CHAPTER 9

Exploring Decolonised Doctoral Supervision Pathways: Inter-institutional Collaborations

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Abstract

This chapter explores a decolonial approach to doctoral supervision in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA) PhD programme. The project, establishing a multi-institutional higher education collaboration, aimed to develop a broader national agenda around the trajectories of academic staff development across the diverse higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa. The candidates' topics converged on this core conceptual focus. Rather than foreground only how doctoral education should support the personal students' progress through the supervisory practices, the designed model aims to develop collaborative, systemic dialogue across the project partners (students and supervisors), exposing and critiquing their responses to the challenges and possibilities for re-imagining alternative

academic staff development practice. The chapter emerges from the collective reflections of the DHET-HELTASA Advisory Committee on the evolving project of the doctoral education programme. As authors, we provide insights into ways of disrupting conventional power hegemonies through workshops, dialogues, and engagement with scholarship and with the programme's doctoral candidates. By centring social justice, collaboration, and care across all aspects of the programme, a transformed and transforming doctoral programme emerges. The urgency of addressing matters of relationality and dialogicality across the various project partners constituted the agenda of understanding, re-appropriating and harnessing power produc-tively. The pathway to a decolonial alternative doctoral education model entailed rethinking ritualised, conventional facets of doctoral education curriculum design, which has value across contexts that grapple with managing marginalisation and activeting affirmatory voices

Keywords: Decolonisation, Supervision Models, Cohort Supervision Models, Inter-institutional collaboration

1 Introduction: Decolonial Pathways as Contested and Complex

1.1 The Context of Doctoral Education

In the university conclave, it is a rare opportunity to be contemplative or deeply reflexive about what doctoral programmes are, do and purport to achieve. Doctoral study discussions are shaped by University Doctoral Boards and Higher degrees Committees focused on regulations, structures and governance. Given the stringent reporting cycles demanded by funders, universities need to demonstrate throughput and outputs which are bean-counted as hallmarks of success and then carved into pieces of the subsidy pie awarded to universities. The call by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the drive by universities to increase the numbers of doctoral graduates expeditiously are aimed to ensure that South Africa can claim its space in the knowledge economy. The temptation to find quick and efficient solutions to move the doctoral candidate from proposal to graduation in one fell swoop, looms heavily. How do we resist the temptation of econometrics, the quick-fix options, and not fall into the trap of assembly-line doctorates?

It is therefore critical for doctoral programme convenors, facilitators and providers to theorise, interrogate and contextualise their offerings in spaces like these to see if the intended and planned programme outcomes are indeed achieved. In a satirical snapshot on higher education in a classic Saturday Night Live skit in the seventies, Don Novello, in character as Father Guido Sarducci, proposes to open the 'Five Minute University'. The institution would teach basic statements that students would parrot back, in effect achieving what they would have retained five years after graduation. The skit was a huge success for Novello, because it characterised the state of learning in higher education at that time (Serva & Monk 2014). Can we say that the tenets of Sarducci's university are not still with us today, in how we teach and expect students to learn via memorisation and uncritical regurgitation of answers? If this is the foundation on which undergraduate studies are crafted, how do we deal with the gap doctoral candidates have to bridge if they are ill-equipped to conceptualise what it means to engage critically with knowledge at this stage? How do we transition ourselves and our students to post-graduate levels of complexity and criticality that enable students to truly learn and engage with curricula? Is the gap too big? Where or on whom does the onus lie: the candidate, the supervisor or the provider?

1.2 Focus of the Chapter

This chapter will engage with the assertion that the gap is a triumvirate responsibility; each of whom needs to do much more than gear all efforts towards reaching the finish line. Given the unequal playing fields that bedevil our country, 30 years after apartheid, there are still innumerable constraints that mar the ease with which doctoral candidates experience this level of study elsewhere. While our histories, biographies and geographies should not stymie our agency towards achieving our goals, these are sometimes immutable levers that trip us up in our aspirations and intentions. Despite the hurdles, many doctoral programmes are re-imagining their purpose, place and perspective to support the parts and the people. In fact, it is our context with its complexity that creates the conditions for new foci to be established to respond to emergent challenges and opportunities that are arising in doctoral education, nationally and internationally. This chapter in particular reports on an innovative and African-centred decolonial doctoral programme that holds as its beacon, the hope that it can produce stories of success about postgraduate education in, by

and for the African continent.

The call for African-centredness, invoked by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, is not to be confused or conflated with notions of Africanisation, Africanacity or Afropolitanism, all aimed at nationalist, reductionist and even essentialised frames of identity and positionality of what it means to be African. We draw on Ngugi's metaphor of re-membering and re-centering who we are as Africans (Ngugi 1986) and from where we speak (Moya 2011) as decolonial gestures towards de-linking (Mignolo 2012) from traditional knowledge and supervision practices in doctoral education. These influences are a part of a Southern scholarship which challenges that African education systems should benchmark their practices on externally imported or imposed discourse that emanate from historical and continued colonial oppressive regimes.

1.3 Decolonisation: A Contested Discourse

We accept that decolonisation and decoloniality, as contested discourses in the university space make it messy and liminal to articulate what decoloniality means, how to enact it and how to deliver on students' calls for epistemological, ontological, ethical and axiological justice. Even as authors of this chapter, we do not share a common understanding of decolonial praxis, yet we have a shared vision and sense that our doctoral programme should embody the principles of recognising the Other, being inclusive and socially just and providing a learning environment for students not to feel alienated or marginalised.

It is not unusual in recent times to hear a discourse about decolonisation inserted into all levels of the academic spaces we inhabit. Ranging from the executive governance and human resources management policy enclaves to academic staff development portfolios; to student politics; to disciplinary curriculum dialogues: each has its unique brand of what decolonisation could entail. As higher education practitioners, we could falsely believe that an age of transformation has indeed arrived as the decolonisation discourse permeates our vocabulary, our syntaxes, our thoughts, and actions. Erroneously, we may even seduce ourselves into believing that all these discourses of decolonisation have undeniably embraced the major challenge of resistance to the status quo that university students offered to the South African higher education system. Precariously, the era of the *#Rhodes must fall* and *#Fees must fall* movements lingers as we remember the potential and limitations of violent disruptions that wracked physical, financial, emotional, and personal damages across the nation-

al system (Habib 2018). Yet, have the purposes and opportunities of these movements indeed been activated? And were those movements themselves coherent in their understandings of what the discourse of decolonisation could or does mean (Jansen 2017)? Whose agendas drove these resistance movements, and have these causes subsided in value? Were some views more valued than others? What explains the shifting discourses about decolonisation?

We may even believe that the new mantras being sung across the institutions indeed are addressing the question of whose knowledges are considered more worthwhile; whose voices count and who sits at the margins of the higher education governance, policy, curriculum and pedagogical practices (Pinar 2012). Decolonisation discourses could be argued to have become a buzzword that perhaps, even shrouds and silences particular forms of representation of selfhood and endorses othering. Are we activating critical engagement with the hallmarks we hold sacrosanct? Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), from the Canadian context, conscious of their campaign towards a pluri-versal system, write about how these decolonial discourses inflict methodological challenges for qualitative researchers. They suggest one should not equate the politics of inclusion of new discourses as equivalent to a strategy for a profound transformation and reimaginations about matters of power and privilege in our academic university activities. They suggest the need for addressing pluralities, complexities, contradictions and paradoxes instead of a quest for normativising singularities which often mask the interests of the dominant or the powerful.

Could it be that we have inherited oversimplifications of what the decolonial project could entail? Whose definitions of decolonisation will prevail, and why? Are there examples in this new rhetorical space which mark a deeper contestation about power and challenge the sustained upholding of epistemological, methodological, and ontological agendas of privilege? This chapter aims to move precisely into the sacred space of doctoral supervision and doctoral education curriculum to explore how to engage with contested notions linking equity, transformation, and decolonisation in this apex qualification curriculum space. After all, it is here that the new knowledge-makers could be activated to embrace new directions and possibilities; to assert new forms of autonomy and identities; to reframe our patterns of habituated practices.

1.4 The Structure of the Chapter

The design of the *doctoral curriculum cohort seminar programme* drawing on

Samuel and Vithal's (2011) single institutional model formed the basis for this case study design which comprised of a multiple national, inter-institutional cohort programme focussing on peer learning and social justice (section 2). The unique features of this *project*, supported by the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa (HELTASA), will be explored as an exemplar of deepening the discourse about a decolonised supervisory approach to doctoral education.

The chapter (section 3) will be structured to draw from a theoretical framework activating *principles* outlined firstly, by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), exploring the creation of a transformative praxis in doctoral education; and secondly, from Schulze's (2012) conceptions of the distributions of varied forms of power that are embedded within the supervisor-student relationships which empower and disempower both interlocutors.

The chapter (section 4) will then draw on *the experiences of the planners/designers* of the programme and their facilitators to critically reflect on whether a new form of respect and valuing of reciprocity, reflexivity and self-determination could be activated. The kinds of resources and views about decoloniality from this range of practitioners with varying degrees of experience (of supervision and of being supervised) within varied South African institutions provide a space for the exchange of theoretical and curricula resources about doctoral education and supervision. The specific agendas underpinning these curriculum designers, facilitators and supervisors of this programme are explored here.

Thereafter, the focus will be directed towards the *students of this programme* **(s**ection 5*)*. The programme is still in its gestation phases, with students (in 2021) finalizing their targeted proposals concerning academic staff development in a post-apartheid higher education environment. This section will explore the choices of students' topics, and reflections on how this new model of doctoral education influence their emergent sense of becoming new knowledge-makers will be explored in this chapter.

The chapter (section 6) concludes with *reflections on lessons learnt* from the setting up, design and early stages of the unfolding of the project's goals. Are new discourses about a decolonised supervision and doctoral education truly being activated in the space of this exploratory inter-institutional curriculum model? Are we merely whistling against the wind of performativity and instrumentality that characterises much of doctoral education agendas in

the neoliberal agenda? Are we developing discourses of empathy, equity and equivalence of perspectives and voice in our doctoral education design?

2 Background to the Doctoral Programme Design and Participants

2.1 A History of the HELTASA Project

The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) is a professional organisation focused on developing and enhancing teaching and learning among university teachers in Southern African universities. Through its annual conference on teaching and learning, it focuses on research in academic and educational development in the higher education studies field. As a professional development organisation, it also supports academics who have vast disciplinary expertise but little or no teaching experience. Once employed, these academics are also tasked with achieving postgraduate qualifications. Many new and established academics are now choosing to pursue doctoral studies in teaching and learning within their disciplines and fields.

When HELTASA was invited by the Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET) to apply for the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) under the auspices of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), this presented a challenging opportunity to conceptualise a programme of doctoral education that suited the organisation's own goals of researching teaching and learning following national imperatives. The organisation was well aware that the overarching aim of the USDP nationally is to strengthen the academic staff PhD pipeline in South African Historically Disadvantaged Institutions and Universities of Technology (DHET 2017). Through this lever, DHET hopes to achieve the National Development Plan targets, which state that by 2030, 75 percent of university academic staff should hold PhDs (National Planning Commission 2013: 267).

Given its own historical interest in academic and educational development, HELTASA saw this as an opportunity to not only support doctoral candidates but to expand its own understanding as a professional organisation concerned with the scholarship of teaching and learning. Research at the doctoral level in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) offers considerable benefits to the higher education system to improve the way it currently serves black South African students, who still fare far worse than their

white counterparts (CHE 2016). With teaching and learning and throughput rates skewed along the lines of race and gender, HELTASA saw its involvement as an opportunity to address the ongoing transformation needs in the HE sector as a social justice initiative.

2.2 Becoming Involved with a Decolonised Lens for Doctoral Education

While the research aspect was quite appealing, the organisation was concerned with the sub-text that doctoral programmes were being conceptualised primarily to increase the numbers of academics with doctoral degrees rather than supporting different voices and subjectivities. Cohort models were touted as more efficient (to achieve increased numbers of graduates) than the traditional apprenticeship model which was seen as not sufficient to the task of 'rapidly increasing the production of doctoral graduates in South Africa' (ASSAf 2010: 16) in the least amount of time.

The organisation was clear that it did not want to support the reproduction of the doctoral studies programme as a conveyor belt or assembly-line exercise, with little or no time to develop the critical scholars that SA HE needs. Since South Africa, already 27 years after apartheid, is still considered a fledgling democracy, there are many social, economic, educational, political, environmental, and cultural challenges (Molefe 2016). Issues of language, gender, ethnicity, ableism, and other markers of difference remain as the residual and collateral damage of a still ubiquitous and vastly unequal education system (Modiri 2016). In addition, the 2015-2016 Fallist movements and student protests in SA higher education, opened up a pandora's box of critique of the way HE had marginalised and essentialised students. This resulted in students citing issues of voice, silence, alienation, and exclusion as severe social justice indict-ments. These challenges have been exacerbated in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, when the onboarding to online modes of delivery and provision of teaching, learning and assessments, unmasked and brought into sharp relief, the fault lines in the current disparate levels of student access and success. These differences continue to be 'violent' for students who do not have the social, cultural, and epistemological capital to engage with curriculum texts and goods on par with their privileged counterparts. This foregrounds the question of whose knowledge counts.

Decolonial theory, and its link to decolonising the doctoral 'curricu-

lum', offers a legitimate response to the fractures made visible by students who advocated for a re-centring and re-balancing of epistemes (not the erasure of traditional texts) by introducing alternative texts, previously left out of curricula, that affirm who they are as students. For doctoral students, especially in the global South, the philosophical argument of the PhD should embrace the ontological as an equally important component to the epistemological domains of study. Contrary to the bifurcation that Cartesian dualism suggests, the head is in fact deeply connected to the body/heart when students engage as embodied beings generating new knowledge through doctoral studies.

Morrow's (2007) 'epistemological access' is also relevant here to challenge the ways that epistemologies of the colonial university are valorised at the expense of texts that affirm who students are. In creating conditions for access to powerful knowledge, doctoral students need to generate knowledge that is contextualised in ways that engage with relevant research questions, alternative research methodologies and theoretical frameworks that include context, gender, language, positionality, intersectionality, representation that affirm their personal worldviews and ways of reading and writing their worlds.

2.3 Conceptualising a Doctoral Programme Differently through a Social Justice Lens

As an organisation, HELTASA wanted to broaden scholars'/ candidates' understanding of the higher education system by contextualising the challenges faced using critical social theories and a critical lens. We wanted to support candidates to design rigorous and critical research by asking relevant research questions with a deep concern for social justice, transformation, and debates on decoloniality. This engagement with contextual influences on teaching and learning as socially, culturally, and politically imbued is critical to the work as scholars and educators generating knowledge responsively and legitimately.

In conceptualising a doctoral programme differently, we wanted to disrupt the deficit discourse that located the academic problem within students who were then seen as needing to be 'fixed'. We acknowledge that the systemic challenges in higher education cannot be borne by students alone. The historical, structural, and systemic fault lines in universities needed to be addressed by analysing the contextual enabling and constraining influences that give rise to deficits in the first place. Rather than seeing students as underprepared, universities need to question the systemic levels of under-preparedness within institu-

tions. How were institutions indeed providing the conditions for a massified and diverse cohort of learners to feel socially, culturally, epistemically, ontologically, and methodologically included? What impeded students' ability to thrive? Student success has everything to do with the systems that enable success and cannot be decontextualised and disconnected from the mechanisms that produce inequity.

An equally unnerving discourse that frames students as 'clients' and 'customers' is the discourse of the 'knowledge economy' which is gaining traction as part of a neoliberal agenda at universities and global networks. This discourse supports the notion that academics with PhDs are critical in overcoming the historical lack of supervisory capacity to support doctoral education. Key to the project of growing the knowledge economy is the need to increase knowledge workers (supervisors and doctoral candidates) who can generate new knowledge to advance the neoliberal agenda of profitable education through the production of epistemic goods. This production is linked to more recent imperatives in higher education such as future-oriented knowledge solutions for an uncertain future, a focus on the sustainable development goals (UNESCO 2017) or an embrace of the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution, the latter critiqued by Moll (2021) as contributing to the neo-liberal agenda. These foci often contradict the imperative to decolonise university education or to achieve social justice because the future, its sustainability and industry are erroneously understood to be the same for the global North and South. For countries struggling to manage their own levels of employment, equality and redress, the future does not present itself as a priority to the more pressing survival challenges of the day. In such a context, PhD candidates and graduates are focusing on different sets of research questions and problems that generate knowledge goods that are not easily commodified and marketed as discrete units to serve the futures-thinking imperatives in a global economy. In other words, knowledge is being conceptualised differently in the North and South, as products for profit and sale.

With these contestations in mind, we successfully applied for the University Staff Doctoral Programme as a four (4)-year programme offered by the DHET and HELTASA. While the project is fully funded by the DHET and all operational costs associated with the project are covered by the USDP project description and budget plan, the financial management of the project is housed at the Rhodes University, under the auspices of the Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning, to provide infrastructural support

and financial oversight. This benefits HELTASA in that the university location for the funding provides support for the financial governance, but it also limits the organisation in terms of its ability to think independently and autonomously regarding the project.

2.4 Exploring Options about Models of Cohort Supervision

The synthesis of a national review (2007-2021) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE: 2022) highlights the dominance across many institutions of a quest to explore alternatives to the historical master-apprenticeship model of supervision in doctoral education. Many institutions have expanded the *one-to-one* student-supervisor dyads, necessitated by economies of scale, supervisory capacity within higher education institutions, and the demand to address increased doctoral student enrolment. These apprentice models are appropriate when they draw on the expertise of the supervisor, whose reputational knowledge of the field drives the supervision agenda. However, the critique of such models is that they could produce cloning rather than an innovation rationale (Snyman 2015). Also, they are open to potentially reinforce hierarchical relationships, which place students at the sub-ordinate to the powerful expert.

Models of project supervision, characteristic of large-scale projects in the Natural Sciences, open up the potential for a range of students to serve as a communal group of practitioners who also draw learnings from within their peer networking. Nevertheless, the project and supervision are usually bounded by funding exigencies; it is also perhaps overseen by a singular lead project coordinator. This *many students-to-one-supervisor* model cannot always escape uni-directional dictation of the agendas and procedures of the research supervision process.

Increasingly, the 'lead researcher' of a large-scale project is no longer restricted to singular individuals. University systems now draw project teams consisting of a range of researchers who may even cross disciplinary and institutional boundaries and even perhaps be drawn from both within and outside the university system. It is not uncommon in this model of supervision to include public and private sectors in dialogue in the doctoral research supervision projects. This has activated a broader approach of the *many-students-to-many supervisors* model (Moodley & Samuel 2018; 2020).

Another permutation of supervisory models is organising a single student's project to be supervised by a team of supervisors (a *one-student-to-*

many-supervisor model). In some international contexts, outside of South Africa, this study team oversees not only the examination at the end of the study, but several evolving draft stages of the doctoral learning processes, such as the proposal defence, the presentation of findings, the co-writing of publications emanating from the team, and the oral viva examination at the end of the study (Nerad & Heggelund 2008; Trafford & Leshem 2008)[1].

2.5 Student - Supervisor Dyads

The experimentation with alternative student-supervisor dyads has evolved the generic label of *cohort models of supervision*, which is a response to the critiques of the potentially hierarchical master-apprenticeship model. By developing larger groups rather than singular individuals overseeing the doctoral supervisor project, is considered as activating a community of practitioners (Wenger 1999; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). The characteristic of a cohort is that they share a common purpose and is activated by the interests of the collective rather than only a personalistic rationale. This does not mean that cohorts are bereft of power dynamics (see discussion earlier) since all systems embed the need to address 'dialogicality' and relationality. The dominance of powerful experts has both facilitative and restrictive potential in such communities.

The matters of contested powers between the co-existing varied cohort models and the university-appointed supervisor agenda continue to challenge the growth of the doctoral education programme at this institution. The university systems measure and reward staff members' performance in terms of their individual research student output. This has accentuated some contestations about who is ultimately responsible for the development of the student's study. This contestation steered the system to yet another model of a

[1] The South Africa Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework however, prefers that the examination processes be independently managed by persons who have not been involved at any stage in the student's study. This aims to ensure independent assessment and evaluation of the doctoral study. However, this does not obviate networks of incestuous examiner appointment procedures between supervisors and their collegial peers in the higher education system to oversee their mutual students' doctoral research projects (South African Qualifications Authority [SAQA] 2012).

'*supervisors-led cohort*' model. This model drew academic staff members across different disciplines who shared common worldviews of how to organize, manage and oversee doctoral supervision. Supervisors (in self-selected teams) assembled their own students (individually appointed by the university system) into a communal shared space for cohort supervision. This aimed to obviate the contested power dynamics between a 'cohort model' supervision and the one-one-one model university appointed legal system. Nevertheless, the proponents of a discipline-led cohort model critiqued this newer model for downplaying the substantive disciplinary depth that should characterise doctoral studies. Some advocates of the more taught-led cohort argue that doctoral fieldwork should be prefaced by a broad foundational base in the discipline before launching into any programme design.

Over time, this institution (described in the supervisors-led model above) has shifted in scale from a cohort model of less than twenty students and a handful of supervisors in the 1980s, to a contingent in 2021 of arguably the largest doctoral education programme in one school nationally. The multiple cohort model now consists of over four hundred and fifty students with a range of novice and experienced supervisors linked in multiple permutations of varied (and contested) cohort-driven approaches to doctoral supervision and curriculum models of doctoral education. The majority of staff at the institution now hold a PhD mainly from within this permutation of models. Staff are now contributing to developing further elaborations of how to design, manage and organise different combinations, intersections and overlaps between cohort models that vary in the duration, management, funding and numbers of students and supervisors involved.

2.6 HELTASA's Blended-cohort Model of Doctoral Supervision

Being a national organisation, the proposal outlined HELTASA's need to explore a hybrid or blended model of doctoral study with a cohort of scholars from across the sector, inter-institutionally. This blended-cohort model would draw on the apprenticeship model (low-blend) by focusing on the supervisor-student relationship in part but would also be designed to provide a structured programme in a student-supervisory team (high-blend), with the intention of providing a wider range of resources to provide dedicated academic impetus and mentorship for the various stages of the doctoral journey for completion of

a PhD. The cohort model enables a diverse range of students (read voices, positionality, etc.) to engage in a collaborative and supportive way. The specific social justice focus of the HELTASA programme is on teaching and learning in Higher Education in Southern Africa. Each doctoral candidate is expected to design and complete a study addressing an overarching research question: How could Academic development theory and practice reimagine and recontextualize itself to respond to persistent inequality and social injustice in challenging contexts?

The overarching aims of the DHET-HELTASA programme are to support and develop candidates with tuition and support (both academic and psycho-social); build a community of scholars who shall mentor and support candidates through the doctoral journey; provide two academic structured retreats per year for the duration of the programme offering a series of developmental opportunities focusing on relevant scholarship, mentorship and support to candidates; support doctoral candidates through a supervision course to benefit individual supervisory relationships as well as develop the candidate's capacity to supervise others; and provide a personal mentor for each candidate in addition to that offered by the supervisor and the programme team. Again, the cohort model provides the discursive space of a learning environment to engage in a collective project that moves away from the traditional (colonial) leaning of master-apprenticeship offerings in doctoral studies to a more non-hierarchical mode of intervention that supports a decolonial approach to engaging with knowledge

2.7 Programme Partners

The doctoral programme is administered and managed by HELTASA. For this purpose, an Advisory Committee (AC), comprising experienced and established supervisors, academic development experts and HELTASA members, was constituted to steer the programme and facilitate the engagements of each doctoral school. Each AC member was invited to join the programme based on their extant knowledge, expertise, experience, and success in supervising doctoral students and their penchant for working differently to reimagine PhD study from the point of view of transformation and decoloniality. The five AC members are led by an experienced academic with extensive experience as a cohort model convenor nationally and internationally and who has theorised and conceptualised different models for different purposes.

The cohort of ten candidates, chosen through a rigorous selection process, had to demonstrate eligibility for participation by fulfilling certain criteria such as being employed at a South African university in permanent positions; being first-time students at the doctoral level (they could not already have a doctoral level qualification in another area); not already registered or under supervision and connected to teaching and learning centres or in positions in faculties which focus on teaching and learning that could offer structural support for academic development. In addition, each prospective candidate had to provide preliminary ideas about the kind of study they would design in response to the overarching research question provided by the programme. The call for candidates was unique in that it focused on academic staff developers, who engaged in teaching and learning practices and scholarship as their core university responsibilities, and who are connected to a teaching and learning centre. Similarly, the membership of HELTASA is drawn primarily from academic developers focused on teaching and learning in higher education, although the target audience has morphed in recent years to include academics who are champions of the pedagogical project at their universities. The funding for each candidate would cover all costs related to the study including doctoral school workshop attendance, international and national conferences, and registration fees where these were not covered by the candidate's university.

2.8 The Programme

Using a team-based pedagogy that draws on a range of voices and experiences that ensure active and constructive participation by students, the AC provides two 'Summer & Winter Schools' per year (i.e. a total of eight over the life of the project). Each 'School' comprises seminars and workshops aimed at supporting the doctoral journey. 'Schools' in the first year focused on inducting and orientating students into doctoral study with significant emphasis placed on the differences between the PhD and master's study and the focus on philosophical and theoretical arguments. The first year was also engaged with students writing concept notes to outline their studies and research questions. The second year was focused on the research design with the goal of supporting participants to develop a sound proposal for rigorous research and on guiding participants through research approval processes at the university at which they are registered. The second year of the project will focus on providing support for data collection and preliminary analysis and the third and fourth years on

moving the thesis towards a successful conclusion. This chapter has been constructed during the course of reflection at the end of the second year of the programme delivery. It thus reflects emergent issues that have arisen thus far. A reflection after the cohort has completed the programme will be need to be conducted in the future. Throughout the programme, however, the focus will be on developing the conceptual grasp that is key to rigorous research that can 'make a difference' regardless of the subject area.

As part of the intentional design of the programme, there are two key components: the main workshop, which includes all students and the AC and the 'side bar'. In the main workshop, we include aspects that deal directly with key issues in doctoral studies. By side bar, we refer to specific additional workshops convened for shorter duration to focus on a theme emerging from the main workshop. To date, we have had side-bar sessions on the topics of academic literacies in PhD study, decolonising the PhD study, research methods, theoretical frameworks, and coaching and mentorship. (See further discussion later on students' responsiveness to this agenda.)

Regarding supervisors, doctoral applicants are free to nominate their own supervisors for inclusion in the project. Students are able to reach out to a supervisor they feel is most suited to their research topic, approach them to discuss possibilities and then present rationale for nomination to the Advisory Committee. Their study will be registered at the institution at which the supervisor is employed. Supervisors will be required to attend one 'School' per year with their students. Parallel to the student programme, the HELTASA PhD programme convenes a supervision programme with the specific objective of exploring a decolonial approach to postgraduate supervision. As the supervisors and co-supervisors are all experienced academics with a track record of successful supervisory engagements in their own fields and institutions, the decolonial supervision programme is not a 'learn to supervise' course. Rather, it is pitched at a level that explores the doctoral study process differently. In light of the decolonial turn in higher education, it explores the disruption of hierarchical power relationships between supervisor and student such that expertise is seen as bi-directional and co-created. The decolonial supervision working group was launched in July 2021. We hope that it becomes a generative space for new understandings about how doctoral education can become more socially inclusive and transformed. Working differently in this space, the 'curriculum' for the decolonial supervision workshops will emerge through a grounded approach, drawn from the current context; the experience, expertise

and understanding of the supervisors as well as their positionalities and positions and their subjectivities and will be informed by decolonial theory and literature from a wide range of sources to ensure that a pluri-versal range of knowledges are engaged.

3 Developing a Lens for Decolonising the Supervisory Space

It is comforting to note that no one theory is able to explain comprehensively all the dimensions of a complex system. It might even be suggested that theoretical frameworks are restrictive and reductionist when they rigidly frame and constrain the multi-dimensional aspects of a phenomenon (Maposa 2020). This latter strangulation of research is often evident when research agendas are confined to only testing the adulation of celebrated theorists and their mantras, and less influenced by what the field context offers as insights into a phenomenon. All theories have their affordances and limitations, and the purpose of research (especially in the social sciences) could be argued to be about providing malleable and refined interpretations of our social context, drawing on but elaborating the foundational perspectives of others. Maxwell (2021: 5) cautions that 'every theory reveals some aspects of...reality, and distorts or conceals other aspects'. The role of educational researchers to develop imaginative new possibilities is indeed cold comfort since those created theoretical lenses provide only a platform for subsequent (positive) disruption, refutation and/or elaboration.

Responsively in this section, we draw on Tellings' (2011) advice to understand the meta-logical rationale for developing theoretical frameworks in educational research. She suggests possible alternatives for how theories are placed alongside each other, and asks for an exposition of what purpose they might serve in our academic endeavours. Tellings suggests theories can be described r*elationally*, where one theory is redefined in comparison with the tenets of another. Additionally, theories could be *synthesized* to cross-fertilise each other and permit the development of imaginative possibilities. Another form of theoretical engagement could entail the *horizontal juxtapositioning* of different theories alongside each other so that a more comprehensive picture emerges in the quest for a global overview. Yet another approach is a *vertical assemblage* where theories might be appropriated to deal with different dimensions of the phenomenon under exploration. Each approach affords the specific elements of a specific resource from a singular, previous theoretical

model to be celebrated or managed in different ways. Each approach warrants that the researchers make explicit the theoretical foundations underpinning their choices, declare their extraction and assertive importance of the principles guiding their theory choices, and announce an awareness of the possible practical applications (and limitations) of such a foundation.

In this section, we draw on a *bricolage* meta-theoretical approach offered by Kincheloe (2001) that critiques both simplistic methodological plurality as well as unidimensional parochialism of favoured theoretical impositions onto the field. Instead, the suggestion is that the development of a theoretical framework aims for a synergistic dialogicality to recur across even paradoxical and contradictory thematic strands. The image of a collage, drawing focus not on the individual but the relational elements of the visual composition, is appropriate for the kind of theoretical framework we aim to develop. We draw relationally from an exploration of what *transformative praxis* could entail in doctoral supervision (Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021), cross-fertilise this with an understanding of varied *forms of power* that are present within the supervisor-student relationships (Schulze 2012), and grafted horizontally and vertically with *curriculum design perspectives* from those who have evolved models of doctoral supervision in response to earlier models of collaborative, cohort communities of practice. The permutations of all these theories' foundations, principles and pragmatic actions form a lens to explore an emergent conception for interpreting a participatory approach to doctoral supervision within a decolonial frame.

3.1 Conceptualising Decolonial Supervision

Postgraduate research supervision provides a frontline battleground for rethinking our knowledge production mechanisms and processes. We draw on ideas explored in two significant texts about decolonialism and research in HE (Schultz 2012; Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021) as we designed the research project. In the global South, and especially on the African continent, there is a solid determination to trouble the traditional western canon (Mbembe 2019) and to reconstruct perspectives on our sense of being in the world. Equally, there is an overwhelming belief that the continued use of patronising, exclusionary and repressive western ideas, models, and practices to reflect on and redirect thinking about our sense of being, does little if anything to help us rediscover and recalibrate our intellectual compass and to assert ourselves in

the global network of knowledge and ideas.

We see postgraduate research supervision as potentially enabling and disabling in the processes of creating knowledge workers of the future. Inadvertently, the academy could easily work against its own intentions through continued use and application of what we have come to see as the ordained and sacrosanct ways of doing research and producing knowledge.

Colonial models of research and researching demonstrate the powerful dehumanising nature of knowledge production, where the researcher assumes a position of non-reproach, all knowing and where the knowledge of the researched is belittled, peripheralised in obscure places and often confiscated by the researchers who routinely assume ownership, power, and custodianship of the knowledge of and about the colonised (see for example Bishop 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019; Sinclair 2003). Alongside Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), Schulze (2012), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) and Mbembe (2019), we tentatively see decolonialism in research supervision as an empowering (not overpowering) process, which enables continuous and persistent intellectual conversations between the researcher, the researched and significant others, to discover realms of knowledge and understandings underpinning the being of humanity in a bestowed world and its people always seeking encouragement, assertiveness, and self-determination to be seen and to become equal partners in the re/ co-creation of the conditions which support sustainable survival, progress and development.

To the conceptualisation of decolonialising of research supervision, Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) have given us four enabling ideas.

1. *Encouraging critical reflexivity*: critical reflexivity happens under three conditions; the deliberate removal of underlying relational power dynamics between supervisor and supervisee which have the potential to ascribe 'definition, label and alienate' (Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021: 3) oppress others in knowledge production; paying attention to the epistemological assumptions behind the questions we ask supervisees to reflect on; and through probing and prompting deep reflexivity on responses given which should not be seen as the end game in the discovery of new truths.

2. *Reciprocity and respect for self-determination*: reciprocity and self-determination go to the heart of the decolonisation of research methods. In supervision, it is about three important things: providing a platform

for mutuality in listening, realising that the agenda of listening is not seeking for others to passively comply as a form of silencing them, but giving them an opportunity to establish their voice in the processes of knowledge making; it is about continuous and respectful processes of intellectual negotiation which enables the supervisee to see themselves in the knowledge production process. It is, more importantly, about engaging in respectful knowledge-making.

3. *Embracing othered ways of knowing*: especially in multicultural contexts, supervisors need to be aware of the possibilities of historical, cultural, and intellectual silencing they can bring to the knowledge making processes. The imposition of models that work and the so-called best practices, may be alien and oppositional to the knowledge, cultural and historical capitals that shape meaning and understanding of the supervisees. To avoid what C'esaire (1950) describes as historical and cultural violence, supervisors need to 'unlearn, and reimagine' (Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021: 4) how to integrate other ways of knowing that often depart from the canon. Obtaining other people's consent can very easily result in the creation of captive audiences who ultimately reproduce the knowledge that already exists.

4. *Embodying a transformative praxis*: research almost always takes place at the margins. As researchers (supervisors), our interest could be powered by a desire to know and understand what lies beyond the horizons of current boundaries of knowledge, or it could also be emancipatory in the sense of moving disadvantaged people from conditions of marginalisation. However, people cannot be transformed; they can and should only be helped to transform themselves. The praxis of decolonial transformation is founded on the self determination of people, helping others achieve their own goals, and ensuring that those we assist assume ownership of the progress that make. Anything else amounts to violence on people's sense of dignity and self-determination, and increases – rather than eliminates – their sense of dependence on others.

Schulze (2012) on the other hand discusses the notion of power in the supervisor-supervisee relationships. She suggests that, first and foremost, all human relationships are power struggles. In the colonial model, power is used

to subdue, capture, marginalise and to assert control and influence. The decolonial supervision process begins from a premise of the acknowledgement of power dynamics in the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. However, recognition alone is insufficient to level the playing field. Based on the work Schulze did with postgraduate students, six dimensions were identified which need to be mitigated in supervision relationships. These include:

- the development of respectful two-way communication systems where supervisees are always given an opportunity to give voice to any matter and at every stage of the research process;

- the development of value-creating support, through, for example, being available to the students, negotiating what serves students' needs best, and constant evaluation of the effectiveness of support structures;

- deconstructing relational power hierarchies, through for example finding the appropriate balance between process-enabling resources, such as keeping deadlines, turning up for appointments amongst others and the power resources that create in the student greater independence, ability to communicate and the freedom to be more assertive;

- shared roles and responsibilities in the supervision relationship through for example, being crystal clear (with room for flexibility) about mutual expectations, clarifying and being prepared to modify supervision styles, and constantly evaluating the roles and responsibilities with a view to discovering what works and does not work in the knowledge-making process;

- providing support on the architecture of the project, through sharing models of writing and agreeing on the structure of the dissertation, providing needed support for different aspects of the structure, amongst others;

- providing emotional support, through recognising that students are human beings after all, constantly facing life challenges which require both support and empathy; facilitating exposure, through providing support for conference attendance, co-authorship of research, and engaging with communities of practice amongst others; and

- providing feedback that is clear, regular, constructive, incremental and which is balanced (not just that which highlights weaknesses).

It looks to us that it may be useful to visualise decolonial supervision as being mitigated under four critical dimensions: the intellectual, the emotional, the procedural and the contextual. Underpinning these dimensions are sets of values such as mutuality, respect, empowerment, recognition and emancipation. Just how these dimensions and values play out in the data explored in the HELTASA model is central to our contribution to the decolonisation of research supervision.

3.2 Addressing Power and Perspectives in Doctoral Pedagogy

Whilst these declared principles of a transformative praxis might guide the action of reflection on our research project reported in this chapter, it should be noted that paradoxically, many doctoral designers, supervisors and researchers are often oblivious to their own assumptions about what drives their pedagogical processes of doctoral learning and teaching. Most practitioners (supervisors and supervised students) enter the doctoral space without an overt articulation of their assumptions about what is expected in the research journey. This includes what is understood about what can be said or done in the supervisory space or the doctoral study design. Schulze (2012) suggests that this can have potentially impactful consequences since both students and supervisors might approach the pedagogical moment with certain expectations of the roles and responsibilities of their interacting partners. For example, she suggests that 'learned helplessness' often characterises beginner researchers in the doctoral journey since they draw from their undergraduate and/or masters programmes where individual autonomy of thought and action is not the dominant rationale. Additionally, students and supervisors might have embedded cultural assumptions about how deference to and/or dialogue with the supervisor is to be engaged. For example, Mahanatunga (2014) alerts us to the interplay of unexpressed intercultural assumptions that potentially could cause misinterpretations of each other. This misaligned worldviewing is noted especially in the context where international doctoral students cross borders of cultural and national states. Similarly, Nerad (2015) suggests that deep taboos prevail regarding what students are prepared to share with their supervisors during the pedagogical dialogue. Drawing from fieldwork across programmes

in different country doctoral programmes, she concludes that personal life experiences (often coupled with gendered conceptions of identities) are sometimes erased from the dialogical supervision space since students aim to present preferred images of themselves. For example, students might wish to exhibit positive semblances of being in charge of work-life balances. Some cultural (or individual) perspectives choose to erase the personal from the public as a professional representation of their ability to manage academic success. Family financial circumstances, pregnancy and emotional relationship challenges are sometimes consciously hidden from view.

Schulze (2012) further suggests, drawing from her exploration of surveys and interviews with a sampled set of doctoral supervisors and students in a distance education programme, that there might be even a conflict of learning paradigms at play. She alerts that one may become inadvertently or unintentionally implicated in empowering or disempowering one's students. Students too exert a power within this pedagogical space by choosing (explicitly or implicitly) to (mis)interpret the pedagogical space divergently from supervisors' tacit assumptions or intentions. The layering of race and privilege intersects within this South African case study. Students might expect positive reinforcement and guided modelling that usually characterise a behaviourist interpretation of learning and teaching. Hence they (students) could expect supervisors to provide the prescribed guidelines for the development of the research project. 'Tell me what I must do' is an unwritten expectation that frames a subservience which might be in direct contrast to the supervisors' worldview, which may prefer that a rationality of independent construction of the new knowledge should be the hallmarks of a senior degree like the doctorate.

Eraut's (1991; 2001) exploration of conceptions of professional knowledge suggests that many teacher practitioners (which could include supervisors as teachers of research) hold tacit, intuitive understandings of their worldviews about pedagogy. These conceptions have often been imbibed from their own habituated practices and routines that have emerged from their own experiences of being supervised. The enduring effect is to sustain large bodies of 'craft knowledge' that lurk underneath the surface of the iceberg of pedagogical practice. Even the presentation of alternative explicit and overt methodologies for supervisory pedagogy (such as is the agenda of many academic staff development initiatives) might simply be interpreted as a form of 'propositional knowledge' *about* supervision, but which has limited long-term enduring effect *in* supervision. The practices and expectations of craft

knowledge are the default reverted position that drives the pedagogical engagement of both the supervised and supervisees. Workshops targeted at building the capacity of supervisors towards alternative supervisory approaches are reinterpreted as overt (imposed) (foreign) rhetorical perspectives of 'others'. Their ability to induce change lies remotely outside the realms of possibility.

Schulze (2012) further elaborates Foucault's reminder that all social relations are systems embedding power dynamics. Such 'power' should not be understood only as a negative force, which could be used to establish hierarchical flows of authority and subservience. Instead, she reinforces the Foucauldian notion that individuals interpret their own powers to use or not a resource in productive ways to develop fuller representations of one's selfhood. Power in this way is understood *relationally, and dialogically*. Spivak (2016) suggests that we need to be aware that the oppressed are often complicit with their marginalisations since they seek absolution or rescue from outside sources. The key to unlocking powers is to be aware of the cognitive damages that past oppressions might have served.

Both supervisors and students, therefore, embody power, and this could be used productively. Schulze (2012) theoretically outlines different kinds of powers that may be present in a supervisor-student relationship. She comments that supervisors have *positional power* that is legitimated because of the legalized duties that are encoded by the university's protocols and procedures. However, no post-apartheid South African university is not conscious of how that authoritative power is not simply bestowed on supervisors. Reputational management is instead earned by how the supervisor commands respect as an authority in their field, how the supervisor commands a deep valuing of the social partners with whom she interacts. The supervisor establishes '*referent power*' drawing from their reputation as a scholar, a leader, a conference participant, a publisher of scholarly works: in short, a renowned academic researcher. Students seek out such inspiration to direct their studies and personal growth and inspiration. Supervisors exercise power by being able to offer condemnatory or rewarding advice about the work of their students. This power Schulze (2012) calls a '*reward power*', which has the possibility of dehumanising or enabling students to see themselves as partners in a journey towards the completion of their studies. However, supervisors might also inadvertently demonstrate '*coercive powers*', which is often reflected in the quality and timeous feedback they offer (or not) to students' draft work. Collaborative supervisory relationships often reflect on the kinds of attention that supervisors

and students offer to each other's communicative strategies. Each of these powers establishes patterns of relationality that produce understandings of whose project the doctoral study is deemed to be; whose definitions come to define the terms of reference for the contextual, methodological and theoretical choices. This relationality may even extend to debates around the choice of analysis and representation formats of the thesis product itself.

Without attention to *dialogicality and relationality*, the above outline of powers could cast students as mere recipients of a hierarchical imposition of negative powers of their supervisors. Yet, what powers do students bring to the pedagogical doctoral space? Our proposition is that the early stages of the doctoral journey are characterised by a hidden power that students embody. Students demarcate (even though not articulate) the boundaries of their agenda for what the research process is expected to entail. Oftentimes, they enter the supervisory space with desires of a 'pedagogy of comfort', aiming for supervisors and the programme to provide all the necessary pleasant support to realise their goals. These goals sometimes emanate from their motives to undertake a doctoral degree. These agendas might be driven more by the coercive requirement of their work contexts, which require (timeous) credentialling for promotion requirements. Students choose not to want disruption of their worldviews or ambitions and (unconsciously) choose to transfer expectations onto the doctoral programme and their supervisors. Moreover, a robust professional practitioner identity dominates these early stages where students perhaps (arrogantly) (confidently) believe that they already possess the solutions to resolve education and social problematics. The research journey is initially understood as a journey of finding the space to assert these professed preconceptions. Any obstacle to realising this assertion of a 'saviour mentality' that accompanies a doctoral curriculum programme is interpreted as resistance and oppression, and moreover, a lack of care.

Herein lies a powerful means of student silencing opportunities for destabilisation or choices to explore alternative perspectives. There could also be a belief that the solutions to be found from the doctoral study are patently simple and that supervisors/the university system could be misinterpreted as providing obstacles to the realisation of this ascendence of their preconceived worldview.

Shulman (2016) suggests that many pedagogo-pathologies might characterise emergent academics' worldviews. These include a romanticisation and simplification of complex solutions; a nostalgic hearkening towards a view that

a golden age once existed and that present authorities simply curtail such resurrections of the past. Another 'pathology' may be linked to the arrogance of belief that individuals can work as solitary beings to resolve problems. Such a belief Shulman suggests draws from the exaggerated effects of individualism. Despite a claim to want to move ahead, Shulman also suggests that some doctoral students, researchers and academics might also selectively forget the complexities that intersected systems entail. Despite a claim to move forward, this might indeed be a preference to remain in inertia (motionless presentism): a resistance to shift into new perspectives. Whilst the pedagogo-pathologies might promote a 'learned helplessness' (Schulze 2012), they could serve as powerful resistance forces to question the status quo of knowledge production. We conclude this sub-section by reinforcing the purpose of this theoretical overview to extract the powerful potential of *dialogicality* and *relationality* of our past, or present and our imagined futures (Samuel 2021).

The overview of the evolution of the cohort models at one South African university (described in Section 2 above) suggests that attention can be given to both the economies of supervisory scale to deal with massification of increased enrolment of doctoral students, as well as develop robust theoretical ways of how to provide multiple opportunities to appropriating power productively in the supervision and doctoral education space. This theoretical framework described above has highlighted some important principles about doctoral supervisory models and curriculum design.

It *firstly* draws on the values of a pluri-versal way of being and becoming, which attends to border crossings of disciplines, institutions, and perspectives.

Secondly, it does not seek to impose new hierarchies in another disguised colonialism.

Thirdly, the supervisory - student dyads can be arranged in multiple formats, each of which embeds contested manifestations of power.

Fourthly, it is the responsibility of curriculum designers of models of doctoral education to attend to these matters of establishing 'dialogicalities' and relationalities of the forms of powers that are endemic to a system of knowledge production.

These powers should be appropriated productively to activate a transformative praxis of doctoral education.

Finally, decolonisation of supervisory relationships is not a simplistic endeavour. The decolonised relationship between supervisors and students prepares academic researchers to become campaigners of a deeper quest for social justice.

The evolving lens guiding the supervisory relationships between the students and supervisors, framed within the broader contextual and theoretical space, is captured in Figure 1 below.

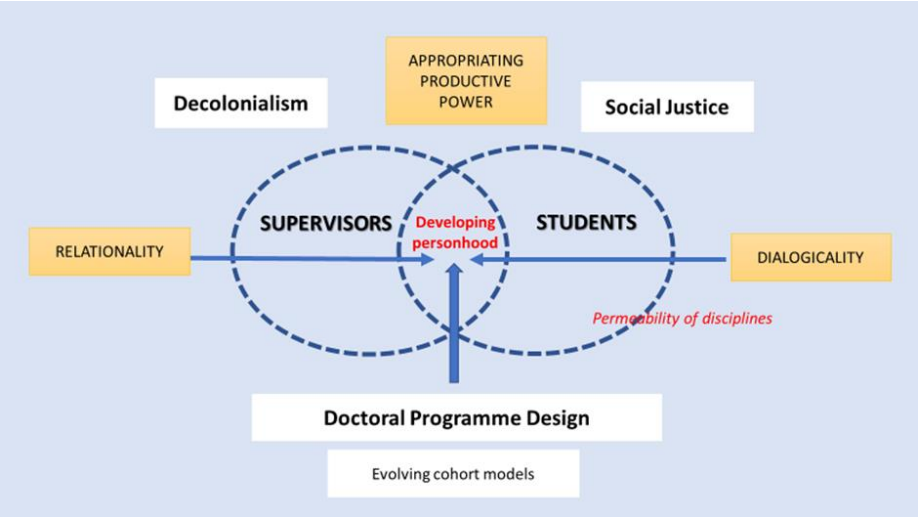

Figure 1. Developing a Lens for Decolonised Supervisory Relationships (Created by the authors).

Curriculum programme design for doctoral education is depicted here as necessarily embedded within the socio-political campaigns for addressing decolonialism and social justice concerns. In order to enact such, this entails rethinking the ways in which power is being appropriated to serve productive purposes. The design of the doctoral programme should be directed towards developing the quality of 'personhood' through recognising and encouraging a rethinking of the quality of relationships formed between and with each other, not just within the education curriculum space only but also the wider contextual environment. Personhood is considered not just as a selfish self-interest.

Personhood entails responsibility and accountability to their one's being and becoming as future productive contributors to the knowledge enterprise (in their doctoral studies) and the wider social system. This is an agenda not just for students but also supervisors.

4 Advisory Committee's and Facilitators' Reflections on the Doctoral Programme Curriculum Design

The central questions that this section seeks to ask are: (i) what is a decolonised PhD programme? and (ii) how do we come to this conceptualisation? In responding to these questions, we set about engaging the ACs on their reflections on being invited into the programme, their initial meetings (physical and digital platforms) and what might they consider being a decolonised PhD programme, taking into consideration their exposure, scholarship and engagement with the concept of decolonised curriculum. The reflections were elicited through a set of prompt questions that required some narrations, some descriptions and some insights. Drawing from these reflections of the Advisory Committee and the facilitators and through the use of vignettes, the following key commentaries on the evolving curriculum design became apparent. These are captured in the form of statements that emerged about the shifting notions of the curriculum design process:

4.1 The End Goal was Clear: All ACs Wanted to Be(come) Part of a Decolonised PhD Programme

ACs 1 and 4 speak of disrupting the existing canons that drive doctoral programmes – the knowledge generated and its relevance thereof and the canon of powerful supervisors that marginalise students' positionality in knowledge construction. In driving the conceptualisation of the HELTASA doctoral programme, AC1 wanted to: '*destabilise the replication of ontological, epistemic and political (in)justices that formed the traditional canon of producing doctoral graduates without appropriate and critical scrutiny of the knowledge relevance, its representativeness and its legitimateness*' in a transforming and developing context.

AC4 focused his reflections on '*established internal capacities of feeling more confident about self-managed programmes in promoting new imaginative knowledge development systems within a social justice agenda'* but

cautions that '*hierarchical pedagogies of doctoral supervision still dominate at the behest of powerful supervisors who still construct students based on their chieftainship and positionality'* and asks, *'as supervisors, are we inculcating new forms of coloniality in marginalising the voices of students?*'

Hence the end goal is not a defined product (a decolonised PhD programme). Rather it is disrupting space for creative, imaginative, disruptive and purposeful engagement leading to relevant and authentic knowledge generation.

4.2 The Destination was a Shifting Target Conceptually, Contextually and Methodologically: New and Varied Conceptions and Practices of Addressing Equity, Social Justice and Researcher Positionalities Emerged

How then does one arrive at the end goal? No fixities as these will engender new colonialities; no positioning as these will re-geography knowledge dominance and no hegemonic processes as these will preserve or create opportunities for the canonisation of particular epistemes. The shifting target, either conceptually, contextually, methodologically or in any combination, depending upon which cannon/s one wants to disrupt, of this decolonised space allows for varying conceptions to emerge contextually in some circumstances to address social injustices, to address inequalities and to be responses to contextualised needs and aspirations.

AC2 felt opportunities were created in the HELTASA doctoral programme '*to learn alongside other renowned experts and becoming part of something new and novel* and he *felt entirely included and accepted'* admitting that he also *'felt a little exposed because of ignorance and lack of skills*', despite being a full and established professor. He qualifies that, despite how much other views differ from his, the initial parts of the programme were '*truly liberating moments which were evidenced by lightbulb moments'.* Being part of decolonised PhD programme was, for him, '*a process of becoming rather than a moment of crossing'.*

AC3 had similar views, expressing surprise on being asked to be part of the HELTASA doctoral programme as there were '*so many prominent scholars in the field of supervision'*, but '*felt drawn by the exploratory nature and unfolding journey*' of the programme. She qualifies by saying that '*it is seldom acknowledged that there are really new ways of working and having*

the freedom to try these', speaking back to her normality of a university setting having its own and discrete ways of doing things bounded by its rules and instructions. Being in a decolonised PhD programme is '*not yet clear*' for her, as this is '*a far too complex an issue*'.

The words used by all the ACs in being invited into and being part of the initial phases of the HELTASA doctoral programme sums up the shifting nature of the destination, despite the end goal being clear. Words such as, amongst others, *shifting hegemonies, hierarchical pedagogies, deficit modes, social justice, traditional forms, canons* and *positions* suggest that what is intended as a decolonised PhD programme is far more complex to allow for any fixities of what might it mean. A shifting target may appropriately allude to the challenge of **the** destination of **a** decolonised PhD programme.

4.3 The Road being Followed is Quite Foggy, Interspersed with Various Indicators Suggesting that We are on the Appropriate Pathway

The goal being clear, the destination a moving target; how then does one know that they are progressing towards a decolonised PhD programme? Being informed by the multitude of discourses on decolonisation, the HELTASA doctoral programme does have elements that suggests it is on a path to a decolonised programme.

Reflections from AC2 reveal that being part of the programme *was* '*truly liberating moments in the true spirit of engaging knowledges from different spaces*', acknowledging the presence of other knowledges, which AC3 reinforces in her reflections that '*there are always different perspectives and emphases on a concept, theory or process*'.

The capacity to be novel within the South African context is what AC4 revealed in his reflections indicating that '*internal institutional capacity in doctoral research had been developed over the years*' and that '*South African institutions were increasingly feeling more confident about self-managed programmes within the country*' suggesting that the threshold of reliance on international canons has passed and that the HELTASA programme, for example, by working across institutional divides is an example of this liberation from the perceived canons. Having been exposed to and developing different doctoral programmes nationally and internationally, he (AC4) wanted to share his experiences within the HELTASA doctoral programme *'in creating alternate*

models of doctoral supervision to democratise the teaching/ learning spaces' where he wanted '*to challenge and be challenged by newer reformulations and relationships*'. Yet, the possibilities of embedded power relations could re-emerge, especially between institution and students and between supervisor and student '*where potential tension between the agenda and discourses of the cohort seminars and the authority of supervisors outside the cohort were anticipated*' within the design of the HELTASA doctoral programme as it involved multiple institutions and multiple supervisors from across institutions within South Africa. In mitigating such anticipated tension, he (AC4) acknowledged the importance of leadership of the AC in creating a *cordial collegial space to activate the alternative*.

From the perspective of being the one who issued the invitation to be part of the HELTASA doctoral programme, AC1 wanted this doctoral programme to engender a critical space to '*generate knowledge that is relevant, authentic, representative and legitimate with the aspiration to trouble the canon and create new ways of being and knowing*'.

Drawing from these reflections, the hallmarks of a decolonised doctoral programmes were in the making. Disrupting traditions and knowledge systems, working collegially yet critically, aspirations of new formulations, developing knowledge for relevance and activating alternatives are some of the key indicators of being a decolonised doctoral programme, but how these elements come together or take on their own line of flight is what brings some clarity to the foggy path to a decolonised academic programme such as the HELTASA doctoral programme.

4.4 There were Mixed Emotions and Aspirations about the Opportunity to Start the Journey

Being part of this innovative doctoral programme within the South African context would engender mixed responses, emotions, and aspirations. While semblance of the HELTASA programme did exist in the form of the national doctoral programme called the Spencer Foundations Project in the 1980's, and more recently in the Mauritius-UKZN partnership doctoral model, the South African initiated programme of HELTASA was deemed as the first in the country and a novel way of bringing together academics and students from across South African institutions. Naturally, such endeavour would bring about mixed emotions, especially for those that considered this as their first experience.

AC1 expressed her emotion at her assumptions about the students that came into the programme when she reported that '*it really hit home when I realised that the PhD candidates on the programme had so many real challenges of time, language, epistemologies, self-worth and positionality. They were not really prepared for the big and deep questions that this programme was asking them to respond to*'.

Turning the eye onto the self, AC4 reflected that we need to be '*positively appreciating the complexity of change, its contradictions, paradoxes and affordance and that decolonised supervision is not about heralding a new saviour-research mentality or a romanticised idealisation that all inequities will be resolved via our actions. Being entangled and re-entangled into and with the worlds of our students to become intellectuals who will contribute to the quality of global discourses is the vision for future higher education system*'.

AC2 reflected that he, at times, '*felt a little exposed because of ignorance and lack of skills*', but considered the '*dialectic opportunity*' of being part of the HELTASA doctoral programme *'as both empowering and liberating*'. The tentativeness of and within the doctoral programme would, therefore, be the inspiration driving the sustainability of this decolonial programme journey as new insights emerge along the fuzzy and fogged pathway or pathways.

5 Connecting with Students

> *A decolonised supervision journey would uphold the value of inclusion. All PhD candidates have meaningful lived experiences, knowledges, abilities and resources which must be recognised and tapped into. (Student response 2021)*

The response from one student on 'what is decolonised supervision' resonates with the programme's aim of centring the student within the relationship (See Section B). Similarly, within the growth and unfolding of the programme, facilitators, supervisors and the Advisory Committee are learning alongside students what transformative pedagogy means at doctoral level; what is a decolonised PhD; what identities are emerging that encompass community and go beyond the menacing timeframes and narrow obsession with the production of a product. This subsection of the chapter aims to reflect critically on what ways are we able to engage authentically with and encourage new and deep insights

into the nature of unbounded knowledges, of ourselves and of our pedagogy.

The context of continued coloniality often shapes supervision practices and the kinds of knowledges with which doctoral candidates engage. This habituated hegemony manifests itself also in the nature of students' doctoral contributions, aided and abetted by supervisors' worldviews. Supervision models cannot be decolonised without the overarching research agenda and practices being decolonised: without decolonised structures, pedagogical systems, curricular processes, and doctoral examination/assessment procedures. The reliance on traditional, imported conventions is primarily taken for granted and is uncontested at the doctoral curriculum design level. Alternatively, there are increasingly different, more collaborative PhD structures and pedagogies which confront hierarchical patterns and relationships. Rather than relying on only one awarding institution, the HELTASA programme sought to include a range of collaborative institutions to co-own the agenda of developing its philosophical imprint. The choice to explore alternative non-hierarchical patterns expanded into the supervision models (discussed in sections 2 and 4 above). The expertise of contested and varied supervisory voices was seen as enriching the dialogical doctoral curriculum space. This further translated into encouraging students to seek innovative and provocative data production processes. This aimed to obviate capitulative models, which bow down to imitative cloning between students and supervisors.

The focus of the choice of student topics explored includes numerous studies on aspects of indigenous knowledge and integration into curricula (Khupe 2014; Msimanga & Shizha 2014; Seehawer 2018). A further example of elaborating epistemologies is the latitude of choice of the medium of language used in the thesis representation format. There are more recent changes in having theses written in an African language harnessing localised cultural forms and audiences (e.g. Kapa 2019; Gumbi 2019). All provide motives for freeing our attachment to 'one kind of knowledge'; 'one right answer' and 'one worldview'[2]. The HELTASA students were oriented to this opening up of possibilities.

In line with the programme's aims to engage students and Advisory Board members in a new form of decolonised doctoral education and inclusive pedagogy based on respect and valuing of reciprocity, reflexivity and self-determination, the student voice is central to the development of the pro-

[2] https://thisisafrica.me/african-identities/nompumelelo-kapa-isixhosa-phd-thesis-fort-hare/

gramme. The student perspective could provide insights into new ways of creating learning opportunities and recording key points of transformation on different levels from the individual, the relational and the structural.

While articulating an intention to have a programme that is inclusive and that draws on theoretical perspectives of critical reflexivity, as designers of the curricular space, we were aware of potential risks. We were conscious (as noted by Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021) that a plurality of knowledges about decolonial transformation prevails. We all (designers, facilitators, supervisors and students) are immersed in divergent, complex, contested and novel readings of our epistemic contexts. Each of us interprets our worlds in multiple ways. Furthermore, an apparent generational divide between varied collaborating participants (especially between senior staff and relatively younger students) could potentially impede shared constructions of a doctoral agenda for study. Moreover, as expected of students on the early stages of the doctoral journey, there was an anticipated uncertainty of our students' personal theoretical orientations and epistemological bases, their preferred learning purposes and life agendas. Various agendas have influenced students' choices of their journey towards achieving a doctoral qualification.

Of course, the decolonisation intention of this programme has also a personal aspect: beginning with the unlearning of assumption and insight into the unconscious positions that we have been socialised into. This is illustrated by an observation by one of the students reflecting on decoloniality:

> *As a white person, I realise now that only hearing one voice is really not healthy for the rest of the population. I have been reminded how hurtful hearing only one voice is. These conversations and workshops with HELTASA in 2020, have opened my eyes and my mind. I never thought of myself as a privileged white person, but now I realise that I am regarded as such because of various reasons; reasons that I took for granted while I grew up. It makes me feel uncomfortable that this is part of my history.*

Alongside the decolonising intention of the programme, the key design feature rests on a cohort model. This curriculum format for doctoral education is an alignment with an ubuntu worldview that centres on relationships:

> *Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his* (sic) *own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities*

> *towards himself and other people …. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual …. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view* ... (Mbiti 1969: 106).

Our inquiry going forward is of students' views, experiences and insights into decoloniality and how these may manifest in the HELTASA cohort model.

Conscious efforts were made in the unfolding programme to engage and elaborate the students' voices, experiences, contexts, and perspectives. Part of the pedagogical strategies of the programme focus has been on encouraging interaction, peer responses to research ideas and proposals, the mentoring of students, and the cohort coaching approach. Support strategies such as open forum discussions around vulnerability, well-being, and dreams were set up. A cohort WhatsApp writing group was established to facilitate ease of communication and sharing, drawing on situated specifics of the students' varied institutional contexts, workplace specificities and emerging study topics. Dedicated monthly workshops and discussions were co-selected by students and facilitators, including issues on theoretical frameworks, what is a PhD, exploring varied interpretations of decolonisation, indigenous knowledge, and what decolonising ethics and research methodologies could mean. These seminars (facilitated by Advisory Committee members and research experts) were coordinated to support the emergent students' voices in line with the evolving philosophical goals of the programme. Students have been encouraged and guided to keep detailed journals that they may offer to share – or share extracts of – to enrich the group reflection process in line with students 'exercising critical reflexivity, reciprocity and respect for self-determination' (Schulze 2012: 2).

However, we are aware of the danger of evangelising our decolonial agenda and romanticising a 'reimagined' doctoral programme. Supervisors have to actively engage in their relationships with their students in order to help them to find their own voice (Schulze 2012: 7). As one student wrote about the cohort model – during an online engagement:

> *I see a congruence in the value of inclusion. However, I also feel that when participants are silent, there's a perception that they are not engaged or 'strong'. And this is not the case. We all digest information differently: some may find a written response a more suitable way for*

> *them to engage, or some may need more smaller group engagement (Student response 2021)*

Just as we design for our students, opportunities to exercise critical reflexivity, reciprocity and respect for multiple ways of seeing, as an Advisory Board, we too return to these ways of researching our own practice. Transformative learning for all in the programme includes being aware of our current positioning, emerging from closed worlds to expanded understandings and connections. Our goal is to escape from fixed and limiting or biased views (Keane *et al.* 2021). As designers of the programme, we envisage that as students' voices become more assertive over the duration of their doctoral journeys, newer lessons will be learnt about how to diversify our epistemological legacies and our contested and contestable worldviews around reimagined supervisory spaces. However, we note that one cannot fully erase the dimensions of power-ladenness in any knowledge project. The challenge will be how to engage and embrace the potentially pluralistic, powerful worldviews of all participants in socially just ways.

6 An Alternative Doctoral Education Curriculum: Lessons Learnt

Decolonisation is a contested term and open to multiple interpretations. These rich, varied meanings are connected to an examination of the interrelationships between competing centres of power. Intrinsically, engaging with decolonisation involves an analysis of the relationships between forces of authority and those relegated to the periphery. In the present South African context, these interrelationships have been constructed in binary connections between Eurocentric forces and the oppression of African cultures and identities. The dominance of western epistemologies has led to a dichotomy which has in turn produced conceptions of ascendancy and privileging of predominantly White, middle-class, and heteronormative ways of being as the hallmarks of quality or normality.

6.1 Decoloniality as a Re-distribution of Traditional Forms of Power and Privilege

Decolonial engagements across the globe have involved understanding the 'powerless', and resurrecting and affirming a sense of worth and value for the

oppressed and marginalised. The challenge for decolonialists is to acknowledge that no one power centre, whether Eurocentric or Afrocentric, is homogenous: they all contain further internal calibrations of powerful and powerless constituencies. When traditional and hegemonic power is challenged, various conflictual responses are evoked from both sides of the spectrum: the vulnerable appear complicit with the oppressors exercising power over them while the powerful victor is often seen as equally vanquished. Guilt, shame and resistance to positions of privilege sometimes characterise activist movements as 'radical', as they appear to be focused on eradicating sources of oppression. This makes transitions to embracing the decolonial turn a tentative and precarious process, fraught with difficulties and contradictions at multiple levels.

In the South African academic landscape, the resistance to power and alienation patterns are endemic to the legacies of many higher education institutions. We are familiar with the terms of historically advantaged higher education institutions and historically disadvantaged or under-served institutions. Each institution has had its versions of how marginalisations and reaffirmations have come to be shaped.

When attempting to establish any programme, like the HELTASA doctoral project that works inter-institutionally across these varied legacies, the challenges of addressing this view of decolonialism will be ever present. These attempts are likely to embed a range of perspectives, including privileging, denigrating, shaming, reformulating, reimagining, and re-serving old and new interpretations. The agenda of deconstruction and reconstruction is best fostered through the process of building trust across new partnerships. We see the HELTASA doctoral programme as having to tackle all these elements simultaneously to challenge dichotomising discourses, which potentially place individual groups' perspectives, races, classes and institutions at loggerheads with each other. The critical challenge will be establishing respectful dialogue across collaborating students and staff from these various institutions, histories and conceptions of power and privilege.

6.2 Decolonial Ways of Being and Coming to Know as New 'Doctorateness'

A decolonial approach to supervision and doctoral learning will mean that the various positionalities of all stakeholders such as the Advisory Committee, the funders, the students, the participating institutions, the supervisors, and their

participants, will have to be engaged inclusively and holistically.

The location of HELTASA outside and inside of the centres of the academy brings formidable challenges in terms of influence and the implementation of the ideas of the decolonial turn. By coming to terms with its mandate, the organisation can open up new ways of being and knowing in doctoral partnerships that work collaboratively to the attaining of common desired outcomes and project goals. The doctoral academic project and its custodians have to be in conversation with all components so that the head, heart and hand work seamlessly towards a common end. Project stakeholders like the funders of the programme, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the academic staff who are likely participants of the doctoral studies fieldwork, the supervisors and the advisory team will be best advised to allow an open and contested dialogical space to active creative and imaginative PhD studies addressing matters of social justice within academic staff development in a changing South Africa.

Similarly, supervisor and supervisee relationships need to engage with their own composition and constitution by acknowledging the knowledge and 'expertise' that both parties bring to the relationship. Hierarchies of traditional knowledge and power have to make ways for different ways of knowing, ways that defy academic knowledge as being the only? legitimate source of thinking. Knowledge needs to be generated (not reproduced) with social imperatives in mind to create better imaginaries for being differently in the world. This will need to translate into an ongoing relationship that is reflexive, vigilant, and compassionate regarding all stages of the journey.

These new ways of being and knowing have to be learnt anew while old habits have to be unlearnt and re-learnt. In the liminality of the decolonial doctoral space, where new connections are made, knowledge is generated afresh from the alchemy of deep and critical engagement between supervisor, student and study. This creates the conditions for a morphogenesis of identities of supervisor and supervisee as well as the study (as a post-humanist entity), which in turn shapes a new doctoral being through the new assertion and articulation of voice, identity, and purpose, compared to before. In this metamorphosis, both Being (person) and be-ing (state) of the student and supervisor are reinvented.

6.3 De-linking from Dicothomosing Discourses

Decolonial and participatory approaches to supervision involve a relinquishing

of traditional authority and power but we must be clear on purpose and intention and breadth of participation and not for the sake of being trendy, different even tokenistic. Doctoral supervision embedding a decolonisation agenda moves 'authority' and 'ownership' into a more fluid, shared dynamic. The original intention and commitment to this fluidity and dynamism was the agenda of the Advisory Committee as it planned this new project. However, the destination was (even for the original architects) a shifting target conceptually, contextually, and methodologically (since varying conceptions prevail). There will likely continue to be multiple perspectives of equity, social justice, which are the critical underpinning philosophical goals of the project. Being involved in the HELTASA doctoral programme necessitates the willingness to walk a foggy path of programme and supervision models. It involves, for supervisors especially, the process of stepping down from a 'superior' 'super-visor' position.

It is likely that some studies might reaffirm current patterns of power and privilege by asserting deficit conceptions of academic staff development at their higher education sites of data production. The role of the Advisory Committee to serve as an arbiter over the paradigmatic perspectives of contested viewpoints about decolonialism will be contested. Developing a shared space for the open syntax of dialogue and the interrelationships between multiple conceptions of decolonialism is likely to be a significant challenge.

6.4 The Decolonised Doctoral Programme as Emergent and Fluid – Not A-priori *or* Fait Accompli

The HELTASA project is unique in that it does not present an *a priori* conception of what its destination might be. There is no single version of what this destination is, even though its goals are made explicit by the Advisory Committee. There is no single version of a decolonised PhD programme. This 'uncertainty', or rather fluidity, mirrors a different stance to research and supervision – being open to unknown ways of working and knowing or coming to know. Perhaps this is an intrinsic aspect of a decolonised process – less dependency on university structures than unfolding responsiveness of participants themselves.

Alternative approaches to supervision arrangements cannot be imposed but should emerge as organic, experimental, and exploratory, until the best fit is found for different dyads/ triads/ cohorts and teams. A one-size-fits-all approach is no longer tenable, not least because doctoral students enter the

space from different contexts, backgrounds, epistemologies, and paradigmatic vantage points, to name a few markers of difference among them. But this smorgasbord is a rich source of connections and relations that expand worldviews and increase our capacity to engage with the ambiguity and 'messiness' of our social worlds. New ways of 'doing the doctorate' must be cognizant of the many points of entry and departure students embrace, and programmes like the one reported on here must embrace a healthy disposition to work with both, and not either, or.

Supervisors and project leaders are in a position to create the conditions for this emergence to happen and to birth a process that brings students fully into the fray.

Thus far, the HELTASA doctoral programme seems to be on a road that is quite foggy, interspersed with various indicators suggesting that we are on the appropriate path. Ironically, a great deal of energy and reflection has gone into curating or opening up learning opportunities for students. This suggests that fluidity, however open-ended and free-spirited it appears, requires meticulous attention to detail. This needs to be provided by strong leadership, dedicated management and a competent administrative team co-ordinating the activities of the project's programmes and inter-dialogical programme activities.

6.5 Voice to the Voiceless

Even when programmes work in a decolonial way, one could still question whether all participants have equal voice in this space: designers, funders, administrators, supervisors, and students, if each stakeholder accesses the space for different priorities and agendas. Given that the opportunity to start the journey commenced with mixed emotions and aspirations, one needs to recurringly ask whether all voices are indeed given or assume equitable footing. Are we likely to ever produce frank replies from all constituencies about this question, or a contested view of the original agenda of the project? When will this development of assertive voices unfearful of censure be established, and how?

In reflecting on the question, 'in what ways is this programme decolonised?', and while many other questions persist, we need to remember to remain to keep vigilant about how different components synergise or diverge as part of the fluidity and the organic nature of decolonising doctoral work. We

will come to know this more tangibly when students' destinations become more clearly embodied in the doctoral studies they generate through what they produce, how their identity changes, how they feel they are able to express themselves, their sense of belonging, the literature they consult, the epistemologies they engage with and critique, and how all of these embodied endeavours provide different ontological access to who they are and what they can do.

6.6 Pluri-versal Knowledge Building

The uniqueness of the HELTASA programme is that it foregrounds the willingness for multiple paradigmatic viewpoints to be activated. However, the challenge will emerge when supervisors, who were not yet originally part of the setting up processes of the HELTASA programme, come to assert their particular stamp onto the supervision interrelationships. The Advisory Committee is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that its agenda of activating a social equity agenda across all the studies. However, this agenda is likely to be an embattled space as different supervisors, different students of varied races, classes and historical perspectives will (and must) assert their viewpoints about what ought to be the agenda for academic staff development.

7 Closing Thoughts

This exploratory chapter has suggested that, like curriculum design, the processes of developing a decolonised supervision model for doctoral education involve 'complicated conversations' (Pinar 2012). Such conversations entail negotiating plural and paradoxical elements. Nevertheless, these dialogicalities and relationalities embed a commitment towards finding plural ways of addressing the current hierarchies of power. Knowledge elaboration and redefining boundaries are the epistemological, methodological, and ontological projects of doctoral education. We recognise that power is both oppressive and agentic: capable of realising new potential forms of social equity. Doctoral supervision should involve this kind of re-imaginative creativity for all involved in alternative exploratory relationships: the curriculum designers, the facilitators of the doctoral cohort models, the doctoral students and supervisors working in negotiated partnerships that open possibilities for higher education. Both the researchers and the researched are the ultimate beneficiaries of such alterity. We hope that this chapter shares the interests of one group of participants, namely

the designers of the curriculum in a single-country case study from the South. Future studies will need to ensure that all voices of the participatory circle are voiced, critiqued, and challenged. This would require not only those in the colonised South to reflect on the hegemonic forces at play in doctoral education design. Partners in the North from which many African countries borrow their curriculum designs, ought to equally question matters of a global spread of injustices perpetrated in the name of upholding 'international standards'. Additionally, expanding interpretations of a decolonised super-vision practice will open up spaces for the contestation of not just of the programme designers and their agendas. For example, further research should explore the choice of languages adopted within supervisory practices and whose interests they serve. This might be particularly important as many students cross-over international borders within and outside the continent of Africa. A decolonised doctoral supervision also involves rethinking national systems of doctoral education and how we position ourselves on an international stage. Our journey has only begun to new possibilities for higher education staff, institutions, and research.

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