unexpected events such as COVID-19 occur. Due to border closures, travel restrictions, quarantining and even job losses, international students faced several hardships during the pandemic. For example, the university authorities required Dane and other international students to immediately vacate their hostel during COVID-19, with no other accommodation offered and I was

approached for help. We need to create caring forums to acknowledge what international students bring with them to their studies as they relate their unique stories due to differing cultural beliefs, language and ways of being. To encourage their social interaction with local students, I ask my international PhD students to present at my honours and masters lectures and workshops. This empowers them to see value in their work and motivates other students to appreciate their endeavours, enhancing their academic growth and promoting cultural tolerance.

6.2.3 Emotional Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership

Empathy is the process of a person understanding the emotions and thoughts of another person correctly in relation to a certain situation, feeling what that person feels and expressing this state to him/her. Dökmen (2013) adds that empathy involves placing oneself in the place of another. My relationship with students has always first been one of concern for their welfare; listening to them and empathising with their personal problems helps to foster deeper understanding of their beliefs and character and what motivates them. Contacting students, communicating with them and sending emails or voice-notes can motivate those who are trapped in a writer's block or need an idea to create further impetus in their thinking. During the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020-2022, only online supervision was allowed as we could not physically meet our students. We sought diverse ways of interacting, including empathy that had to be perceived and acted out in different ways. I used voice-notes and Zoom meetings, together with a style of writing that has empathetic features, first focusing on personal welfare and health. I find that sincere empathic understanding makes the supervisor - student relationship mutually healthy and facilitates easier communication from the student's side. For example, students developed trust and were able to telephone me at will. I am aware from my own experience that I wanted to call or email my supervisor but was often apprehensive about his 'business' or frame of mind. When people are empathised with, they feel understood and attach importance to their work, but it must be genuine care.

Narrative 5: local MEd fulltime student: Sue is an MEd student who works part-time but has personal and health issues. I offered her a part bursary. I was empathetic towards her as she initially showed determination but later on her

work was erratic. She encountered several difficulties from ethical clearance to data collection. She took a route contrary to my experience and advice. This delayed her work for some time, creating more frustration and stress. It seems that in every step Sue took to further her academic progress, she experienced emotional trauma. I often had to play a pastoral role. Unlike Ruth's case above, for Sue, it would have been easier and less stressful if one had easy access and control of the data collection process. As a supervisor and a parent of two postgraduate students, I am inevitably drawn to empathise with her and others in similar situations and to assist them both emotionally and with difficult emotional and academic issues.

Narrative 6: Creating a forum for postgraduates' emotional expression: During the past 10 years, I introduced an annual celebration and postgraduate ceremony into the science and technology department, an idea I picked up from a visit to Uppsala University. Students recollect how their supervisors supported them when they were struggling and relate how their supervisors' persistence, academic advice and encouragement enabled them to graduate. The annual forum has created a platform to express their journey as a cathartic and emotional experience - some students cry joyfully. Their supervisors' strong belief that they could graduate despite their doubts, schooling background, language difficulties, etc. instilled in them the hope of doing so. When marginalised students are compared with their advantaged counterparts, students acquire HOM such as persistence, ways of seeking help, tolerance, social skills and emotional strengths. Universities provide some support and do factor disadvantaged students' prior experiences in as additional support and mentoring are now offered. Programmes in this regard at our university range from face-to-face cohort groups to online seminars, funding from supervisors and bursaries. Research suggests that focusing on affective transformation in an explicit agenda can not only address students' feelings of inadequacy (HOM-5 - empathy), but also enhance their desire to begin to write successfully.

The reflexivity lens also enabled me to explore ways in which I can improve my future relationships. I know that I am quite caring, provide timeous feedback and am concerned about students' health but I think I am sometimes quite demanding as my focus is the end product. I try to establish a friendly, cordial and open relationship so that students can communicate with me any

time. I try to understand each student as an individual with their unique problems, context and work ethic and to push the boundaries towards excellence and emphasise the process and nature of learning and thinking. I use previous successful students in a group chat to advise new students. Sometimes, I perceive that, due my tolerance, students work at their own pace and prefer stricter supervision. Nowadays, I insist on some writing work before formal meetings and that the timelines required by the institution are adhered to. I do feel concern for the few students who do not cope with the quality of the submissions required despite persistence and support and drop out. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of my work, I straddle disciplines and it can sometimes be difficult to cope.

7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the use of autoethnography, my personal HOM attributes and my supervisor - supervisee relationships from an academic, social and emotional perspective. For most of my MEds and PhDs who often begin the journey seeing themselves as at the margins of postgraduate education, this is an arduous developmental process where HOM developed from their personal attributes is crucial to their success. In observing and reflecting on my students' lives and hopes, I elaborated on the benefits of creating and encouraging HOM such as critical thinking and empathy. The concept of critical hope embeds HOM and has benefited most students towards successful completion - the supervisor's strong belief that they can succeed gives them hope and encourages them to persevere. The reflexive narrative accounts of my supervisor - supervisee experiences of HOM using the autoethnographic method and process suggest that greater social and emotional engagement with empathy, and regular communication and effective feedback are ways in which academia can support students. Developing and nurturing empathy and exploring conditions to *improve writing skills and feedback*, *for sheer will to succeed and persistence* is one of the main HOM that emerge, which needs further and deeper research.

However, the study shows that HOM within a CP framework of critical hope can inform practice and avoid the deficit discourse in academia that postgraduate supervision is largely the student's responsibility. Habits of Mind is a universal set of functional skills and strategies that are essential in enhancing one's survival by exploring, acquiring and deepening further skills and knowledge, either in one's field or an aspect of daily work. Developing

HOM from an early age, guided by the home and school environment, can enhance one's self-efficacy skills towards success in one's personal and work life such as studies in Higher Education. Together with a belief in Critical Hope, the HOM form the essential foundation for action that can be directed towards addressing global societal goals such as gender equity, equal access and opportunities to achieve an equitable society. In the process of action, CP offers a rigorous reflexive pathway to ensure that our commitments and values are altruistic and purposeful. The study implies that HOM together with Critical Hope can be fostered, especially by educators at all levels in pursuit of a transformed society.

HOM and CP together with Critical Hope have important implications for African postgraduate education, where many young scholars leave their countries and the continent seeking study opportunities elsewhere. Such students make tremendous sacrifices to pursue their dreams and goals and to have their voices heard in foreign spaces. They often choose to return to their countries to provide hopeful leadership roles and promote relevant and robust African postgraduate studies. This sometimes activates contestations with the ritualised practices of their home countries' postgraduate education. The migration is often supported by funding, additional academic support and ICT to raise the quality and number of postgraduate students from the African continent. However, there is a still a need for in-depth support from mentors and supervisors who profoundly understand the complex journey of post-graduate education which includes how relational interactions and goals are established within the supervision postgraduate space, how varied knowledge systems are brought into dialogue with one another, how different African epistemologies infuse the thinking and being of students from Africa, and a critical analysis of whose knowledges are being affirmed and why.

Future research on HOM and Critical Hope within Higher Education supervision could explore how collaboration and teamwork among academics together with institutional support could direct and strengthen this vision and goals of universities.

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