

# TRANSFORMING POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Editors: Michael Anthony Samuel and Hyleen Mariaye



*Alternation African Scholarship Book Series, Volume #14*







# ***Alternation African Scholarship Book Series (AASBS)***

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# Preface

In 2022, towards the end of their tenure, the Humanities Institute Postdoctoral fellows (PDRFs), funded by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) (2020 – 2022), identified a number of key research focuses in Higher Education, they considered as important for research transformation, currently. These were:

- African Societies and Social Cohesion;
- Critical Identity Studies in African Contexts; and
- Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa.

We are grateful to the editors of this volume, Prof Michael Anthony Samuel, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and Prof Hyleen Mariaye, Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius, for taking on the project on *Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa*. We also want to convey our sincere thanks to all the authors and reviewers who participated in the project, and contributed to the production of this excellent volume. As the project developed, through its phases, it also importantly thematised some seminal emerging matters, to which we have some substantial contributions, and on which the academic discourse will be continuing. These are:

- Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa;
- Supervisors' and Students' Engagement with Postgraduate Education; and
- Inter-institutional, National and Transnational Discourses.

Amongst others, these are focuses which are also seminal for both the Humanities Institute's research, catalytic and affiliated projects, as well as the PDRF projects funded by the NIHSS. They are all contextually relevant, in research orientation, coupled with conceptually relevant and innovative knowledge production, for the deepening, furtherance and enhancing of quality doctoral research, and research supervision and mentoring in South Africa, and the African continent. Thank you, Colleagues, for an excellent volume.

Finally, we also want to extend our sincere thanks to the NIHSS for the funding of the project, as part of our PDRF Working Group Research program, at UKZN. You are providing substantial leadership in epistemic and epistemological research funding transformation in South Africa, as well as continentally.

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# A Note from the Editors

The recent interest in postgraduate studies has been at the forefront of many South African higher education institutions, especially in the wake of the national review of doctoral education undertaken by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This policy-driven exercise was directed at examining the quality assurance systems of doctoral studies at an institutional level. The review was undertaken between 2017 and 2022 to critically examine the rise in the production of doctoral education enrolment and graduation rates. While these shifts were welcomed, the deeper question points to what compromises were indeed being fostered. A concern was that matters of quality of the doctoral programme designs, its supervisory models, its practices of registration and student recruitment, and of assessment, needed more critical evaluation. Concerns were raised about whether doctoral graduates were indeed contributing to the expected social and economic development of the wider community expected by funders of the programmes.

These concerns about the quality of postgraduate education are not limited to the South African context. Fellow African countries are also querying the monitoring and evaluation of the quality assurance systems to support postgraduate education, not only at the doctoral level, but also at the foundational level of master's programmes. Transforming the quality of postgraduate education is the focused phenomenon that this anthology aims to engage. The invitation by the Editor-in-Chief of *Alternation* to contribute a volume about these matters on postgraduate education in Africa, thus was a welcomed opportunity to reflect on the leverage points for transforming the quality of postgraduate education.

Approximately thirty abstracts were received in response to the call for papers for the anthology. About fifteen chapters were drafted and submitted to the editors. In some cases, draft abstracts or chapter authors were encouraged to collaborate with other submissions. The editors also approached targeted individuals to make specific contributions. Not all of them succeeded in making the deadlines set. A double-blind peer review process of review was used, drawing on the expertise of a range of scholars listed at the end of this anthology. Thirty-three reviewers from local South African, Mauritian, and other international contexts were used to provide feedback on submitted manuscripts. Even though only eleven chapters were finally selected for publication in this volume, they constitute the voices of twenty-four collegial sub-authors who co-constructed their input. After the reviewers'

reports were received, as editors, we provided guidelines to the authors to refine their chapters. Upon resubmission of the revised texts, further enhancements were requested which constitute the final list of eleven chapters for this volume. Monthly updates with the Editor-in-Chief assisted to provide the momentum of the production of the anthology. We recognise that many of the earlier chapters were not accepted because they remained purely at a descriptive level rather than shifting the discourse to raise theoretical, philosophical and abstract scholarly arguments. One set of authors of a draft chapter chose to withdraw based on the extensive reworking required to reach acceptable standards. The selected published authors accepted constitute a range of ranks: recent PhD graduates, early career researchers, mid-career researchers, and seasoned researchers who have experience on the international terrain of postgraduate education. Five of the ten chapters involve authors from international contexts outside of South Africa. The list of authors consists of eighteen female contributors.

As editors, we have chosen to allow many theoretical paradigmatic approaches to bloom across the anthology. It is not our intention to provide commentary on each chapter's theoretical, methodological, and analytical stances. Our editorial advice to authors has permeated the revisioning process, which included a request to demonstrate how the authors' preferences and arguments can be applicable or relevant to the wider African continental context. It is up to the reader to make their critique of how well this agenda has been achieved as lessons learned are varied, about postgraduate education, as well as stories of success and engagement with postgraduate education. We note that the chapters are underpinned not only by a quest to enhance the quality of the provisioning of postgraduate education, but also by the subtle and overt campaigns towards activating a decolonised, indigenised and socially just agenda. The authors highlight that these matters are not simplistic or essentialist, but need to be understood complexly and contestedly.

We have grouped the chapters into three broad sections: the first section focuses on the framing of the postgraduate space (theoretically, systemically, and pragmatically). The second section deals with curriculum design and the requisite pedagogy of postgraduate education. And, the third section, focuses on inter-institutional, national, and transnational collaborations. These sections are overlapping and intersecting as matters of the systemic, institutional, programmatic levels and personal matters overlap in coherent and divergent ways. The studies reported here vary in methodology and style of research practice, including self-reflective inquiry, case study research, policy analysis studies, programmatic reviews, empirical quantitative and qualitative analysis, and theoretical position papers. This range

shows the possibilities of different perspectives and approaches, in ways of knowing the phenomenon of postgraduate education, and transformation, through personal, programmatic, institutional, regional, continental, and global engagements.

We would like to acknowledge the professional support of the administrative staff (Hemlata Bhurdool and Ahnisa Madhoo) in the Higher Education Studies cell at the Mauritius Institute of Education for assisting in overseeing the peer review process and collating the anthology text. We would also like to thank Deanne Collins for her professional language editing services. The administrative staff at the *Alternation* desk, Denzil Chetty, Sizwe Sithole and Mpumelelo Zondi are also appreciated for their technical digital, online publishing and administrative support in the finalisation of the anthology. We are grateful especially to the many peer reviewers whose critical commentaries helped elevate the quality of the chapters. Colleagues and friends, in our specific schools, faculties and professional organisational research settings, too many to mention individually, who have encouraged us to produce this much-needed volume, to you we are most grateful. To partners and relatives, we know you have endured our passion for promoting postgraduate education, and you allowed us the space to indulge and activate this agenda.

Most importantly, we are grateful to the authors who tolerated our repeated requests for refinements of the chapter. I am sure, you too, like us, are proud of your achievement. To all these contributors to the anthology, we are indeed indebted.

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## List of Abbreviations

AASBS	Alternation African Scholarship Book Series
AC	Advisory Committee
ACUP	Association of Public Universities
ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa

CHE	Council on Higher Education
CIRGE	Center for Innovation and Research in Graduate Education
CP	Critical Pedagogy
CREST	Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIES	Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
DST	Department of Science and Technology
ECR	Early Career Researchers
EdD	Professional Doctorate in Education
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
HCD	Human Capital Development
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HELTASA	Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HES	Higher Education Studies
HOM	Habits of Mind
IAU	International Association of Universities
ICEF	International Consultants for Education and Fairs
IDERN	International Doctoral Education Research Network
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IT	Information Technology
MA	Masters
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MIE	Mauritius Institute of Education
MIG	Management, IT and Governance
NDP	National Development Plan
NIHSS	National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SA	South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAERA	South African Education Research Association
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SARCHI	South African Research Chairs Initiative
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SER	Self-Evaluation Report

SIGs	Special Interest Groups
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TDP	Teaching Development Programme
TNE	Transnational education
TPECK	Technology, Pedagogy, Environment, Culture, Knowledge
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCDP	University Capacity Development Plan
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISA	University of South Africa
UoB	University of Brighton
USAF	Universities South Africa
USDP	University Staff Doctoral Programme
UTLO	University Teaching and Learning Office



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# **Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa**



# CHAPTER ONE

## Exploring the Postgraduate Education Space

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### Abstract

This chapter sets the contextual, theoretical and philosophical background to the volume by gestating the idea of a postgraduate space. Recognising the interconnectedness of the global, continental and institutional forces acting upon postgraduate education, it examines how these often coalesce to lead to an exclusive focus on policy steering interests. The effects of an overemphasis on productivity and discourses which emphasize a deficit perspective on African higher education are illustrated by means of two case studies located in the professional contexts of the two authors. These serve to raise questions around the implicit assumptions underpinning the deficit framing of the African contexts. Alternatively, if postgraduate education is to be constructed as a public good to serve the wider community, deep systemic transformations must be activated through careful collaborative curriculum design and improving the quality of educational experiences for postgraduate students as indicated in the range of provisions and practices discussed by the contributors to this volume. The chapter concludes by raising the series of *questions* that recur across the anthology as it sets up the quest for a deep transformation of postgraduate education.

**Keywords:** postgraduate space, policy staging, doctoral education, transformation, curriculum design and provisions

Decolonisation, and the Indigenous knowledges that sustain it, are diverse and, due to the embedded nature, unique to particular contexts and geographies. How do we negotiate these particularities in an increasingly globalised (and subsequently homogenised) and connected world, especially when there are increasingly fewer options to remain isolated in attempts to maintain particularity? (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012).

## **1 Introduction**

### ***1.1 Background: Beyond Policy Staging***

This chapter serves to shift the discourse of underproductivity of postgraduate research within the African context. We already are confronted with a litany of explanations for the low levels of contribution of the African university systems to the international research corpus (Walshe 2008; McGregor 2008; Kotecha, Steyn & Vermeulen 2012; Scherer & Sooryamoorthy 2022). These studies have been useful in framing the problematic around matters related to the critical subject of building the capacity of the institutional systems, promoting leadership and political will to support postgraduate research, activating systemic institutional staff development initiatives, and funding opportunities to address the main challenges confronting higher education research in Africa. The extant emphasis has been on promoting a call for a policy staging of interventions to address a redirection of human, physical, and financial resources to activate change.

Fredua-Kwarteng (2023), a Canadian policy researcher, suggests that we need to be cautious about how we approach the staged reporting by global institutions such as the World Bank who argue that Africa (and the developing world context in general) lags behind the more economically advanced countries and that Africa needs to produce as many as 100,000 PhDs over a ten-year period. The construct of staging, drawn from the realm of theatrical drama performance, refers to the creation of a conscious platform in which the audience is invited into the world of the playwright. The creator of the imaging (the author/ the scriptwriter) has an underlying message to steer the audience in a pre-defined direction. When it comes to the realm of policy staging, it could also analogously refer to the diagnostic processes used by the medical profession to track the degree of spread of a particular pathology within the body. The status of a disease and its prognosis drives the agenda. In analogous ways,

creators and reviewers of policy (policymakers and analysts respectively), like playwrights and medical physicians usually have an *a priori* expectation of the choices of interventions to be implemented. Fredua-Kwarteng's critique does not deny the need for systemic policy initiatives that provide the necessary baseline funding framing interventions for change. The 'capacity development' discourse is built on the foundational evidence (the platform) that Africa has 198 researchers per million compared to 428 in Chile, 4,260 in Canada, 4,269 in the United Kingdom and 4,663 in the United States. Yet, the policy discourse is not sufficient and needs to embrace a more encompassing theoretical interpretation about whose interests are being served via the choices of postgraduate 'outside-in' interventions.

More importantly, at a theoretical rather than a pragmatic, operational level, Fredua-Kwarteng implies that the agenda of external deficit framings of the African context could be also understood as creating a marketplace of the spaces where the 'saviours' from the outside world might intervene to rescue the African context (the prefigured *a priori* solution). Advocates of this 'outside-in' discourse assist to reinforce rather than challenge the inequities that exist on the world stage, when they do not examine more critically the specific conditions under which African higher education are being undertaken. Many of the staged analytical positionings could be argued to reveal undertones of pleading deficit rather than asserting that developing countries are required to make strategic choices around how diminishing budgets are deployed to address competing social demands – many of which cannot be addressed by the 'Centre's' conception of useful research. A new form of 'knowledge colonialism' is promoted via the bartering and borrowing as exports and imports of curriculum, programmes, preferred policies and educational practices traverse between the centres and the peripheries (Ramtohul 2023). The *status quo* of inequities thus lingers albeit in the name of support and development.

Whilst the attempts to leverage change via the development of buy-in from the leadership and management structures of university executives and academic programme directors are relevant, most of their management leadership discourses (drawing from variations of the Human Capital Development theories-HCD) around postgraduate education usually point to the argument that an investment in the producing PhD graduates will ensure a sufficient skilled force to activate economic and social welfare development. The production of human capital to activate the economy is caste within circumscribed econometric understandings (See a critique of HCD by Brooks 2009). These

HCD discourses might have contributed to the marginal increases in the continental rate of PhD production over the last decade (UNESCO 2022), yet their enduring effect on the quality of development of the broader society is still questionable (Botha & Botha 2022). The concern is raised about whether the PhD graduates are indeed contributing to the quality of *public social life* or are their agendas primarily driven by individual private interests in what a PhD will benefit the graduate personally. This could be attested by the multitude of jobless PhD graduates (or graduates in peripheral jobs) (Sumanasiri, Yajid & Khatibi 2015) whose pursuit of private interests (certification) renders them vulnerable, as employers now value cheaper micro-credentials over more expensive, but less productive doctoral credentials (Ahmat, Bashir, Razali & Kasolang 2021).

The myth of a contribution to the public good by postgraduate graduates might not always be realised for several reasons (Leibowitz 2012; Williams 2016; Walker 2018). Firstly, there are many reasons why students enrol in PhD studies, not necessarily always driven by altruistic agendas or academic research interests. Additionally, the transition into the world of work post-PhD is fraught with nuanced challenges (Nerad, Bogle, Kohl, O'Caroll, Peters & Scholz 2022) (See also Chapter 11). Many do not exclusively embrace the targeted expectations that obtaining a postgraduate qualification is a stepping stone into the career as a researcher, or as a contributor to social growth and development (See Chapter 8). A much closer analysis is needed to track the processes of transitioning from the world of academia into post-qualification careers (Samuel 2014). Myths around this transition promote a misconception that all postgraduate students desire to be part of academia, find the trajectory into the job labour market a smooth or straightforward one, and are unfettered by social, familial and institutional political obstacles to achieve their aspirations (Nerad & Heggulund 2008).

Notably, the quest for a qualification could be driven by other expedient agenda to ascend promotion ladders within executive or managerial structures. There is a high status attached to obtaining a postgraduate credential and this sets the graduate apart from the majority in the population who do not reach this apex qualification. However, the scholarship of the discipline in which the postgraduate study was conducted is often jettisoned as new administrative, managerial and leadership responsibilities, and the status it accrues, takes preference. This could be one explanation for why the underproductivity of academic disciplinary research endures when new African graduates are absorbed

rapidly into managerial roles and out of academic laboratories and research fieldwork spaces.

Secondly, the lack of noticeable contribution to the public good by PhD graduates might be linked to the quality of African postgraduate education itself: its curriculum and research supervision might not adequately prepare PhD graduates at their exit graduation point to serve at a cutting edge of the disciplinary fields they have studied (See Chapters 4 and 6). Often times the agenda of their PhDs is driven by expedient imitation of the agendas borrowed from elsewhere: their host institutions, their supervisors, and not the specific contexts from which they originate. Indeed, the problematics they research might not even have emanated from within the local social context itself. Research supervisors are often obsessed with ‘internationalization’, where the notion of ‘glocal’ is romanticized at the expense of the local (See Robertson 1994; and Swyngedouw 2004 for foundational theoretical interpretations of the terms ‘internationalization’, ‘glocalization’ and ‘globalisation’).

Williams (2016) extends the argument that the notion of the public good value of universities has *morphed* over time. In the founding histories of universities as institutional structures, the role of the university was considered to be one which produced knowledge that held society to account for their choices. Nevertheless, the custodians of power over the knowledge production (largely embedded in religious conclaves) had a strong influence over what and whose knowledges came to be circulated in the public sphere. Later in the twentieth century, economists usually conceptualised the public good education as a means to drive technological processes. However, more recently, the public good of a university is understood in its ability to activate social justice through the social mobility of its participants. This shifting agenda of benefactors, agents and their roles, Williams (2016) argues alters the social contract of the relationship of the university and the state away from the university’s prime role as a knowledge producer to that of an *inculcator of moral and social* responsibility.

Who defines the ingredients of these moral and social features has become a moot issue as increasingly the state seeks a return on investment of the resources they make towards the upkeep of the university system on behalf of the wider tax-paying public and the widening influence of private capital. Within evolving democracies, the expected role of the university system appears to be dominated by the goal to activate accountable research and knowledge that promotes the well-being of the wider society. This is not restricted

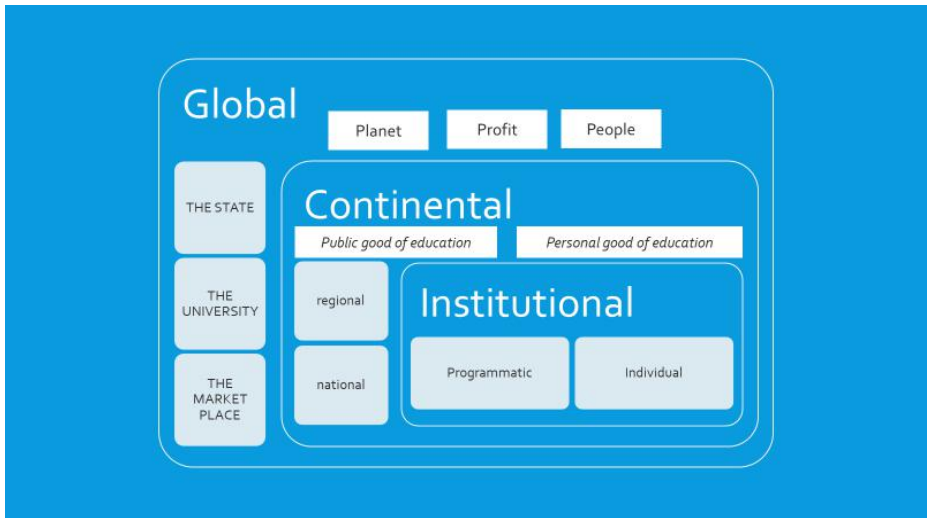
only to activating the development of civil rights such as participation in the political systems and institutions within a country, but also to the quality of human rights exercised, and the freedoms and responsibilities to define one's identities. Universities have arguably become more assertive spaces to define and refine self and society. The notions of access of previously marginalised groups into higher education and success therein are embedded in this developmental discourse (See Chapter 5). In addition, the infusion of this public good/social development agenda varies divergently according to the different professional and academic programmes on offer at universities. More instrumentalist curricula agenda are perhaps offered in the disciplines of the 'hard sciences' (e.g., the Natural Sciences) foregrounding scientific disciplinary knowledges, whilst the 'soft sciences' (e.g., Humanities and Social Sciences) take more overtly the social responsiveness responsibility. Arguably, both the hard and soft sciences could be understood as supporting either directly or indirectly the wider growth of the social system.

Concurrently, the agenda of the workplace (the market place) is imposing its critique of what is expected of higher education graduates. The under-preparedness of students to be 'work-ready' emphasises a mismatch between the idealism of university priorities, and the pragmatics of workplace expectations (McKenna 2019; Mesuwini & Bomani 2021). The employability of graduates from certain fields and disciplines of study, or from particular institutional typologies, is a concern (Adams & Yu 2022). For example, graduates from the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions (in the South African context), despite their work-orientated curricula and professed missions to support job preparation, are unable to secure productive employment for many of their graduates (Akojee 2016). This might point not necessarily only to the sending institution (the higher education system) but also to the receiving institutions (the labour market), each with its own exiting and recruiting practices, which are never neutral.

The competition of interests between the *state* (purporting to act in the interests of its electorate), the *marketplace* (with its profit-driven underpinnings) and the *university* (as an intermediary, or a servant to either of the above forces) are a feature of present-day priorities. This triumvirate is also affected by the rise of technological modalities which bolster each other's capacity to act (Hariri 2018). The interests of the higher education system to secure economic resources to keep afloat, might also prejudice institutions to choose particular expedient strategies. Moreover, the overarching discourse of seeking

to develop an interconnected globalised society which acknowledges the balance of people, profit and planetary perspectives in an era of the global climate change prevents any ‘isolated choices’ (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012). The competing, volatile and dynamic space requires fluid interpretation and responses (See closing sections 4 and 5 of this chapter). Postgraduate education ought, therefore, to be engaged in varying kinds of knowledges and knowledge-making processes. Underpinning this non-isolationist stance involves acknowledging the non-neutral nature of knowledge itself, and simultaneously drawing on the interflow of epistemologies of the past, the present, and the future. Time, space and purpose intersect, radiate and interflow in the act of knowledge-making, and doctoral education (policy and practice) could become a space for epistemic, lived and eternal temporal rhythms (Manathunga, Qi, Raciti, Gilbey, Stanton & Singh 2022; Manathunga 2019).

The conception of a postgraduate education space is thus considered as embedding simultaneously a personal, political and social value. This agenda operates within intersected layers: at individual, institutional, national, regional, continental and global levels. Epistemological disciplinary, ontological and axiological social interests overlap in a dialogical discursive interaction that span beyond just institutional programmatic boundaries (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1: A Complex Network of the Postgraduate Education Space**  
(authors' own)

## ***1.2 The Structure of the Chapter***

This chapter aims to recognise the complexity of the postgraduate education space within the African context (section 1). Next it will examine why the specific context of African postgraduate education should extend *beyond a focus exclusively on policy steering interests* (section 2). By looking at the specific contexts of the two authors, one from South Africa (Author A) and the other from Mauritius (Author B), we aim to explore how the *meso-contextual* space of postgraduate curriculum design matters. As an emblematic case study, we examine how the quality assurance agenda of the South African national reviews of doctoral programmes in the country were recently undertaken (2017-2022) by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). We focus on how, despite the interest in raising the quality of doctoral education provisioning, the CHE review re-emphasised and re-exposed the bifurcated system of inequities in curriculum design and development, management and administrative practices across a historically saturated system. Rather than serving a developmental purpose, it reinforces the gap between the advantaged and under-served higher educational contexts. The potential bureaucratisation of quality assurance is examined here. The Mauritian case study aims to examine the unintended effects of policy steering which gave rise to the burgeoning of private higher education provisioning. This has a knock-on effect on any quality postgraduate education programme design throughout the country.

In the next section (section 3) we make a case for shifting the discourse towards examining the nature of the *curriculum design* of doctoral education. We establish the *emergent lines of inquiry* required for this agenda. What factors indeed enable or constrain the development of African postgraduate graduates becomes the key question. Moreover, one needs to be examining how research capacity could be developed via the quality of postgraduate education and curriculum initiatives to activate transformation. Too often doctoral education is understood as the private privy of only the singularly-assigned supervisor and his/her apprenticed supervisees. The tensions in these student and supervisory roles are worth re-examining and are the subject of many of the chapters identified in this anthology (See particularly Chapters 3, 6, and 9). The section argues for the shift towards expanding the *relationships* not just between supervisors and their students but also between wider partners across disciplines, across sites of learning/ researching or practising postgraduate studies, across institutions, and even across *national and international spaces* (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10).

The section also justifies elaborating *the discourse of transformation* beyond just superficial shifts in quantitative demographics of race, class and gender participation. The discourse is one not just of graduate production but also about how to examine the worthwhileness of a postgraduate qualification (see Chapter 11). The conceptions of a more elaborate deep transformation of postgraduate education are presented here. Some key constructs like dialogicality, collaborative competences, tackling uncertainty, complexity, and entanglements are explored here. The shift towards an ‘anti-colonial hope’ stance (Zemblyas 2023) is offered here.

The section concludes by justifying the architectural landscape and organisation of the anthology of chapters that follow in the book.

The chapter aims concludes to activate the series of *questions* that recur across the anthology as it sets up the quest for a deep transformation of postgraduate education (section 4).

## **2 Policy Resources or Restrictions: Case Studies from South Africa and Mauritius**

In this section we explore two case studies from divergent African contexts: the one from South Africa (a large contributor to the share of postgraduate research on the continent) and the other from Mauritius (which has been successful in obtaining a far reach in higher education participation rates). The section suggests that the regulatory control of policy initiatives, whilst promulgated to uplift the quality of the education system, sometimes could have unintended consequences that mitigate against its original purposes. The first case study (South Africa) reveals quality assurance agencies’ approach to problem-solving involves externalising the challenges of doctoral education rather than acknowledging the broader systemic dysfunction. Quality assurance (QA) agencies are argued to transfer responsibility to individuals and institutions rather than acknowledge systemic pathologies. The QA approach and its architectural mode of operation during the national quality review process of doctoral education reinforces the gap between advantaged and under-served higher education institutions. The second case study (Mauritius) comments on the self-congratulatory policy promulgation of rapidly expanding higher education provisioning through local and international collaborative online and residential efforts, without the deeper critical examination of the contextual, institutional, administrative, and intellectual academic resources to sustain

policy change in the higher education system. The knock-on effect of under-resourced poor quality of undergraduate expansion on the postgraduate research and curriculum is simply under-planned for in the quest for politically rhetorical social equity discourses. These findings are not confined to the two case study contexts and can be seen as placeholders for other contexts.

## ***2.1 The Council on Higher Education (South Africa): Doctoral Standards Review (2017 - 2022)***

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) derives its mandate from the Higher Education (Act 101 of 1997) to serve as a quality assurance body on higher education in South Africa. Themba Mosia (Council Chairperson) confirms that the CHE and its responsible sub-committees, such as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), aim to ‘promote, accredit and advance quality assurance mechanisms across the higher education system, and advise the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation on all higher education matters’ (CHE 2022: vi). In concert with the interests of the National Research Foundation (NRF), which underpins several funding initiatives that support doctoral studies, the CHE undertook in 2017 to review the quality of doctoral education provisioning with the view towards making recommendations for higher education policy. Against a national set of established benchmarks (published in 2018), 23 of the 26 public higher education institutions (HEIs) and 5 private HEIs that offered doctoral education, were officially expected to evaluate their institutional quality assurance arrangements in a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). These institutions (28 in total) constituted varied typologies: those that had long histories of reputed research engagement, such as those advantaged institutions from the apartheid era, as well as those who had limited capacity and experience of postgraduate education. Some were classified as traditional universities (offering mainly degree programmes), and others as comprehensive universities (offering a range of degrees, diplomas and certificates). Another category was the universities of technology which recently were mandated to embrace postgraduate education programmes and research beyond their original vocational and technical foci.

Each SER (with its accompanying portfolios of evidence) was then evaluated by a peer review panel from outside the institution. The institutional SERs and the peer review panel reports were then synthesised comparatively by an expert team which then orchestrated the production of a *National Review*

*of South African Doctoral Qualifications: Doctoral Degrees National Report* (CHE 2022) (henceforth referred to as the Report) which was structured to look at areas related to the 16 national standards criteria such as the admission process, registration, supervision planning and execution, assessment, graduation rates, funding, institutional human and physical resources to support doctoral education. The transitioning of graduates into the world of work was also summarised.

This review period spanned approximately 5 years of engagement from the conception to the final synthetic report. It aimed through its review design to activate a shared synthesis about doctoral education within the institutions themselves and comparatively across the national system. The expectation was that direct policy recommendations to activate quality postgraduate education would evolve from this review.

However, key commendations and critiques are offered about such a quality review process. Notably, international commentators outside South Africa applauded the CHE for its rigorous and extensive process of casting the spotlight on the operational levels of varying institutions (Mohamedbhai 2022). The review process embedding *monitoring and evaluation as an extended mandate of HE policy* was considered relevant for similar doctoral education systems across the African continent. Many African institutions also have to balance the push for increased enrolment and maintaining the issue of quality doctoral education provisioning. These continental institutions are also varied in their historical trajectories: some of which have been long-established, those still in development stages, and those aspiring to be upgraded to university status. The importance of the development of supervisory capacity was highlighted as resonant with the African experience. In addition, the key issue of building *quality assurance capacity systems* was raised by Fredua-Kwarteng (2021). He argued that most African external quality assurance agencies are organisationally weak, poorly funded, and inadequately managed. He comments further that visionless leadership has not yet generated a robust set of monitoring and assessing of the quality of doctoral processes, outputs and outcomes. The South African example of quality assurance reviews was consequently seen as potentially a benchmark. Such a policy of quality assurance was interpreted as resourceful to promoting the standards of postgraduate education which look retrospectively at the masters' programme as a feeder into doctoral education, as well as prospectively cognisant of the financial resources needed when setting target enrolment and graduations outputs.

By contrast, some commentators from within the South African system were more circumspect about whether a *human capital orientation* in the review was driving the process (Harley 2020). The shadow of the gaze from the NRF which was involved in the setting up of the review was considered as infiltrating a ‘return of investment’ financial logic. The commentator critiqued the ambiguity of the CHE’s defence of an independent choice of standards, whilst professing its alignment with the NRF agenda. Further, the critique acknowledged that the process of self-evaluation could be uncomfortable for institutions, especially when the stakes were high. Institutional reputation across the national system was at stake, and report writers of the institutional SERs were pushed to present their institutions in a positive impressionistic light. The author cites the famously coined ‘impression management’ (Goffman 1959) which ‘comes into play when people attempt to persuade others of their definition of the situation. The strategy is aimed at making impressions become the reality of the target audience’ (Harley 2020). What counts as evidence presented in the SER is selective, and often not necessarily deeply critical enough of the realities on the ground. The audience writes the text.

McKenna (2019) is more blatant that ‘quality assurance generally seems to encourage bureaucracy and compliance’ and institutional actors are encouraged ‘to be part of a rising managerialism in institutions’. She argued earlier (McKenna 2018) that universities are increasingly turning into business corporations, and the mantras of enhanced efficiencies from the business world chip away at the core purpose of higher education, namely the academic project. She cites Ginsberg (2011) who reflects that across the US, the number of academic staff employed to teach and guide research rose at a slower pace than increased student enrolment, yet the increase in executive positions, usually people with business rather than academic acumen increased.

Reflecting on the submitted SER for my institution (Author A), the quality assurance probing fostered a space for a questioning of the wide variance of doctoral curriculum designs. Different disciplinary fields of study interpreted the role of a postgraduate qualification in varied signatory ways (Matos 2014). The rituals and routines of disciplinary tribes (Becher & Trowler 2001) primarily drove the interest of academics’ design and offering of doctoral programmes. The CHE doctoral standards were considered by these practitioners as a form of homogenising expectations of what constituted quality doctoral education. In the face of critique, the evidence that was shared for the institutional SER document tended to be largely descriptive rather than sufficiently

critical or theoretical. Internal curriculum designers of doctoral education chose to reference other more prestigious (national and international) institutions to establish their curriculum programme benchmarks. In certain professional programmes, the role of professional councils' steering the definitions of curriculum programme quality rather than the CHE came into contestation. Limited evidence was found of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary collaboration since the individual academic units were being managed as separately-funded entities. While the report itself detailed this diversity, the CHE commentary on the institutional SER reflected that they expected that the institution had a common policy about the management and administration of the quality assurance across its diverse institutional settings. Interestingly, centralisation rather than decentralised variance was being suggested. This posed a challenge for a post-apartheid merged institution that had several campuses, spread over more than two cities, consisting of several disciplinary schools, and characterised by a complex governance structure of management. The institution valued its variations of doctoral designs and quality assurance systems; the CHE questioned the coherence based on other normative university structures nationally.

On reflecting more broadly about the SER review process nationally some institutional peers considered the procedures as somewhat of a bothersome exercise. The actual writing up of the SER was outsourced primarily to consultants who were retired individuals who had the luxury of time that permanent members of staff lacked to construct this extensive institutional overview. Their perspectives tended to emphasise the historical foundations of the institution in celebratory rather than critical tones, suggesting that their institutional reputation was already considered incontestable and that the CHE review process was largely an exercise in policy compliance. The site visit of the peer panel could be considered as a space where individuals at varied levels in the bureaucratic hierarchies seized an opportunity for a localised grinding of axes. The micro-institutional politics thus lay behind the critical commentary they offered, showing up fault-lines in the administrative and management systems. A preference for those being interviewed was to present a perspective of technical, operational and procedural levels of analysis. They usually steered away from any deeper critical socio-political analysis of their role in the broader community, across urban and rural contexts, and across neighbouring institutions with lesser resources. However, professional etiquette and deference to the SER panel visit were hospitable and avoided any controversial matters.

For academics intricately involved with the design and delivery of doc-

toral education, the final synthetic recommendations of the CHE in its final 2022 Review Report were somewhat insipid. The Report merely told us what was already known about the wider variation of doctoral education quality and practices that recur within the system. Whilst individual institutions themselves were not named in the synthetic report, the overarching message was framed within a deficiency discourse.

More advantaged institutions were applauded for ‘best practice’, and other practices were considered as not exceeding baseline expected requirements and not necessarily commendable. The Report indirectly suggests that graduate research management tools, data management systems, and online digital platforms for higher degree management and oversight were considered as ‘supporting efficiency but do not constitute above-threshold practice’ (CHE 2022: 62). However, the use of international supervisors and the offering of co-badged qualifications (supported by the necessary oversight structures) were considered as representing above-threshold practice. The Report closes with this comment: ‘It is recommended that institutions must clearly differentiate and separate achieving the threshold as per the Standard and exceeding it. In many cases, institutions tended to casually construe even those standard practices, conditions and national policy requirements as constituting above-threshold practice’ (CHE 2022: 64)

Historically disadvantaged institutions were again set up as inadequate and in need of improvement. Whilst recognising the diverse *in situ* institutional challenges, the Report still reinforces the reality of a historically bifurcated higher education system without acknowledging adequately the complexity of the transitioning from the past and the difficult efforts undertaken toward reaching national benchmarks, especially when the starting platforms are highly unequal. The tone is judgemental rather than developmental. Moreover, the executive orientation to the Report emphasises the surveillance agenda that McKenna (2019) predicted: ‘Based on the findings and recommendations from the national review, every institution that participated in the review was required to submit an Improvement Plan to the CHE. During the period of the implementation of the Plan, institutions are expected to submit periodic progress reports and the CHE will monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan to their successful conclusion’ (CHE 2022: vii). This consolidates the ‘over-lording agendas’ that Harley (2020) also predicted where institutions themselves are considered as the architects of their own surveillance mechanisms. The authoritarian gaze is deflected away from the CHE as a watchdog.

Important recommendations that the institutions' SERs suggested for new policy directives are glossed over and the responsibility for activation of the reform was again redirected to the institution to put in place its own Improvement Plans. The Report is detailed in identifying the range of issues confronting doctoral education from recruitment to entry into post-qualification employment. There is a set of listed recommendations accompanying each area of reflection. But, the onus is shifted towards institutions themselves to resolve their problematics, and it is likely that cash-strapped under-served institutions, or those with lesser experience or capacity resources, will unlikely be able to invest adequately to reverse their status.

For example, The Report acknowledges the Institutions' SERs recommended the need for student financial support to address the unrealistic terms of reference of current bursary or fee remission schemes that expected students to complete their doctoral students within three years (James 2022). The reality is that many doctoral students (especially in the professional programmes) were involved *de facto* as registered part-time students, holding day jobs to sustain their financial livelihood. The time-to-degree expectation was simply unrealistic, especially when many students do not have the autonomous research capacity at entry into the doctoral programmes. The registration time-lag between their masters and doctoral degree (different for varied disciplines) usually involves students grappling with updating their knowledge of the rapidly changing fields of research knowledge. Sometimes doctoral students are crossing over into new institutional cultures or disciplinary fields of study and their undergraduate or masters' degrees leave many students grappling with the transition to a doctoral study, and this delays their throughput and graduation rates. In listing these and other concerns, grounded from the institutions themselves, James (2022) notes that the Report acknowledges these challenges on the ground. But the Report typically responds perfunctorily as follows:

Delays in completion can sometimes cause frustration on the part of the supervisor, who may lose interest in the student and subtly withdraw from providing appropriate guidance and supervision. Other consequences include 'hot' research topics dating and [that] may no longer be novel in the eyes of the supervisor or the examiner, to the potential detriment of the student (CHE 2022: 58).

There is a limited explicit declaration of what systemic policy intervention should be recommended at a macro-level to address these issues of delays.

Should there be a reconsideration of the policy of the time-to-degree span; should earmarked funding be directed to support specific higher education institutions or specific programmes to engage with appropriate transitioning support programmes to enable the cross-over into an autonomous doctoral study? Should pre-doctoral initiatives and staffing resources be subsidised and supported by national resources to address specific capacity issues in specific typologies of institutions? Who will establish the process of a new subsidisation scheme of promoting the throughput of doctoral education students if the time-to-degree completion is underproductive? What funding support is directed towards institutions for part-time students since most macro-funding support (and many bursary schemes) favour only full-time registered students? Why and how can students be encouraged and financially supported to undertake full-time studies that are feasible financially?

It seems as if the CHE absolves itself from making these overt policy recommendations at a national level and expects institutions to resolve these ‘blockages’ at a doctoral curriculum design level and internal institutional management level. Similarly, other areas within the Report about registration procedures and examination procedures, about ethical clearance management and administrative management, or the building of supervisory capacities are relegated as internal institutional accountabilities. Further, the Report advises that students personally need to choose doctoral studies with open eyes to its expectations. This recommendation does not acknowledge the range of motivations underpinning choice for doctoral studies, nor how graduates aim to utilise their credentials prospectively. (See section one above about choices for doctoral study.) No overt directives are offered about the rule of many universities to require that students submit a completed journal article manuscript for publication as part of the doctoral examination. Institutions’ SERs reflected that this expectation, while promoting the dissemination of the research work, also contributes to delays in final graduation completion.

These deflections reinforce the misconception that poor quality is not a systemic issue, but a personal, or institutional lack of will or capacity. Additionally, the Report generally congratulates the institutions for the robust and well-documented set of regulatory policies, but chastises the institutions (or more specifically the academics on the ground) for the lack of shared knowledge about the terms of reference of the managerial policies. The managers of institutions are also hereby shielded in the Report’s critique. Indirectly, the ‘burden’ of quality is being placed at the doorstep of individual supervisors

and their practices. Is this commentary indicative of the steering of the university system toward policy sycophants? Whose interests would such policy idealisation serve? Is this the most appropriate strategy by which the deep quality of doctoral education will be enhanced?

This above section points to the scepticism that there was missed opportunity in the Report, with its ambitious targets, to drive adequate policy steering directions. Instead, in support of its professed view not to encroach on institutional autonomy, it shifted the discourse towards internal institutional logics. The effect is to activate accountability from below, without a co-requisite responsibility of systemic support from above. It is not surprising, therefore, that many South African academics on the ground in this anthology, as perhaps a loss of faith in systemic reform from above, resort to how to change the system from the bottom-up.

## **2.2 A Graduate in Every Household: Un-intended Consequences of Mauritius Higher Education Policy**

This sub-section foregrounds the policy directive to activate the growth of the higher education participation rates in the Mauritius context during the period 2011-2021. It highlights the rapid impact that this policy had on the burgeoning of a range of institutions that came to position themselves in the marketplace of the policy environment. The impact that a rise in private higher education institutions on the quality of postgraduate education provisioning within the small-island context which claimed to set itself up as a prospective ‘knowledge hub’ in the Indian Ocean is the focus of this reflection. This sub-section also reinforces the questioning of the potential resources and restrictive possibilities of policy as explored in the South Africa case study above.

Mauritius has one of the highest tertiary participation rates of the African continent currently at 47% (Higher Education Commission 2022). The policy change that ushered in this era of massification of higher education was adopted more than a decade ago and was framed around the political slogan of ‘one graduate per family’ which reflected the intention of the government of the time to transform Mauritius into a knowledge hub (Marshall 2010). Increasing participation in HE was not only a social justice issue but also closely connected with the economic ambitions of the island to generate in time revenue from foreign student recruitment. To this end, foreign universities were encouraged to set up their campuses either as satellite campuses or enter into collaborative

transnational partnerships through a series of fiscal reliefs (Mariaye & Samuel 2018).

The then Director of the Tertiary Education Commission, the apex regulatory institution entrusted to enact government higher education, writing in the context of the international Conference on the Internationalisation of Higher Education held in March 2011, argued *‘Over the past decades, the number of globally mobile students has increased by 41%, according to UNESCO data. There are now more than 2.5 million students who are enrolled in higher education institutions outside of their home countries and it is estimated that the number will rise to 8 million in 2025. International education has resulted into a significant economical impact on countries hosting foreign students. As enrolments grow, so does the economic return. Mauritius should take advantage of the international market demand for tertiary education. The Mauritian tertiary education sector can become one of the pillars of the economy by attracting 100,000 foreign students by 2020’* (Higher Education Commission 2011). By the end of 2022, the Janus-headed policy of achieving social equity through massification and exporting Mauritian higher education primarily on the African continent produced mitigated quantitative results at best and at worst generated a range of practices which, in the long term would run counter to the very objectives of the policy. Student international recruitment stands as at date at 2,858 as compared to 635 in 2011, with the bulk of the recruitment being in private higher education institutions, a very far cry from the expected 100,000 (Higher Education Commission 2022).

Policymakers’ miscalculation occurred on several levels. For one, their lack of knowledge of African realities and what prospective African students are expecting from an international programme; an overestimation of what Mauritius could offer as a higher education destination banking on the same assets as those that are foregrounded in advertising the island as a tourist instead and; lastly, a naïve understanding that local and international institutions already operate within comparable and compatible structures. Arguably, the social justice agenda was to be largely achieved by merging institutions or changing their statutes for them to assume an expanded portfolio. The Open University of Mauritius was to spearhead this transformation through its provision of distance education to a diversified profile of local and international students. Although its local student population is the fastest growing on the local campus, international student figures remain insignificant at 4 for 2021. The University of Technology was also set a target of 6,000 students with a campus,

which was already struggling to house 3,000 students Its current enrolment stands at 3,500 students (Higher Education Commission 2022).

Between 2011 and 2023, on average 15,000 new enrolments were registered at undergraduate levels and 5,000- 6,000 at postgraduate levels. Yet the number pursuing research degrees remain low at around 700 currently engaged in research degrees. The policy of one graduate per family has meant that a conservative estimate of 100,000 Mauritians completed an undergraduate degree between 2011-2021 in a country of 369,000 households with 36,500 families living below the poverty line (Statistics Mauritius 2022). Some may see in these figures an opportunity to celebrate but we argue here the costs of this quantitative track record will be onerous in the long term. Already, because of the inadequate attention paid to setting up the required regulatory, institutional and programmatic structures to guarantee quality outcomes, public and employer trust in the attributes of graduates has eroded resulting in a comparatively lower reserve salary for graduates.

Whilst the policy itself did improve accessibility to higher education and increase postgraduate uptake, its effects on research capacity remain negligible. In fact, relatively the proportion of successful postgraduate students taking research degrees has declined. We argue here this systemic inability to leverage the advantage created by a large undergraduate population to improve completions of postgraduate research degrees is created by the very ‘one graduate per family policy’.

The policy was majorly founded on the premise that imported international education through brand-name universities be sufficient to raise the quality of provisions in Mauritius through the transposition of transnational practice in the Mauritian context. The unexpected legion risks to the quality of international universities provisions locally emanating from inadequate attention paid to the quality of teaching and assessment as well as issues related to language and curricular contextualisation (Pyvis 2013) resulted in graduates not having the level of criticality expected, poor study habits often symptomatic of a lack of understanding of the rigour, engagement and discipline required for success.

Local higher education institutions placed under the pressure of producing the required numbers to justify their demands for funding and be seen to contribute to the national agenda of improving access have used their position to increase enrolment even if that meant compromising the standards of achievement. Added to this, many recruited students may have school grades,

which are insufficient to see them successfully through an undergraduate programme. Yet, many of them aspirationally join a postgraduate programme lured by the career advantage this may offer.

The case of the policy of ‘one graduate per family’ stands as a poignant example of how the short-term quantitative achievements of policy run counter to its long-term qualitative objectives. The vision of Mauritian policymakers, though worth pursuing from an economic perspective, has been partial at best and at worst, set the Mauritian higher education system on the same trajectory as India fifty years ago. The ease and accessibility of earning a degree reduced its economic value on the labour market, led to a loss of public confidence in the value of a university education, and compromised the research capacities of universities.

However, the lessons learned from the implementation of this policy have resulted in the Higher Education Commission setting up a more robust system to monitor the quality of programmes offered but it will take time to repair the damage done to the cultural transformation it has brought in terms of shaping expectations of learning and quality of engagement in undergraduate education and how this transfers to postgraduate learning experiences. There is also a limited guarantee of how an externally imposed accountability system would be sufficient to counter ‘beat the system strategies’ which many higher education providers appear to have successfully activated over the 2010-2021 decade cushioned by the quantitative logic the policy legitimised.

### **3 Towards a Lens of Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa**

Many higher education institutions across the continent are confronted with a relatively small percentage of students interested in or capable of postgraduate education. Several contexts are constrained by the social, political, economic and historical realities that prioritise basic education (at primary and secondary school levels), given the low levels of gross enrolment and participation rates in formal education and schooling. Consequently, in this scenario, participation in undergraduate studies (access and success in bachelor’s degrees and diploma studies) is already a selected achievement that aims to reverse the historical inequities of the past, and postgraduate education is often considered a luxury.

However, this anthology recognises these challenges of context, but aims to move beyond the repeated retellings of these harsh realities of under-

productivity. We believe that the refrains of underproductivity simultaneously fuel a deficit discourse of potentiality within the African context. These recurrent narratives offer a ‘no-hope-prospect’ which relegates Africa to sit as spectators to the field of research play that is being performed outside of their immediate environments as knowledge makers. It offers little insight into the spaces and processes where meaningful postgraduate higher educational provisioning is being transformed. We aim to show that not all African contexts capitulate.

There are cases of institutions and programmes where the rise of the research agenda and postgraduate education are being tackled head-on. Many creative strategies are being activated to develop locally relevant, indigenous ways of operating without simplistically borrowing models from the more affluent contexts. However, we recognise that the global stage of doctoral education requires a complex entanglement with the discourses that emanate from outside the immediate localised contexts. The process of postgraduate education is about negotiating our unique particularities without essentialising and commodifying romanticist conceptions of African identities disconnected from the rest of the globe. We believe that postgraduate education is a complex space with many intersecting networks across departmental structures, within programmes, within and between institutions, regionally, nationally, continentally, and transnationally.

This anthology aims to set the platform for sharing stories of how these obstacles of context, history and resources have been re-imagined and transformed to serve the local African contexts’ ethical, worthwhile and productive interests. In particular, the focus will be on those exemplary spaces (programmes, people and perspectives) where postgraduate education studies are being activated in democratic and socially just iterations. This anthology aims to draw on stories of success about postgraduate education *in, by and for* the African continent. However, the book does not romanticise these alternate possibilities as a ‘naïve hope’ that optimistically expects things to change even if one puts forth no effort to make it happen. Neither does the unconventional possibilities suggest ‘false hope’ which celebrates that simplistic collaboration will alter patterns of power relations between contracting partners. Instead, the aim is to explore authentically how ‘critical hope’ has to be nurtured and co-produced in sustained and deliberative ways (Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen & Boler 2014).

The aim is to explore and report what it entails conceptually and prag-

matically to bring about a *deep transformation* of the postgraduate education sector within the African context. Complexities are acknowledged since Africa, and its multilingual and diverse histories and contexts each require unique responsiveness. Such theoretical explorations also include how the African continent and its higher education systems position themselves relationally to other global systems in the global North, as well as between intranational continental partners in South-South partnerships, and across different hierarchical positions and institutions within national systems (Maringe & de Wit 2016).

The role of funders, donors and designers of curriculum programmes for masters and doctoral education all exert powerful influences making the space of higher education systems and their knowledge-making activities replete with many linguistic, political, ideological and paradigmatic positionings, each vying for presence. De Sousa Santos (2014; 2018) refers to this stance of examining the interconnections between various systems and institutions as an ‘ecologies of knowledges’ approach which challenges the dominant gaze of global hegemonic forces. This examination is an exploration of both the developed and developing world partners implicated in marginalising and/or centring each other.

The anthology recognises that no one system has an embargo on the truth. All forms of knowledge systems should be respectfully recognised in a system of dialogicality and relationality (Schulze 2012). This includes forging relationships around who holds the epistemological knowledge required to activate postgraduate studies: between disciplines, between multiple partners within the institutional systems, and within the world of work. This suggests that both the African context (its current resources and expertise) and its interlocuting international and systemic partners (their worldviews and agendas of reading the African context) need to re-examine how they support co-designing and co-development of postgraduate research reporting and delivery. Each context has its heritage of lived values about what postgraduate education and supervision should entail and what constitutes the required interventions (Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021). These perspectives and programmes might both enable and constrain any innovation or transformation.

### ***3.1 Emergent Lines of Inquiry in this Anthology***

If one regards education as a dialogical democratic process of affirming indivi-

duals to re-read their world, then one needs to put under the microscope policymakers, funders, managers, administrators, support systems, supervisors and students, and their prospective employers in a transformed set of relationships (Nerad, Bogle, Kohl, O'Carroll, Peters & Scholz 2022). The anthology aims to scrutinise the multifaceted agendas driving the interest to develop postgraduate education studies within university systems in Africa. These agendas are not always driven by epistemological or transformative concerns to activate worthwhile scholarship linked to local African contexts. The transformation of postgraduate education in Africa is an ongoing contested conversation that involves the negotiation, and expected series of further re-negotiations, of varied vantages about the purposes, values, and operations of postgraduate education. (The framework presented in the opening section of this chapter in Figure 1 above refers.)

A concerted, collaborative multi-pronged approach is required to tackle the transformation of postgraduate education within the African continent. These changes include tackling,

- new initiatives within the overarching national systemic *policy landscape*;
- the shifting in *governance, management and administration* of postgraduate education;
- the reconceptualisation of the *design of curriculum* of postgraduate studies at masters' and doctoral levels; as well as
- the re-examination of the *pedagogical forms of supervisory models* that are being used to generate a more democratic transformative agenda in postgraduate studies; and
- the need to develop *collaborative relationships* across disciplines, institutions, regions and stakeholders within and outside the university systems.

### ***3.2 The Organisational Architecture of the Anthology***

We have organised the sections of this anthology into three broad yet overlapping sub-sections to reflect these above areas of focus:

- Transforming postgraduate education in Africa;

- Supervisors' and Students' Engagement with Postgraduate Education; and
- Inter-institutional, National and Transnational Discourses.

The **First Section** attempts to develop a broad overview of some key systemic issues characterising *the postgraduate education space*. The first chapter draws on specific case studies from the two African contexts where the editors have honed their interest in higher education policies and practices. It questions the limits and potential of a policy-driven activation of transforming postgraduate education (Chapter 1). The next chapter deploys a theoretical lens of 'critical hope' (Bozaleck *et al.* 2014) that recognises the ethical and political responsibility to counter despair and recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality and solidarity with others. The supportive curriculum interventions related to this programme design are explored here (Chapter 3). This section also emphasises the political question about how one affirms the marginalised in a postgraduate curriculum programme. The statistical analysis of the enrolment, throughput and graduation rates of individuals by race and gender in particular fields of study, motivates the argument for a targeted intervention to address the challenges experienced by Black female doctoral students (Chapter 3).

The **Second Section** has been organised to reflect the interest of many of the authors in this anthology who have embraced a focus on what they can do at a localised curriculum design and pedagogical level of postgraduate education to enhance both students' and supervisors' engagement. In this section, the opening chapter evaluates options for designing online modalities in an honours degree (pre-masters') programme to activate student agency in their own postgraduate development (Chapter 4). The next chapter explores supervision models from the perspective of both students and their facilitator/supervisor in a collaborative cohort model (Chapter 5). The gaze in the next chapter turns towards an inward self-reflective critique using auto-ethnographic approaches to examine how to leverage change amongst diverse students in the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Chapter 6).

The next chapter focuses on assisting those postgraduate students who aim to join academia. The chapter shows how a scholarship of teaching and learning can be embedded alongside the research capacity development agenda for postgraduate education (Chapter 7).

The **Third Section** attempts to examine how inter-institutional collabo-

rations could de-territorialise the nature of postgraduate education. A more macro-systemic analysis is offered in the first chapter in this section which discusses how a national educational research association approaches the building of capacity for research participation and development of early career researchers, as a form of building of the next generation of scholars (Chapter 8).

The next chapter explores how the national Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa and a national educational learning and teaching research association collaborated to develop a model of postgraduate studies that activated scholarship about academic staff development framed by a social justice interest. The reflections by the facilitators of this project, from varied institutions nationally, argue that the emergent model constitutes an example of a decolonised supervision model (Chapter 9). Inter-institutional postgraduate programmes across national borders are explored in the next chapter. It explores comparatively the collaborative relationships in a North-South and a South-South transnational offering (Chapter 10).

The final chapter constitutes a reflective account offered by an established international researcher who has argued for moving away from the concept of a globally converging doctoral education model. She describes the process of assembling (in an international conference /workshop) early career researchers, their supervisors, university administrators and funders of doctoral education to share their vantages about building, renewing and reforming their local and national doctoral education systems. The chapter explores the seven key recommendations that stimulate not only doctoral education related to disciplinary expertise, but also is bolstered by a core set of values to underpin doctoral studies (Chapter 12).

Each of these chapters draws on diverse theoretical frameworks that locate their arguments in specific contextual spaces. It is not the intention of the editors to moderate these varied paradigmatic perspectives. Instead, their multiplicity enriches the anthology. A notable feature of many of the chapters is their collaborative developmental effort in co-writing between seasoned academics and novice less-experienced post-doctoral fellows, recently graduated postgraduate students, and some doctoral students too. This signals the collaborative shared effort that this anthology supports.

## **4 Concluding Thoughts**

The anthology aims to explore the motivations for how and why African *higher education institutions*, their *supervisors and postgraduate students* engage in

postgraduate studies. We hope this anthology will provoke thinking about at least some of these questions:

- What drives the agenda of prospective students to undertake masters' and doctoral studies? And how are these agendas being thwarted and/or overcome in the course of their studies? What enables, constrains or challenges the students' expectations and agendas?
- Are the goals of worthwhile knowledge being pursued as a public good within postgraduate studies? How are social justice considerations embedded within the postgraduate curriculum?
- Whose definitions of worthwhile postgraduate education prevail in successful postgraduate programmes?
- How are agendas of performance, econometry and productivity discourses managed, understood and tackled?
- What kinds of governance, management or administrative structures/systems are being designed to support the affirmation and capacity-building of postgraduate students, supervisors and their studies in the African continent?
- What examples of curriculum projects and programmes are establishing collaborative and productive partnerships toward the development of postgraduate education in Africa?
- What alternative typologies of masters'/ doctoral education curricula (like the professional masters/doctorate) are being developed on the African continent? What explains the support or resistance to alternative typologies of masters'/ doctoral curricula?
- How are interdisciplinary studies promoted within masters' and doctoral education within the African continent?
- How are alternative modes of delivery, like online postgraduate education, being harnessed within postgraduate education delivery for the African context?
- What alternative models of supervision are activated to develop democratic spaces to support postgraduate education in Africa?
- How are multiple stakeholders involved in shaping the nature of postgraduate education within and outside the university context in Africa?

In addition to, or within these questions, the contribution of this anthology might address themes/ issues such as:

- The re-imagination of institutional partnerships to support productive worthwhile, socially just and ethical postgraduate education in Africa
- Governance structures, policies and postgraduate education toward transformative education in Africa
- The programmes of capacity building to support successful postgraduate education in Africa
- The development of relevant African-led scholarship
- Postgraduate curriculum programme design, monitoring and evaluation
- Building supervisory capacities
- Shifting supervisor - supervisee relationships towards democratic engagement
- The postgraduate education journey: before, during and after the postgraduate qualification
- Entry criteria into postgraduate programmes
- Pedagogy and the postgraduate curriculum
- Exit-level postgraduate attributes
- Postgraduate education within the social community

Rather than advocate prescriptive solutions, we hope the anthology raises further dialogical questions for future research to transform postgraduate education in Africa.

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## CHAPTER 2

# Collaboration, Collegiality, and Commitment: Cultivating Critical Hope in a Doctoral Programme

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### Abstract

Research on doctoral education in South Africa portrays a sector that is struggling to disentangle itself from its colonial roots. A key factor in this struggle is moving away from the dominance of the Oxbridge model of the traditional master-apprentice, one-on-one supervision model which persists in most institutional contexts, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. While access has been widened since the demise of apartheid and the democratisation of higher education, participation rates, retention, and notably throughput rates, in doctoral education remain low and racially skewed (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2016). The dominance of the master-apprentice supervision model is seen as a major contributing factor to this issue (ASSAf 2010; CHE 2022). Thinking creatively about how we can mitigate some of these challenges, we have drawn on the concept of critical hope (Bozalek *et al.* 2014), to design pedagogical interventions such as the triannual ‘Doc Weeks’ (McKenna 2017), externally funded project teams, research clusters (Wilmot 2022), a fortnightly online work-in-progress programme, and a pre-doctoral initiative. This chapter, which focuses on a higher education studies doctoral programme at Rhodes University, a small, rural research-intensive university in the Eastern Cape, argues that the two fundamental success factors are: (1) the building of a collaborative space within a culture of collegiality and

commitment to knowledge creation; and (2) the setting of clear, structured support with explicit milestones. In doing so, we offer examples of how we are attempting to deliberately nurture, through our diverse pedagogies, and co-produce, with our candidates, critical hope for bringing about a transformative learning experience for our doctoral scholars.

**Keywords:** Critical hope, doctoral education pedagogies, collegiality, transformative learning

## **1 Introduction**

Doctoral education results in a contribution at the frontiers of a field and in a researcher who can continue to build our understandings of the world and find solutions to its problems. It is, by its very nature, an optimistic and hopeful endeavour, albeit fraught with complexities. Postgraduate education in Africa, in particular, is often characterised by its political, economic, and social inequalities and contextual complexities (Manabe *et al.* 2018; Mohamedbhai 2015). In the last 20 years, we have witnessed a rapid increase in demand and intake of postgraduate students for a multitude of reasons including improving higher education systems, developing globally relevant but locally responsive knowledge, producing highly skilled graduates who can take up key leadership positions in society, as well as contributing to the growing knowledge economy (Cross & Backhouse 2014; Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015). Providing a sustainable system that can accommodate these increased demands is constrained by a lack of physical resources (such as laboratories and technical equipment), supervision capacity (particularly in relation to the dominant kinds of supervision models used), as well as the preparedness of candidates (Cross & Backhouse 2014; Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022).

Despite such complexities, postgraduate education in Africa remains an area full of potential and possibility. Government and society more broadly, as well as institutions of higher education see it as a space for nurturing high-level skills to address social and environmental ills and to build our knowledge at the frontiers of disciplinary fields (National Development Plan [NDP] 2012). The importance of the doctorate in Africa has been substantiated outside of the African context, with postgraduate studies being positioned as playing a key role in the well-being of the continent by organisations like the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP) and the International Association of

Universities (IAU) (ACUP/IAU 2012). This positive counter-narrative is often overshadowed in conversations about poor participation rates, low throughput, and supervision challenges.

This book attempts to challenge the dominant negative narrative by offering analyses of success cases across various African contexts. This chapter contributes by focusing on the South African context. It offers readers insight into doctoral education in South Africa more broadly, and then, using the concept of ‘critical hope’ (Zembylas 2007 2022), it reflects on the affordances and limitations of a specific doctoral programme in Higher Education Studies in providing transformative doctoral education.

## **2 Doctoral Education in South Africa**

Research on doctoral education in South Africa portrays a sector that is struggling to disentangle itself from its colonial and settler-colonial roots (ASSAf 2010). For example, under apartheid, most universities in South Africa were actively constrained in knowledge creation through both research and the offering of postgraduate studies (Bozalek & Boughey 2012) and this continues to impact on current capacity. In 2012 the government proposed a bold plan to produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million of the total population, per year, by 2030 (National Development Plan [NDP] 2012). This would mean an increase to 5000 graduates per year, against a figure of just 1878 doctoral graduates in 2012 when the National Development Plan was published (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2014:30). While these targets are yet to be met, there have been significant increases with 3445 doctoral candidates graduating in 2019 (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2021:30). The emphasis on producing more doctoral graduates stems from the view that highly skilled graduates will be able to develop the much needed locally relevant knowledge that Africa requires to contribute to the growing knowledge economy (Cross & Backhouse 2014:155). The higher education sector in South Africa is also in need of new generations of academics given the aging professoriate in many universities (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015). The increase in doctoral graduates has not, however, come without challenges. As South Africa’s recent Doctoral Review undertaken by the Council on Higher Education (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022) shows, there is unevenness across the sector and as such, the review has raised questions about quality. In particular, concerns have been raised about the uneven policies and systems governing postgraduate

studies at universities and the problematic nature of the dominant supervision model used in the sector, which fails to provide candidates with sufficient support or intellectual community.

A key part of our decolonial struggle in doctoral education is moving away from the dominance of the Oxbridge model of the traditional master-apprentice, one-on-one supervision model which persists in most institutional contexts, particularly in the humanities and social sciences (Bitzer & Albertyn 2011; McKenna 2014 2017; Samuel & Vithal 2011). This model entails a candidate working very closely with (typically) a single supervisor, often in isolation from other doctoral candidates. To be successful, the model relies on adequate time and attention being provided by a highly skilled supervisor to the novice candidate to model, support, and induct the candidate into doctoral research. This model persists in South Africa despite an international move to more structured and collaborative approaches (McKenna & van Schalkwyk 2022). The shift has occurred in various countries in Western Europe (Keller *et al.* 2018; Baschung 2016; Ramírez 2016), the USA and Canada (Ngulube & Ukwoma 2019; Paul, Olson & Gul 2014), New Zealand and Australia (Sampson & Comer 2010; McCallin & Nayar 2012), China (Zhu, Cai & François 2017), Mauritius (Samuel & Mariaye 2014), and elsewhere. In some cases, such as Russia, national legislation has mandated a move away from the one-on-one model which is seen as an inefficient approach to doctoral education (Maloshonok & Terentev 2019).

Researchers such as Manabe *et al.* (2018) have argued that the one-on-one model is particularly inappropriate in the African context where the need for research capacity building is so acute. Furthermore, decolonial scholars such as Mbembe (2016) argue that locally relevant research in and for Africa requires a move away from individualistic approaches to knowledge creation. The implications for such doctoral education include the need to foreground an anti-coloniality agenda. Zembylas (2022: 28) warns us that without such an agenda higher education can fall foul of ‘the dangers of continuous reproduction and sustenance of colonial structures and practices’.

In the South African context, where we experience a dearth of highly experienced supervisors and a growing number of doctoral candidates, the one-on-one model is seen to be unsustainable and has been implicated in low retention and throughput rates (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015; ASSAf 2010). The recent national review of the doctorate raised concerns that this model creates significant power dynamics, particularly when supervisory

relationships include persons of different cultural, racial, and language backgrounds (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022). Many South African universities are placing pressure on supervisors to take on more students and are expecting novice supervisors to start supervising immediately after graduating with a doctorate (Mouton, Boshoff & James 2015; Motshoane 2022). This places both supervisor and candidate in a potentially vulnerable position where supervision takes place in isolation (Zeegers & Barron 2012).

The national review of the doctorate also highlights the need for additional structures to support the academic and scholarly development of candidates, recognising that not all learning can come from the supervisory relationship alone (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022). This sentiment has been raised in research on supervision practices where scholars have argued for the role and value of social learning opportunities within doctoral programmes, such as bringing candidates together in ways that encourage peer learning rather than working in isolation (see, for example, Wilmot 2022; McKenna 2017 2021; de Lange *et al.* 2011; Wisker *et al.* 2007). In contrast to the master-apprentice model, which adopts a narrowly individualistic approach and intensive supervisor capacity requirements, social learning can be harnessed using more collaborative supervision models. Despite the affordances of collaborative approaches, however, the one-on-one model persists. When the pressures for more doctoral graduates are considered in relation to dominant supervision models, questions of quality and genuine opportunities for access and success arise.

Cognisant of the many challenges we face in our context, it is important to remain hopeful in our commitment to creating a learning environment that is conducive to the development of our doctoral candidates. Scholars caution us, however, to discern between celebrating marginalised individuals who have overcome significant odds to achieve and advocating for practices that critically engage and disrupt the hegemony to create success stories of transformation (Zembylas 2014:14). The concept of ‘critical hope’ provides a powerful organising framework for understanding this subtle but significant difference, and how it can be achieved in practice.

### **3 Critical Hope**

Thinking creatively about how we can mitigate some of our contextual challenges in our doctoral programme, we have drawn on the concept of critical

hope (Bozalek *et al.* 2014), which we also bring to bear in our reflections here. Critical hope is a powerful response to contemporary despair premised on dialogue and reflexivity. It does not deny context but instead requires an analysis of historical and material conditions. As Zembylas (2014:14) indicates, critical hope is ‘an act of ethical and political responsibility that has the potential to recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality, and solidarity with others’.

The concept of hope can be fairly empty if it urges one to simply ‘hold the faith’ in the light of social inequalities and environmental degradation. This ‘naïve hope’ or ‘mythical hope’ (Zembylas 2014:13) plays into meritocracy ideals created by neoliberal forces by creating the false illusion that if one works hard enough, one will achieve (be that in education or in society more broadly). A form of blind optimism, this mindset often results in inaction, as it removes the sense of agency for transformation, or, due to despondency at the lack of transformation, it can lead to a sense of fatalism that things will never change (Zembylas 2014:13). Critical hope, in contrast, demands a deep analysis of the context of injustices and reflection on how they came to be as they are. It requires critical consideration of the status quo and asks who is served by its current framing, recognising that some privileges act to exclude others. Critical approaches can easily slip into despair and despondency, which is where hope is necessary. Hope here does not work alongside criticality as some kind of counterbalance but, rather, these concepts work in congruency (Bozalek *et al.* 2014). Hope here is not a ‘lofty, wistful concept’ (Bishundat, Phillip & Gore 2018:91) but, rather, is one tethered to reality through reflexivity – that is reflection and an active engagement towards change.

Working within a framework of critical hope requires one to engage in critical inquiry whilst being open to ‘critique, ambivalence and uncertainty’ (Zembylas 2014:15). This entails being critically aware of hegemonic norms and values and being willing to unlearn and embrace discomfort in the learning process. Such a process can, and indeed should, be a deeply uncomfortable one – whether one is positioned as the privileged or as the marginalised – in essence, it calls for a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler 2014). Central to this pedagogy, is that both the dominant and the marginalised be moved beyond their comfort zone in order to critically engage with the hegemonic values they have come to internalise through socialisation (Boler 2014). A key feature of critical hope, however, is to approach this work with compassion, as Boler (2014) explains that ‘to shatter worldviews ... can be emotionally translated into feeling one has

no place of belonging’ (p. 27) – a process that can be likened to ‘an annihilation of self’ (p. 31). In the process of dismantling particular worldviews, the job of the educator is to provide an alternate space as well as a framing for the development of ‘new social imaginaries’ (Zembylas 2014:11) that are underpinned by socially just understandings of the world. In doing so, the sense of despair and failure resulting from the critical unlearning process can be met with a compassionate alternative through which to bring about a transformative learning process.

Engaging with critical hope offers a dual approach that, on the one hand, ‘bears witness to negativity’ (Apple 2014: xvii) by unearthing relations of power, privilege and marginalisation, while, on the other hand, actively seeks to build alternate critical spaces of possibility and action that can lead to transformative learning processes. In this chapter, we draw on critical hope as an organising framework to explore the work we do in our Higher Education Studies Doctoral Programme and to offer critical reflections on the way the programme is (or is not) responding to the needs of our context in transformative ways that challenge dominant assumptions of academia.

#### **4 Applying Critical Hope to our Programme: A Reflective Illustration**

Bozalek *et al.* (2014:2) argue that education can be a ‘purveyor of critical hope’ but that to be transformative, educational practices also require critical hope. In the remainder of this chapter, we draw on the concept of critical hope to critically reflect on our practices in the Higher Education Studies Doctoral Programme (hereafter HES programme) and suggest how the programme purveys critical hope in its offerings to varying degrees.

We are situated at Rhodes University, a small, rural research-intensive university in the Eastern Cape. Our HES programme comprises 25 to 30 candidates. Our candidates tend to be older than the average age (over 40 years), predominantly female, and are racially and linguistically diverse. Most of our candidates hold full-time academic posts at other universities in South Africa with some working in other countries on the continent and thus do their PhDs part-time from a distance. The only physical contact we have with our candidates tends to be during ‘Doc Weeks’ (described below), which happens three times a year. Since the programme’s inception in 2010, we have worked within the constraints of our context and tried a variety of interventions in our

programme to foster social learning opportunities – some of which have been more successful than others. Such interventions include a pre-doctoral initiative, triannual ‘Doc Weeks’ (McKenna 2017), research clusters (Wilmot 2022), a fortnightly online work-in-progress programme, and externally funded project teams.

## **5 Pre-doctoral Programme**

As outlined in the recent doctoral review (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022), there is a concern about the preparedness of doctoral candidates in South Africa. The field of higher education studies is particularly affected in this regard, as it often attracts academics from diverse disciplines or leadership positions who wish to pursue research on an educational topic in their disciplinary home (e.g., Accounting) or institution (e.g., funding mechanisms in the sector). To provide a bridging structure to the PhD, we offer a one-year pre-doctoral programme with short-course accreditation. During this programme, pre-doctoral students work closely with a mentor (one of our supervisors) towards the development of a research topic. The course is structured around two assignments: a contextual framing of the topic (essentially, a literature review) and a conceptual framing of the study. Students are given access to the full suite of online offerings in the programme and are invited to attend all activities. At the end of the year, if the two assignments have been successfully completed, we invite the student to apply to the PhD programme or they may exit with a certificate. Many also choose not to complete and exit during the course of the year.

We have found this programme to be hugely successful for building a foundation of higher education studies knowledge and inducting students into the disciplinary norms and conventions of higher education research. Importantly, it also gives the student time to critically assess if their current life circumstances are conducive to doing a PhD, and if our programme is the best fit for them. Withdrawing from a pre-doctoral programme is far less emotionally complex than de-registering from a PhD, and as such, we encourage many of our candidates to start in this programme.

Returning to the subtle but important difference between ‘naïve hope’ and ‘critical hope’ (Zembylas 2014), we argue that the pre-doctoral programme provides students with a realistic ‘taste’ of a PhD within a supportive space which can then open opportunities for critical self-reflection on whether this is

the right way forward for them. The complex conceptual work involved in a PhD and the time commitment and effort it requires is often disguised as merely a matter of ‘believing in yourself’ and ‘working hard’. This discourse is to the detriment of the student, and we work hard to dismantle this myth, with the pre-doctoral programme playing a primary role in this regard. The pre-doctoral programme empowers candidates to exercise agency over whether to continue into PhD studies or not. Those students who have successfully completed the pre-doctoral programme and who continued to do a PhD with us tend to enter the programme from a position of strength, both intellectually and personally.

## **6 Doc Weeks**

Doc Weeks are structured research-oriented weeks where students engage with a variety of activities which are designed to support their own research process through social learning. We have three Doc Weeks per year where candidates travel to Rhodes University in Makhanda and attend in person. This is typically the only time that our candidates experience face-to-face learning in the programme – most of the learning and teaching happens online. The structure and content of the weeks are negotiated between the coordinator of the programme (Sioux, from 2010 – 2018 and Kirstin from 2019 to present) and the candidates. We usually include several guest seminars by leading scholars from the field from all around the world (e.g., Michalinos Zembylas, Viv Bozalek, Ronelle Carolissen, Karl Maton, Crain Soudien, Leesa Wheelahan, Margaret Archer, Shireen Motala, Lis Lange, Zodwa Motsa, to name a few), presentations by our own graduates, discussions around key readings, workshops on aspects of the research process and doctoral writing, and face-to-face meetings with supervisors. We also include candidate-led time, such as work-in-progress presentations where candidates share their thinking and work through any research-related challenges they are experiencing.

We have argued elsewhere (see McKenna 2017 and Wilmot 2022) that Doc Weeks are a particularly effective mechanism for fostering social learning and supporting candidates in ways that cannot be achieved to the same degree or in the same way through a one-on-one supervisory relationship. Working within our contextual constraints – primarily the dispersed, distance nature of our cohort – it is also an effective way to create and harness the benefits afforded by a doctoral community. The social and peer learning enabled by this community not only strengthens the academic and scholarly development of the

candidates but also helps support the affective side of doctoral education. For example, it supports the development of a doctoral identity, while cultivating key academic practices such as peer review. Importantly, the development of peer relationships with other candidates that this space enables is central to a positive and successful doctoral journey.

The work we do in Doc Weeks intentionally seeks to disrupt many of the hegemonic discourses in higher education, such as the one foregrounding a meritocratic view of education. This critical work is achieved through the conversations we have as a collaborative community as well as through the ideas and worldviews introduced by means of careful selection of readings and invited guests. In this way, we acknowledge the role of values and ethics in education and seek to reveal power relations within systems – central to critical hope approaches (Bozalek *et al.* 2014:1-2). For example, we intentionally discuss and question the normative roles of the doctorate which are often sidelined in national documents that tend to focus rather on the knowledge economy, or which posit a neutral notion of ‘skills’. We explicitly engage with ideas of the doctorate as a public good, and interrogate what it means to nurture responsible, critical citizenship as part of our curriculum. This work is important, particularly in a post-apartheid society where there is a need for graduates who are ‘deeply connected with the possibilities of achieving the goal of democratising societies’ (Fischman & Haas 2014:60). Given that many of our candidates are themselves lecturers in other higher education institutions, the practices we model in our programme can have an impact in other contexts outside of doctoral studies.

As scholars note, reflexivity is a central part of critical hope work: it always entails both reflection and action – ‘dialogue and humility’ (Bozalek *et al.* 2014:2) – not only in how we understand and engage with the topics being studied by our doctoral candidates but also, in how we build, more broadly, the culture into the doctoral programme. This is challenging as it requires us to be willing to unlearn, to shift our plans midway, and to embrace other ways of doing. This is not easy when trying to manage and meet the needs of a diverse group in Doc Weeks. It requires constant reflection and engagement with the group and being keenly aware of the power dynamics between the supervisors in the room and the candidates. It is often the case that the person supervising or leading sessions in Doc Weeks is of a different age, gender, race, and language group than some of the candidates given the varied profiles of candidates and supervisors. In line with this diverse contextual reality – which

we argue is a strength of the programme—we (the authors and people integrally involved in the programme) also need to be aware of our positionality. Many of us (including the two authors) are part of the privileged, hegemonic group in our society. Even though the ideologies and ontologies we adopt might resist such hegemony, by virtue of who we are (middle-class, white women) we are part of a system that acts to marginalise others. As such, we need to keep seeking pedagogies of discomfort and practice compassion in all we do to move ourselves and the doctoral candidates, out of our comfort zones into a potentially transformative space (Boler 2014). Our challenge in this work is finding ways to unsettle our own assumptions and blind spots borne of privilege while collectively re-examining many of the hegemonic values so central to our field. As Samuel and Mariaye (2014) observe, this process is not easy and involves constant re-defining and re-negotiating of different roles and the power relations therein. In this sense, it is a personal process of ‘allowing one’s worldviews to be shattered’ (Boler 2014:36) as well as challenging the status quo of the field of higher education studies.

## **7 Research Clusters**

To complement Doc Weeks and provide more focused support for the theoretical development of candidates specifically, we introduced research clusters into the broader HES programme in 2020. Based on the concept of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), clusters bring together scholars who are working with the same theoretical and analytical framework (see Wilmot 2022 for a more detailed account of the background to, and design of, the cluster initiative). At present, we have three cluster groups: a weekly Legitimation Code Theory cluster, a fortnightly Social Realism cluster; and an ad hoc Decolonial cluster. The clusters are candidate-led, but supervisor attendance is strongly encouraged to support legitimate peripheral participation of novices (Lave 1991). Each session is led by a particular candidate (decided before time using a sign-up roster) and the time is typically used to workshop a specific theoretical/analytical challenge they are experiencing, or to present a piece of analysis which is then (constructively) interrogated by the group. The key premise of the cluster programme is for candidates to present ideas early on so that they can be ‘broken’ by group members – with the goal of using constructive feedback to build better, stronger ideas in future. Time for cluster meetings is also included in each Doc Week programme.

The work of Zembylas has been useful for understanding our efforts to build a heightened collaborative ethos in the doctoral programme through the cluster initiative. Zembylas (2014:14) argues that collaborative work creates potential for ‘affective connections that enable transgressions’. What we have found, however, is that just creating these structures does not guarantee that connections and transgressions will take place. This is especially true when spaces continue to be imbued by criticism rather than critique, and by hierarchical power over connection. We continue to learn that it takes ongoing critical reflection and willingness to change – to embrace what Zembylas describes as ‘a decentred, nomadic process by which belonging is defined’ (2014:15) – to create a space where candidates can develop real connection through mutual trust. For example, we recognise different patterns of participation in the cluster initiative and the doctoral programme more broadly. This is evident in how some candidates take up opportunities more often than others, and how some candidates feel more comfortable to express vulnerability in the group. We refer to vulnerability here in relation to academic work (such as presenting incomplete ideas or putting one’s hand up to lead a session when one does not feel entirely confident to do so), as well as in a personal sense such as trusting the group enough to show emotion (e.g., tears, frustrations, anger) associated with the PhD and, at times, beyond. Unevenness in participation is not unique to our programme, with other scholars observing similar patterns in their own institutional contexts (see, for example, Samuel & Mariaye 2014). Despite not everyone feeling the same degree of freedom to be vulnerable, we have noticed how peer relationships have been forged in these smaller groups and are resulting in increased peer learning opportunities. We see how candidates who may be more reserved in large settings feel able to assert their voice to a far greater degree in the smaller groups.

We are mindful that we need to continually interrogate our practices and assumptions and continually work towards creating spaces where affective connections can be forged. This is one of the reasons why the cluster initiative is candidate-led. The intention was to mitigate the supervisor-candidate power dynamics so that peer learning could be more easily embraced. Interestingly, however, candidates have called for more supervisor attendance and involvement in these groups. Supervisors attending as participants as opposed to ‘teachers’ has been found to contribute to a productive, collaborative learning space. Initial findings from ongoing research by the first author (Kirstin) and one of the cluster leaders are also revealing how despite the focus being on the

development of theoretical knowledge, the clusters also help shape candidates' doctoral identity and scholarly practices such as peer review. In this way, they appear to be cultivating many of the necessary graduate attributes of doctoral education, as called for in the recent CHE doctoral review (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2022). Despite the positive outcomes of the clusters, we are cognisant that more work is needed to critically analyse why some candidates continue to feel less able to contribute in these spaces. In doing so, we also need to remain open to changing our 'ways of doing' to ensure that all candidates find a sense of belonging in such spaces.

## **8 Online Programme**

Given that our candidates are doing their PhDs by distance, we have an online programme that runs throughout the year to provide additional space for candidates to meet and share their progress. Since the beginning of 2020, this programme runs every fortnight. A roster is set up and candidates self-select a session to lead. Typically, these sessions are used for work-in-progress updates but occasionally candidates may use the platform to do a practice run of an upcoming conference paper or to workshop an issue related to their research. The doctoral coordinator is always present at the meetings to provide additional feedback and support to the candidate. Supervisors are encouraged to join but we have found that competing schedules means that they do not attend consistently. As with all our offerings, these sessions are voluntary but we find that a core group of about 15 candidates attend every session.

For many of our candidates who are middle-aged and have not studied for years, the entire doctoral journey is a pedagogy of discomfort as they take on and engage with new methods and literacy practices. We explicitly position our role as ensuring an ethic of care through compassion and the development of a collaborative community. Given that our candidates are typically full-time academics at other universities and doing their PhDs by distance, it is likely that they may feel isolated during their doctoral journeys. It is also equally likely that their academic roles can occupy all their time, often at a cost to progress in their studies. Feelings of loneliness and guilt associated with slow progress are commonly referred to in the literature (Barry *et al.* 2018) but are often backgrounded in neoliberal practices and discourses of 'counting' doctoral outputs and scrutinising timelines. In such a framing, the important work of education can be lost, particularly the 'affective qualities such as love, care,

solidarity, collective responsibility’ which should be at the forefront of all educational endeavours (Apple 2014: xv).

The online fortnightly programme was therefore developed as a mechanism to provide support in a ‘low-stakes’ environment since attendees are limited to current candidates and supervisors and ‘messy’ work is encouraged, and as a regular point of contact for our candidates. Having candidates present work-in-progress updates on their PhDs helps to showcase the ‘messiness’ and non-linear nature of doctoral studies – an aspect that is often misrepresented in self-help style guidebooks on doctoral studies (Kamler & Thomson 2008). We argue that vulnerability is a necessary quality to embrace in doctoral communities; thus, we endeavour to cultivate the practice of offering incomplete or unpolished work to peers to review in order to develop ideas further. Such an ethos embraces critical hope principles of offering candidates a collaborative space in which criticality and compassion are foregrounded. Informal feedback suggests that this space is serving this purpose well, with candidates self-selecting to lead sessions and participating within the sessions (particularly given the voluntary nature of the programme). When asked if monthly sessions would be preferable, candidates unanimously indicated that they prefer meeting on a more regular basis.

## **9 Project Teams**

Over the past 12 years we have had several different funded doctoral project teams. These have included collaborations between ourselves (Rhodes University) and a number of other South African universities as well as universities in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Funding for these projects has been secured through grants from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the British Council and the National Research Foundation (NRF). The project teams have adopted different approaches but are typically centred around a particular substantive issue facing South African higher education. They do, however, allow flexibility in terms of research design. For example, in our latest project, Social Justice and Quality in Higher Education<sup>1</sup> (a project with Rhodes University, the University of Venda

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<sup>1</sup> Find out more about this project team here:  
<https://sites.google.com/ru.ac.za/sjinhphd/>

and Lancaster University) candidates are addressing topics on aspects of social justice and/or quality, but have constructed research projects which utilise different methodologies and theories.

The project teams have been successful in creating smaller, more focused communities for candidates to work in. While there is always input from the diverse range of collaborating supervisors and the coordinator of the larger HES programme at Rhodes University, we have observed that a significant amount of peer support and agency is shown among the candidates themselves – evident in the setting up of WhatsApp groups or scheduling online writing Pomodoro sessions independently of formal project activities. Such activities provide an extra layer of support and camaraderie and often result in long-lasting friendships between candidates, despite being geographically separate. In this sense, the project team structure appears to cultivate affective aspects called for by critical hope theorists more successfully than the larger programme where candidates often take longer to get to know one another and perhaps do not work as closely together in their studies.

Project team funding has also helped to foster stronger relationships between candidates by bringing team members physically together more often, such as for writing retreats or attending conferences. Such opportunities, we argue, foster a culture of care in our programme as supervisors and candidates get to know each other well and gain insight into each other's backgrounds and family circumstances. In doing so, we try and subvert the current pressures and influences in higher education such as neoliberalism, neoconservatism and rankings which 'put pressure on academics to think and act in particular ways' (Apple 2014: xiv). Adopting a mindset of compassion should not, however, be considered at odds with accountability. We argue that compassion needs to be bounded in relation to proper stewardship of resources. As such, we intentionally provide support in relation to milestones (for example, the research proposal) and we make the expectations of doctoral research explicit throughout candidates' journeys – whether it be in relation to the notional hours required, expected milestones, or the quality of the research project.

## **10 Where to From Here?**

From our reflective dialogue with the concept of critical hope, we argue that our current practices reflect some of its principles. We have shown how our pre-doctoral programme dismantles notions of 'naïve hope' (Zembylas 2014) in that

candidates are able to get a sense of the expectations of our doctoral programme and exercise their own agency over whether to pursue their PhD with us. We also explained how Doc Weeks enable us to disrupt hegemonic discourses while fostering social learning opportunities in the group. This discussion highlighted the need for ‘dialogue and humility’ (Boler 2014) as we negotiate different roles and power relations within these programmes. We have also shown through our discussion of cluster groups, the online programme and project teams how community is central to our programme, and how this community attends to the affective dimensions of doctoral education, fostering care, solidarity, and collective responsibility (Apple 2014) among candidates and supervisors.

Despite these positive attributes, there is always space for growth and improvement. While we try to push back against hegemonic discourses wherever we can, we could be making this a formal part of the curriculum through the introduction of what Jan McArthur (personal communication) describes as ‘structured opportunities’ in doctoral education. As Schwittay (2023:5) notes, to approach teaching as ‘a deeply emotional, moral and political endeavour’ we need to engage in constant critical reflection. We argue that this work can be done both informally, on an individual basis (as we are already doing), and formally, in the creation of doctoral curriculum. Despite our national systems and associated accrediting bodies not formally recognising coursework for credit in doctoral programmes, we have used coursework very effectively in some of our funded projects. We believe that there is the potential to introduce more structured support that is underpinned by critical hope principles which foster collaborative engagements that seek to disrupt worldviews while, at the same time, producing ‘powerful affective connections that create even small cracks to the traditions of oppression and injustice’ (Zembylas 2014:32). Including formal curriculum would require us to be more acutely aware, and overtly ‘own’ what Schwittay (2023:5) refers to as ‘our normative values and objectives’. This is an aspect we are currently exploring in the programme.

We believe that the principles from critical hope are not only embedded in the programme offerings but are also articulated in the kinds of research our candidates pursue. In this sense, ‘unlearning the myth of a neutral education’ (Boler 2014:30) is central to our practices. This is evident in the way project teams have been constructed (e.g., specifically requiring candidates to focus on social justice topics) as well as the dominant use of critical social theories in the programme. Such frameworks actively seek to identify and understand the inequalities and injustices in our system and how they impact the sector.

Reflecting critical hope principles, however, they also seek to offer alternative, more socially just ways of doing and being.

When she started the programme in 2010, Sioux specified that the measure of success would not only be the number of graduates we produced but, rather, by the quality of their experience and the ways in which their research contributes to higher education debates. The majority of our graduates have published from their research and continue to contribute to scholarly conversations in the field across a range of topic areas<sup>2</sup>. Some have also gone on to take up prominent roles in the field, such as Registrars, Deans and Directors of Centres of Teaching and Learning, officers in the Council on Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training to name a few. The HES doctoral programme has enjoyed a positive reputation in South African higher education, particularly for candidates' robust use of theory to engage with complex social justice issues in the field. To keep this commitment, we need to work with our contextual challenges to find ways to continue to embed critical hope in and through our programme to support graduates who are able to forge 'new social imaginaries that are grounded in social praxis and solidarity' (Zembylas 2014:11).

## **11 Concluding Thoughts**

The different structures described in this chapter provide a snapshot of our offerings, but it is, of course, not the complete story, because structures alone cannot do important critical hope work – the success of any programme depends on how it is implemented. Using the work of critical hope theorists to reflect on our programme reveals how some structures work better than others, but most importantly, that it is the culture created within structures that has the most impact. In light of this process, we argue that two fundamental success factors in the programme are: (1) the building of a collaborative space within a culture of collegiality and commitment to knowledge creation; and (2) the setting of clear, structured support with explicit milestones. In doing so, we offer examples of how we are attempting to deliberately nurture, through our diverse pedagogies, and co-produce, with our candidates, critical hope for bringing

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<sup>2</sup> A list of our PhD graduates can be found here:

<https://www.ru.ac.za/teachingandlearning/highereducationstudies/doctoralprogramme/phdgraduates/>

about a transformative learning experience for our doctoral scholars.

Invoking critical hope as an organising framework to research our doctoral programme has enabled a self-reflexive methodology which has helped in charting out the next steps. Zembylas' (2022) work in particular is challenging us to seek ways to move beyond critical hope to engage in 'anti-colonial hope'. We look towards this future work with hope and enthusiasm. Scholars across the continent of Africa have a critical role to play in challenging hegemonic understandings and 'ways of doing' in postgraduate research. Our reflections in this paper are just one example of such work. In as much as we have shown how community is a critical feature of our programme, we too argue that building a community of scholars working in postgraduate studies in Africa is needed. Contributing to these conversations, either in a supervisor or programme coordinator or administrative capacity, we need to share our successes and challenges. As our sector grows and matures there is learning and unlearning to be done, and we have much to offer to international debates. A volume such as this marks a starting point for these hopeful conversations. As Freire (2007:3) indicates '[w]ithout a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle'.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Activating Access and Success in Doctoral Studies: Critical Considerations of Black Females

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### Abstract

Historically, women have been, and still are, excluded from full participation in some areas of Higher Education studies, especially at the postgraduate level. Their success rate in doctoral studies is also relatively restricted. This chapter draws on a baseline analysis of statistical trends relating to female doctoral students (their access to and success in doctoral education) in the democratic South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020). This background data is layered onto the theoretical tenets of intersectionality theory, foregrounding structural impediments that result in under-enrolment and relatively lower completion rates among Black females in specific disciplines and fields of postgraduate study. In addition, the lens of an intersectionality theory is employed to explore the complex confluences of race, gender, (inter)personal, professional and systemic factors which coalesce to create obstructive regimes. The chapter suggests that activating Black females' improved access and success calls for strategic targeted enrolment drives in specific disciplines, policies and regulations that challenge the cultural practices that support patriarchal regimes, the development of appropriate curriculum strategies to support the specific needs of the targeted group, and

engagement with alternative models to promote socially just supervisory-supervisee partnerships that redefine hegemonic masculinised roles and responsibilities within doctoral education. It proposes a targeted intervention framework to tackle matters of race, gender, and professional and personal situatedness to support Black female doctoral students, including a distinctive peer support strategy, a dynamic conception of supervision, and a dedicated mentorship programme.

**Keywords:** Doctoral students, Intersectionality theory, Peer support, Mentorship.

## **1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of South Africa's Higher Education System, focusing on enrolment, graduation, and dropout rates disaggregated by gender and race. The advancement of women in South African Higher Education has been a particular focus of attention during the transformation of the sector. This is evident not only in enrolment and graduation statistics but also in acknowledgment that the university system, including across the African continent, still requires more female senior academics and scholars (Akala 2019). Whilst strides have been made in improving Black students' access in the democratic South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020), the chapter emphasises the need for further purposeful and unambiguous strategies to assist Black female students to progress from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Students' varied backgrounds and career aspirations are reviewed through the use of an intersectionality lens which posits that the systemic, institutional, programmatic and personal demographic characteristics of the targeted group are interconnected in complex confluences at various levels, enabling or impeding access and success. For example, it might be necessary for South Africa to start introducing female students to research at the undergraduate level as this can help them to gain access and succeed in their doctoral studies. The chapter is directed towards constructing a proposition for a framework using intersectionality theory to guide its logic.

Section 2 provides a brief motivation for using an intersectionality lens in Higher Education. The elements of race, gender, socio-economic class, and systemic institutional and curricular factors are not considered as discreet, but rather as overlapping complementarities, sometimes in tension and contradict-

tion with one another. Section 3 presents a statistical overview of doctoral enrolment, graduation, and dropout rates in Higher Education in South Africa, covering its history and current situation. This data suggests an incomplete agenda of realising the social justice call for specifically Black female doctoral students' access and success in various disciplines. Section 4 draws on the literature to develop a proposed integrated framework of strategies to support Black female doctoral students. It is divided into the following subsections: increasing motivation through *mentorship* of students in Higher Education; promoting dynamic *supervision* via adaptable supervisors; and activating shared *support amongst peers* as a way to assist female students to succeed in doctoral studies. The chapter concludes (Section 5) by integrating these three elements into a proposed framework to support Black female students to succeed in Higher Education. Broader applications of the framework are dealt with in Section 6. Whilst it might be also valuable for doctoral students in general, the specificities for the targeted group are highlighted.

## **2 Intersectionality Theory and Gender Inequalities in Higher Education**

Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw initially popularised the term 'intersectionality' in her seminal work in 1989 to describe the suffering that Black women in the United States continue to experience despite constitutional legal protection and professed institutional transformation goals. Following this foundational redirection of social sciences theory, intersectionality is now widely used as a term to define and explain how institutional and social policies, practices, and ideologies contribute to and exacerbate the unequal conditions that marginalised groups in society contend with (Lekgau 2021; Nichols & Stahl 2019).

Intersectionality involves the interactions between gender, race, and other identity categories. It holds that race, socio-economic class, and gender (as well as other ascribed statuses) do not work as discreet categories of experience, but are instead lived and experienced concurrently (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Harpur, Szucs and Willox (2022), it is appropriate when applied to access and support of previously disadvantaged people throughout Higher Education since marginalised groups are simultaneously negotiating systemic, structural, cultural, institutional and personal dynamics.

Intersectionality is also a useful method to examine how conflicting or overlapping identities affect people's experiences in society (Bhopal 2020). Systems of oppression that connect with one another include structural racism, sexism, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and disability, in addition to other forms of systemic oppression (López, Erwin, Binder & Chavez 2018). Inequality cannot be explained by a single element; rather, intersectionality studies expose the interaction of multiple factors to create various patterns of power relations (Bhopal 2020). It investigates the positions that various stratifications have imposed on women and their experiences (Bhopal 2020). Intersectionality highlights inequalities related to gender, race and class. It also foregrounds the power dynamics that exist in Higher Education that continue to marginalise Black women. This lens can also be used to understand and problematise the challenges that women face in Higher Education and to address disparities and encourage inclusion (Unterhalter, Robinson & Balsera 2020). It is an appropriate framework of analysis to analyse the experiences of Black women in this sector (Collins 2016).

Historically, South African women were subjected to structural and cultural restrictions under apartheid, which is why White men made up the vast majority of students in Higher Education, especially in science and engineering courses (Mkhize 2022; Moshupi 2013). Black students who wanted to study these courses in previously advantaged institutions were required to seek special permission or were forced to study abroad (Mkhize 2022; Mlambo 2017).

Most South African and international universities still have a male-dominated leadership structure (Moodly 2021). These leadership positions afford them power on top of White and/or male privilege. Black women find it challenging to occupy these top positions and positions of leadership in a predominantly masculinised society and culture (Moodly 2021). This also means that women are less involved in decision making and have less power to influence policies within Higher Education Institutions. It has resulted in the prevailing gender and race disparities that are still witnessed in Higher Education today. Although the sector has attempted to transform and now reflects more diversity, racist and sexist ideologies persist.

In ways that neither Black men nor White women are subjected to, the quantitative data in Section 3 clearly demonstrate that there are still structures that consistently oppress Black women. While White women may encounter sexism, they do have White privilege. Black men experience racial discrimination, but enjoy male privilege. These two population groups are born

with a head start and power that Black women simply do not have. Black women are not born with any privilege; they face triple marginalisation based on race, gender and class.

In some cases, cultural practices and religion also marginalise women. Black women in Higher Education experience both racial and gender marginalisation (Mkhize & Idahosa 2021). White privilege and male privilege give automatic power to those born with it. Due to this lack of power, Black women are directly or indirectly marginalised in many spheres of their lives. According to Gushman (2021), they have to find ways of coping and operating in spaces where both racism and sexism are deeply entrenched. Higher Education in Africa and internationally is still dominated by structural and systemic gender and race disparities. The only way to address these power imbalances is to foreground the reality that Black women still face in this sector.

Gender equality practices appear to have changed as more women enrol in Higher Education. This may be due to the perception that race provides superior political capital (Mama 2007). Despite this change, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class must still be studied as a whole because they present intersecting problems (Walker 2016). It is crucial to look at gender from an intersectional perspective because South Africa continues to experience historical and contemporary inequities.

The multifaceted lens of intersectionality is used to interpret a range of data from official statistics on doctoral education drawn from the Council on Higher Education report (CHE 2020).

### **3 A Statistical Overview of Doctoral Education in South Africa**

The apartheid regime prohibited Black<sup>1</sup> people from entering particular professions or fields. People with disabilities and women were especially impacted by this exclusion. The regime came to a legalised end in 1994 but its effects are still felt today and are demonstrated by racial and gender disparities. In the words of Mabokela (2001, p. 207), the South African Higher Education system went through a transformation ‘from a system plagued with racial and gender disparities to one that will uphold the ideals of non-sexism and non-racism’. Despite this, inequalities persist. Of particular concern is the fact that new types of racial and gender discrimination have emerged (Rabe & Rugunanan 2012), with fewer Black women completing doctoral studies and

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<sup>1</sup> Black in this chapter refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians.

few gaining promotions to professorships. This section provides further justification for why a targeted emphasis on Black female students is required to realise the broader goals of social justice and democracy in the post-apartheid context.

**3.1 Doctoral Enrolment and Graduation Trends by Race**

The tables below provide national doctoral enrolment statistics for the years 2016 to 2020 and show the racial disparities that persist. They do not include data from the University of South Africa (UNISA)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1: % Doctoral Enrolments by Race: 2016-2020**

Race	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
African	66%	66%	66%	65%	65%
Coloured	4%	5%	5%	5%	6%
Indian	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%
White	23%	24%	23%	23%	22%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

The table shows that overall, Black students made up the largest percentage of enrolments between 2016 and 2020. By 2020, these stood at 78%, while doctoral enrolments among the White population constituted 22%. This seems to be in line with South Africa’s population statistics.

As Table 2 below shows, from 2016 to 2020 there was an increase in graduation rates across all race groups. The grand total shows the average graduation rate for each year. In 2020, White students graduated at a slightly higher rate than their Black counterparts at 48%, compared to 42%, 34% and 41%.

<sup>2</sup> UNISA data is complicated and differs from the rest of the sector. The tables that result from the UNISA data and the rest of the public institutions do not demonstrate synergy; the UNISA data contains variables for nationality. UNISA has an open distance learning mode with very few or even no contact sessions. The rest of the public universities in South Africa do not have a predominantly open distance learning mode. UNISA has thus been excluded from this chapter.

**Table 2: % Doctoral Graduations by Race: 2016-2020**

<b>Race</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
African	1%	5%	16%	30%	42%
Coloured	1%	4%	10%	22%	34%
Indian	2%	6%	15%	29%	41%
White	2%	9%	20%	37%	48%
<b>(Average)</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>43%</b>

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 3 shows an increase in dropouts from 2016 to 2020. There was a considerably higher dropout rate across all race groups in 2020, which could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to online instruction. It could also be attributed to geographical location, language barriers, socio-economic class differences and disability if present.

**Table 3: % Doctoral Dropouts by Race: 2016-2020**

<b>Race</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
African	16%	21%	26%	32%	58%
Coloured	13%	20%	20%	26%	66%
Indian	14%	17%	24%	27%	59%
White	14%	20%	22%	26%	52%
<b>(Average)</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>57%</b>

(Source: CHE 2020)

As depicted in Table 3, more than half the doctoral students dropped out during 2020. The race group with the lowest percentage of dropouts is White students at 52%; if an aggregated average is taken of Black students, this group still has a slightly higher dropout rate than their White counterparts. While the overarching generic trends seem positive when using a racial-based filter, a more nuanced interpretation is revealed when disaggregating the doctoral data according to gender disparities.

### ***3.2 Enrolments, Graduations and Dropout Rates by Gender***

While women make up the majority of South Africa's undergraduate students, they are relatively under-represented at doctoral level. However, this is a

generic trend that is not unique to South African women, it is an international phenomenon. The academic pipeline from undergraduate to postgraduate is cited repeatedly in various studies (the 1996 White Paper on Science and Technology (DST, 1996), the 2002 National Research and Development Strategy (DST 2002), the Ten-Year Innovation Plan (DST 2008) and Human Capital Development Strategy for Research, Innovation and Scholarship (DST 2016); Mouton, van Lill, Prozesky, Bailey, Duncan, Boshoff, Albertyn & Treptow (2022)). All these documents identify three common issues that need to be addressed to unblock the academic pipeline (from honours, to masters, and doctoral level and postdoctoral fellows). Firstly, they reinforce the need to increase under-represented groups' access and success. Secondly, they cite the need for interventions to tackle the dropout rates of doctoral students as well as established scholars from the university system. Thirdly, the studies advocate for transformation of the South African Higher Education academic pipeline by making it more inclusive of Black and female students (Mouton et al. 2022).

Table 4 presents enrolment data for 2016 to 2020, disaggregated by gender.

**Table 4: % Doctoral Enrolments by Gender: 2016-2020**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Female	44%	44%	44%	46%	47%
Male	56%	56%	56%	54%	53%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source: CHE 2020)

The table shows that, from 2016 to 2020, males made up a higher percentage than females of students enrolled for doctoral study. This trend remained consistent over this period.

**Table 5: % Doctoral Graduations by Gender: 2016-2020**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Female	2%	6%	15%	29%	42%
Male	2%	6%	18%	32%	44%
<b>Grand Total (Average)</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>43%</b>

(Source: CHE 2020)

The graduation rate climbed steadily from 2016 to 2020. Table 5 shows that slightly more males than females graduated with a doctorate.

**Table 6: % Doctoral Dropouts by Gender: 2016-2020**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Female	15%	20%	23%	28%	58%
Male	15%	21%	26%	31%	56%
<b>Grand Total (Average)</b>	15%	21%	25%	30%	57%

(Source: CHE 2020)

The dropout rate disaggregated by gender shows a spike in 2020 in comparison to 2016 to 2019. This could possibly be due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Slightly more females than males dropped out in 2020.

### ***3.3 Doctoral Enrolment and Graduations by Gender, Race and Field of Study***

When one further disaggregates the data on race and gender participation in doctoral education, one notes that Black females are under-represented in various fields, with greater representation in the humanities, education and business than in the sciences and engineering (Council on Higher Education 2015). The data for doctoral enrolments, disaggregated by gender, race and field of study for 2005 and 2020 are presented in the following two tables. These years were purposively selected: it was in 2005 that universities began to be merged and the audited data for 2020 are the most recent available<sup>3</sup>.

Table 7 shows that, overall, more Black males, White females and White males registered for doctoral studies than Black females. The proportion of Black women was highest in Education at 31%; however, even here, Black males made up a slightly higher proportion at 35%.

The 2020 figures show notable changes from those of 2005, with Black females making up a higher percentage of enrolments than White females or White males. However, except for Education at 44%, the proportion of Black males was higher than that of Black females.

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<sup>3</sup> Cases of unknown race and gender have been excluded.

**Table 7: % Doctoral Enrolments by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2005**

<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Black Female</b>	<b>Black Male</b>	<b>White Female</b>	<b>White Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Science, Engineering & Technology	17%	30%	24%	30%	100%
Business & Commerce	11%	32%	19%	38%	100%
Education	31%	35%	22%	11%	100%
Humanities	16%	32%	25%	27%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

**Table 8: % Doctoral Enrolments by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2020**

<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Black Female</b>	<b>Black Male</b>	<b>White Female</b>	<b>White Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Science, Engineering & Technology	35%	41%	12%	11%	100%
Business & Commerce	32%	51%	10%	7%	100%
Education	44%	43%	9%	3%	100%
Humanities	35%	41%	14%	10%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

**Table 9: % Doctoral Graduation by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2005**

<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Black Female</b>	<b>Black Male</b>	<b>White Female</b>	<b>White Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Science, Engineering & Technology	14%	29%	26%	30%	100%
Business & Commerce	6%	19%	23%	52%	100%
Education	30%	29%	29%	12%	100%
Humanities	12%	25%	36%	27%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

The 2005 doctoral graduation statistics show fewer Black females graduating despite the initial high enrolment rates (See Table 9). White males graduated at a higher rate than Black females, Black males and White females. Fewer White males graduated with an Education doctorate.

**Table 10: % Doctoral Graduations by Field of Study, Race and Gender 2020**

<b>Field of study</b>	<b>Black Female</b>	<b>Black Male</b>	<b>White Female</b>	<b>White Male</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Science, Engineering & Technology	27%	44%	15%	14%	100%
Business & Commerce	23%	55%	12%	9%	100%
Education	40%	44%	11%	4%	100%
Humanities	29%	44%	16%	12%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 10 shows that in 2020, Black females as a proportion of the total number of doctoral graduates increased. However, this percentage was lower than that of Black males across all fields. There are many inconsistencies between the enrolment rate of Black females and their graduation rates. The above statistics on race and gender show that, in contrast to Black women, White men, Black men, and White women continue to succeed in slightly higher rates in doctoral studies.

The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training records that women occupy subordinate positions even after leaving Higher Education (Department of Higher Education & Training 2013), while the Ministerial Report on Transformation (Department of Education 2008) reports that sexual harassment is rampant and that Higher Education in South Africa is tainted by gender inequality and discrimination.

Furthermore, women tend to select specific courses in Higher Education. They pursue programmes that are not dominated by men, mainly in business and the humanities while men favour the sciences or engineering (Smyth & Steinmetz 2008). This type of gender-influenced career decision-making is widespread (Charles & Bradley 2009; Darmody & Smyth 2005). It

is, therefore, crucial to examine gender differences to better understand what needs to be done to promote equality and fair employment opportunities (Lörz, Schindler & Walter 2011). In the South African context, this also needs to be examined from a socio-economic class, language and disability perspective.

In response to existing disparities, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) has put policies in place to ensure that there are more doctoral graduates (DHET 2020). This is supported by the goals set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) to increase the PhD cohort to more than 100 doctoral graduates per million South Africans by 2030 (National Planning Commission 2012). It might increase the likelihood of a knowledge economy that is both sustainable over the long term and meets South Africa's skills demands while enabling competitive global participation.

Gender inequalities have been addressed through affirmative action. However, to achieve the desired outcome, the use of affirmative action must be justified and social justice objectives must be properly understood and put into practice (Akala 2019). Furthermore, it is critical that Higher Education Institutions understand that the goal of affirmative action is not to single out particular people or eliminate jobs but to create new ones, particularly for women, in this sector.

The number of Black and female students enrolled in Higher Education in South Africa has gradually increased over the years. However, according to Akala (2018), a rise in the proportion of female and Black students does not necessarily indicate increased equity or equality. At the leadership level in Higher Education, women still struggle to 'break the glass ceiling' despite progressive policies (Akala 2019; Moodly & Toni 2015). The under-representation of Black women in this sector persists from postgraduate level into the workforce.

## **4 Towards an Intersection of Interventions**

This section explores ways to address the foundational inequities of Black female doctoral students in specific disciplines. It consists of three sub-sections: exploring *mentorship* patterns, developing alternative *supervisory practices* (including reframed conceptions of roles and responsibilities), and valuing the role that students as *peers* can play to support their own progress through doctoral studies.

#### **4.1 Mentorship of Students in Doctoral Education**

Professional identity is formed in social interactions within communities of practice; mentorship is an important part of this process. Mentorship can be regarded as a unique and circumscribed community of dialogue between the supervisor and the student. While supervision (See section 4.2 below) foregrounds input related to a specific study (at various stages of development), mentorship pays attention to the broader induction of the doctoral student into the world of academia, career trajectory, and planning a life-work balance.

Supervision involves assisting students to make research decisions, developing their methodological skills and ability to design experiments, assisting them to communicate their findings, and offering peer support (Akerlind & McAlpine 2017; Motshoane & McKenna 2021). These do not in any way constitute mentorship. If supervisors meet the above criteria, they have done their job. Research supervision is generally viewed as a task-oriented endeavour (Akerlind & McAlpine 2017; Motshoane & McKenna 2021). Mentorship goes beyond these basic requirements. It involves pastoral care that is not often seen or even needed in supervision. Mentorship involves long-term care of the student's career beyond just obtaining a PhD (Khamis & Chapman 2017; Thackwell, Chiliza & Swartz 2018).

Mentorship of Black female students could take the form of inviting PhD students to faculty meetings. It can also be considered as a mini-apprenticeship as the student learns how faculty discussions are led and could also be invited to chair one of the meetings. This gives this group of students an idea of what an academic career entails (it is more than just research, supervision and teaching). It also involves the social aspects and socialisation that assist students in their PhD journey (Dhunpath, Matisson & Samuel 2018). This strategy also involves power sharing as the student can be involved in discussions for decision making around policies or other matters that directly affect the student body.

Invitations to participate in academic processions at graduation could become the norm. This is an important 'rite of passage' in academia. It could also reduce the visual power dynamics, where the professoriate is mainly male (Moody 2021). Therefore, representation at graduation processions is dominated by males. Being part of a procession with university academics and executives might also motivate Black female doctoral students to remain and develop their career within academia. Academic graduation processions could also

provide networking opportunities for the student. This can also be viewed as positive affirmation that the student can and will complete their doctoral studies.

Mentorship is also the explicit disdain by supervisors who are Black females, White females, Black males or White males for behaviour that further alienates Black women. Furthermore, it involves an element of trust (Blunt & Conolly 2006; Dhunpath et al. 2018). Power sharing can be achieved by standing up against and speaking out about the current practices in Higher Education that continue to suppress Black women and Black doctoral female students. This also builds trust and could open avenues for Black female students to approach staff without the fear of victimisation when they are faced with problems in Higher Education Institutions. Staying silent under such circumstances seems like acceptance of the gender and racial disparities in Higher Education and perpetuates the current power dynamics in this sector.

In practice, supervision and mentorship overlap as supervisors /mentors increasingly have to attend to simultaneous and complex intersected factors influencing students' progress. While supervision policies are available, there are no policies for mentorship or any document that provides direction on its implementation (Dhunpath *et al.* 2018), which seems to take place informally. Too often the responsibilities of mentorship are omitted from the equation. We argue that the required mentorship qualities should be extended as the unique features of what it means to be a Black female need to be included in this dyadic relationship. Mentors themselves should embrace learning from the perspective of this targeted group. Paradoxically, mentors who frequently do not share the demographic and experiential profile of their students have to be mentored about unique experiences and reading the world from the perspective of Black females.

Instead, the considerable international literature on activating success tends to foreground students' personal motivation that affects success and throughput in Higher Education as if this is solely the responsibility of the individual learner. This shifts the burden of success to students alone. Furthermore, the literature tends to promote the activities of collective groups of students and makes little reference to gender differences (see further discussion of peer communities of support in section 4.3). It thus tends to focus on personal student motivation, peer tutoring and student attitudes and approaches to education (Harrop, Tattersall & Goody 2007). This somewhat deflects the responsibility of the Higher Education system to enact structural features to address specific challenges. For example, some Higher Education Institutions

conduct course evaluations without reference to gender differences; the implication is that such differences are unimportant and/or negligible. What kinds of formal developmental processes are designed by institutions to support the student, rather than the expectation that students themselves and their personal initiative will manage the transition into and out of doctoral studies? The focus on collective groups homogenises interventions and denies the particularities of specific individuals and their characteristics within the group.

Further systemic interventions are required to provide scaffolding support for targeted groups that are relatively under-represented or under-productive within doctoral studies or to manage their prospective career trajectory into academia. For example, how postgraduates are introduced to their careers and how their professional identities are developed in the early stages of their careers is crucial and could help to support incoming and future female doctoral graduates in their studies. In-depth research on Black women's experiences before enrolling in postgraduate programmes is also crucial and could provide information on how to motivate young women to seek graduate degrees. This should start at a young age, ideally when they are still at undergraduate level.

Effective supervisors understand that mentorship is a crucial part of their job (Pearson 2001). Effective academic supervision is defined as a positive working relationship between the supervisor and the student. As part of this relationship, the supervisor must help the doctoral student to learn how to carry out independent research, think critically and develop original ideas (Al Makhmreh & Stockley 2020). Mentorship is much more, since the changing relational dynamics and outcomes of mentoring involve heeding the specific demographic lived experiences of Black females which warrant specific kinds of interventions and acknowledged insights. Matching Black female students with supervisors/mentors who care about systemic, personal and developmental needs is crucial to student access and success. Such care is not a matter of reinforcing disguised patronising or patriarchal relations. The supervisor's/mentor's role should be to support students' progress in both academic and broader life-work-career engagements. Supervisors/mentors assist students by engaging in discussions with them, listening to their concerns and sharing their own knowledge and experience (Al Makhmreh & Stockley 2020). This includes offering advice before students enrol for specific disciplines, topics and fields of study. Mentorship precedes access and promotes successful progress.

## ***4.2 Dynamic Supervision and Adaptable Supervisors***

Since doctoral students differ in terms of character, circumstances, gender, language, social background and experiences, managing student diversity is unavoidable and requires skill, patience, flexibility and adaptability from research supervisors (Maiztegui-Oate & Santibáez-Gruber 2008; Najjuma 2020). At the start of the supervision relationship, students and supervisors have different levels of experience, disciplinary specialisation and knowledge (DIES/CREST 2018). We argue that supervisors have the responsibility to develop dynamic, creative and adaptable supervision practices. When they are allocated supervision of Black female students, they should adjust and adapt their supervision practices to effectively support students in this population group.

Since doctoral supervisors hold power and influence in the Higher Education space, they are able to review current doctoral policies within their institutions. There is also a possibility that the policies are outdated. Doctoral education is very masculinised and impersonal (Mkhize 2022). The inevitable struggle of women in Higher Education is fuelled by subtle structural and policy obstacles (intentional or unintentional) that have gone unacknowledged and under-reviewed. This overhaul could also result in further curriculum reform that speaks to and supports the progression of Black female students. If these types of policies exist in Higher Education, they need to be reviewed and overhauled if necessary to support such students.

Given the important role that supervision plays in the success of doctoral students, the literature and data show that supervision of Black female students needs to be deliberate and to have the specific goal of ensuring that these students are retained within Higher Education through to doctoral level and beyond. Doctoral supervisors, regardless of race or gender have influence and their power can be used to support students. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the most important elements that Black women are not born with is power. Supervisors should use their knowledge and power to protect students' rights, facilitate deliberate dialogue, expose them to critical learning and support democratic justice to improve the community of practice (Najjuma 2020; Vilakazi 2016).

Fisher, Nyabaro, Mendum, and Osiru's (2020) study found that women in 17 African countries completed their doctoral studies one-and-a-half years later than their male counterparts and the ratio of paper acceptance was one less than males. Co-presenting a paper at a conference and allowing the student to lead the presentation with the supervisor being the second rather than the first

author facilitates the application and transfer of the research and writing skills that the supervisor has already been guiding her/his students on. This could also increase the chances of acceptance and publication of a paper. It could enable power sharing and empower the Black female doctoral student. Their name is also foregrounded and can become known in their field even before they complete their doctoral studies.

Supervisors could also teach a Black female doctoral student how to go about obtaining a book contract by introducing or recommending them to the supervisor's existing professional networks in publishing. Publishing a book or book chapter is an intimidating process; it needs to be simplified so that the student can access it and it does not require extensive financial resources. Candidates' access to informal knowledge such as book publishing that they could acquire via participating in a department's research activity is still somewhat restricted (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). These could be related to geographical location, language and disability. These barriers need to be removed for Black female doctoral candidates.

Creating opportunities for Black female doctoral students to participate in co-teaching can also demonstrate a supervisor's willingness to share power with their students. Doctoral students are not given the chance to consider lecturing or a foundation in academia while pursuing their PhDs (Bailey, Bogossian & Akesson 2016). In the South African context, this is usually seen at the postdoctoral research level or if the student manages to secure a post as a lecturer. This should exclude tutoring that is often seen in Higher Education Institutions and should involve co-teaching, with remuneration, where the supervisor shares their teaching load, not just marking and admin with the student.

There is currently little research on how supervisors are adapting their behaviour to accommodate student diversity, particularly in the context of online supervision (Najjuma 2020). In the South African context, diversity goes beyond race and gender. Socio-economic class differences, cultural norms and even disability are compounding factors for Black female doctoral students. Black female doctoral candidates are also likely to be affected by traditional female roles stemming from cultural or religious pressures within the home where women are expected to attend to their families' needs as well as their studies without any help from their partners or husbands. South Africa has many single parent households where women bear the burden of raising children alone. According to the Social Research Foundation (2023) 43% of the

country's households are run by single parents, the majority of whom are Black women (Social Research Foundation 2023). Online or a hybrid form of supervision can alleviate the burden on mothers who cannot always leave their children at home or are single mothers. Supervisors should make online resources available for Black female students through engaging other stakeholders within their institutions to ensure that a student is not disadvantaged by their financial position, family responsibilities or their disability when online resources are required.

The supervisor should emphasise a team rather than a hierarchical relationship. Through her/his supervision methods, the supervisor must deliberately demonstrate to the doctoral candidate how to also be a good supervisor and lecturer in the future. They should also be sensitive to the student's cultural and religious needs, avoid taking an authoritarian stance and show respect to the student. Doctoral education can prepare students for careers as researchers and university lecturers. Doctoral students' socialisation is closely tied to their interactions with their supervisors. Poor or non-existent communication and a lack of intellectual stimulation during the supervision process are major causes of student dropout (Castelló, Pardo, Sala-Bubaré & Suñe-Soler 2017). Since doctoral supervision is an authority relationship, power can be abused and supervision can become destructive. An important factor influencing supervision methods appears to be how supervisors were treated as PhD students (Al Makhamreh & Stockley 2020).

It is also important for supervisors to be sensitive to Black female student's cultural capital. They should be aware of the cultural demands that are placed on Black women, even if they do not share the same cultural capital. Numerous studies have been conducted on the overall learning environments of doctoral students. Some focus on issues relevant to creativity such as students' sense of agency and the development of their identities (Bengtson & McAlpine 2022), the supervisor's capacity to meet students' dynamic need for exploration (Frick et al. 2014) or the advantages of incorporating various types of cultural knowledge into intercultural supervision (Brodin 2018; Manathunga 2017). They demonstrate that more educational leadership and doctoral supervision pedagogy are needed (Brodin 2018). Making space for creativity and the inclusion of cultural knowledge or even the student's heritage in the write-up of the doctoral thesis is one way of doing this.

Dynamic supervision can also involve inviting Black female students to work on a proposal for private consulting contracts that supervisors are in-

volved in and contributing some of the remuneration towards the student's academic and personal needs. This also develops the research skills students would need if they chose to join industry after graduating. In some cases, it could immediately address and alleviate any financial burden that the student is facing. Financial constraints are one of the reasons why many doctoral students do not finish on time or at all (Mkhize 2022). Given the doctoral graduation rate, specifically that of Black female students as presented earlier in Section 3, this might be one of the strategies to increase graduation rates in this population group.

Effective supervision, the cornerstone of doctoral education, is one of the most important requirements for on time completion (Kobayashi et al. 2017). Manathunga (2007) investigated the techniques that university administrators and supervisors use to identify early warning signs of student problems. In addition to building rapport with students and holding regular meetings, these supervisors used scaffolding in supervision to aid students' development (Manathunga 2007 as cited in Kobayashi *et al.* 2017). This technique could also be used to support Black female doctoral candidates.

In the South African context, doctoral candidates come from different cultural contexts and English, which is the language of instruction, is not a first language for many Black doctoral students (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyan 2019), especially those from rural backgrounds. This further frustrates their academic writing skills where support is not given. It is compounded by oppression related to class, race and gender that Black South African women still face in Higher Education (Akala 2018; Lekgau 2021). Supervisors should also raise doctoral candidates' writing proficiency to an acceptable level. They need to build rapport and trust with candidates to ensure that they can respond to critique effectively, without language barriers (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). Given that some doctoral graduates will seek employment as lecturers, Higher Education Institutions should also provide opportunities for socialising and building personal and academic connections (Levin 2017; Gu, Levin & Luo 2018).

The need to adjust in line with students' individual abilities means that supervision requires a personalised strategy that evolves over time, with more directive feedback required for students who perform less well and more high-level input for those aiming for a distinction. This should take place in an even-handed way, with all students treated equitably if not equally (Katikireddi & Reilly 2017). Difficult academic circumstances during doctoral studies tend to be harder to navigate if one does not have power (Gushman 2021). In the case of Black female students who already are at a disadvantage due to their gender

and race and do not have the inherent power to navigate difficult circumstances, supervisors should try to level the playing field.

The links between departmental practices, faculty and university rules and challenges related to national quality assurance of supervision practices are becoming more widely understood, with supervision increasingly an established methodology and a collaborative activity (Bengtson & McAlpine 2022). There is growing recognition that doctoral supervision involves not only a student's relationship with her or his supervisor(s), but also institutional leadership practices, national and international policy objectives and other factors (Bengtson & McAlpine 2022).

Black female students need supervisors who are responsive to their different cultural, language, race and class differences, and are flexible and open to change. This type of supervisor also needs to be confident and brave enough to challenge prevailing patriarchal and masculine norms in Higher Education, even at the risk of ruffling some feathers. Power sharing does not require policies or even resources; it requires flexible, culturally sensitive supervisors who are also interested in driving the Higher Education sector's transformation agenda. Not only should they be willing to challenge these structural barriers that oppress Black women, they also need to be creative. Times are changing at a very fast pace. The Fourth Industrial Revolution calls for supervision and mentorship practice that respond to these rapid changes that we are witnessing. Black women need allies in the form of White women, Black men and White men who are afforded privilege upon birth. The use of intersectionality as a lens to examine mentorship and supervision allows for a better understanding of how social positions (race, gender, class, culture, geographical location) affect Black female doctoral candidates' access to and success in these programmes. It is also used as a backdrop to suggest possible alternative forms of supervision and mentorship. Not only should supervision be a means to an end; it should also include deliberate and ongoing mentorship. Successful completion of doctoral studies rests on the shoulders of both the empowered candidate and her/his supervisor.

### ***4.3 Shared Support amongst Peers***

Doctoral candidates, including females, need to rely on one another and not only on their supervisors for support. Postgraduate students need extensive support, with many students describing feelings of despair, loneliness, anxiety and high levels of stress (Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden & Gisle

2017; Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine & Hubbard 2018). Students who were at school together find their lives diverging and need to replace such friendships with other support groups at university, encouraging and counselling one another at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and sharing similar goals.

In such a situation, ongoing motivation and encouragement from peers is very important to motivate doctoral students to continue with their studies and complete on time.

Peers can support one another through feedback and constructive criticism. In discussion board postings, online candidates can inspire one another to reformulate ideas, thus improving one another's writing skills (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). It is not necessary for doctoral students to have a great deal in common in order to learn from one another. They should be flexible and open to new experiences and take the initiative to improve conditions for themselves.

The group setting gives form to several aspects of doctoral learning. The group's ability to draw on one another's knowledge and resources reduces the necessity for individualised training (Webber, Hatch, Petrin, Anderson, Nega, Raudebaugh, Shannon & Finlayson 2022). Students' peers are likely to be going through similar experiences in their studies and this enables them to confide in and support one another when academic and personal situations are challenging. Promoting group and peer assistance gives doctoral students examples of how to manage their own students in the future when they become doctoral supervisors.

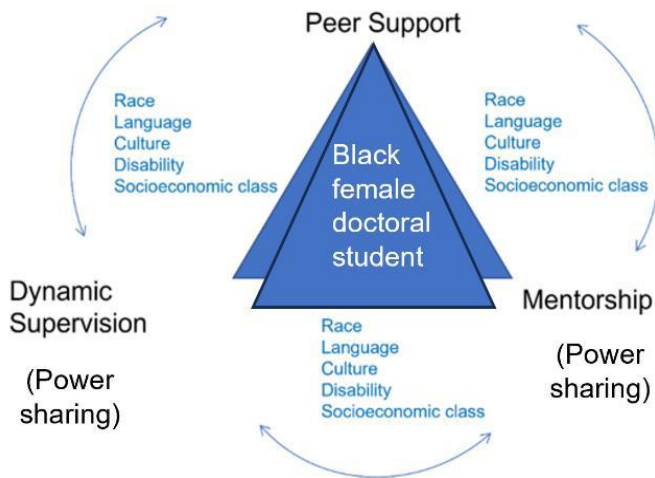
It is recognised that the argument to activate peer support might be considered as antithetical to the original argument presented in section 4.1 above which highlighted the need for a move away from students being considered as solely responsible for their own progress. However, Section 4 as a whole emphasises that while the system and supervisors have a responsibility to exercise leadership and management of students' access and success, there is a co-responsibility of roles as both groups (students and supervisors/mentors) work collectively in the best interests of progress. This intersection is captured in the framework presented below.

## **5 Proposed Framework to Support Black Female Students Using an Intersectional Approach**

This chapter has argued that South African Higher Education is fraught with inequalities that are a stumbling block for Black female doctoral student

success. These students also contend with socio-economic class, disability and language difficulties. The framework below is proposed as a way to address the current issues confronting Black female doctoral students and also to narrow the gap in their completion and success rates in doctoral studies. It was developed using the existing literature and the intersectional approach.

**Figure 5.1: Suggested Framework to Support Black Female Doctoral Students**



To recap the methodology followed to develop this framework, initial desktop research was conducted to gather the literature and data on the overall graduation and dropout rates at doctoral level in South Africa. These were analysed and key trends relating to gender inequality were highlighted. Intersectionality in Higher Education was also presented. Following this, existing literature and trends were used to develop a framework to support Black female students in their doctoral studies.

The arrows in the framework show that mentorship, supervision and peer support are interconnected, and it is difficult to treat them as disparate parts.

Intersectionality theory (introduced in Section 2 above) highlighted the integrated flow between the components of a dynamic system (Bhopal 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Harpur, Szucs & Willox 2022; Nichols & Stahl 2019). At all points, the different intersections (race, language, culture, disability and socio-economic class) coalesce and overlap.

The framework also indicates that there are opportunities for power sharing in the mentorship and supervision components. The Black female student should be able to lean on the influence and power that her supervisor has within the institution and this should be leveraged to help her succeed in her doctoral studies. Instead of policies or even resources, power sharing calls for adaptable supervisors who are passionate about advancing the Higher Education sector's reform agenda. They need to be creative in addition to being willing to confront the structural factors that oppress Black women.

Consequently, the above framework integrates a range of sub-studies which are underpinned by intersectionality theory in Higher Education including:

- Gender disparities in Higher Education (Akala 2019; Moodly & Toni 2015, Mouton et al. 2022).
- A systemic analysis of dropout, throughput and graduation rates (the academic pipeline) (CHE 2020; Mouton et al. 2022).

Our analysis has shown that the specific characteristics and life experiences of Black female doctoral students need unambiguous targeted focus. The framework incorporates the debates raised in Section 4 suggesting that mentorship, supervision and peer support communities need to be brought into dialogue. However, these three elements are not disconnected from the systemic and personal characteristics unique to the targeted group.

Supervision can also take the form of mentorship. Mentors could be young lecturers who are also early career researchers and can be male or female; young women need female role models but also support from their male counterparts. Encouraging students to attend seminars to network with people within and outside their field is an informal form of mentorship. Mentorship thus also forms part of the research supervision process.

Peer support amongst doctoral students also forms part of the framework. Group and peer support provides doctoral students with examples of how to manage their own students when they become supervisors in the future. They can also draw from their peer support group to support them in

their studies. Intersectionality can be drawn on as a means to support female doctoral students to enable them to succeed. Gender/race and gender/class, language and disability can be compounding factors in doctoral success. The framework shows that intersectionality can be used as a vehicle to address gender inequalities in Higher Education. Intersectionality is also flexible and can be combined with other approaches and even theories.

## **6 Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter examined the role of intersectionality in Higher Education. Such intersectionality involves not only the isolating singular demographic features of race, gender, disconnection from geographical location, language, socio-economic class barriers, and disability. Given South Africa's very difficult history, social and structural inequalities still exist in Higher Education. The chapter noted the numerous disadvantages that Black female doctoral candidates, in particular, contend with, compounded by the different intersectional contexts. Addressing gender disparities in South Africa needs to be approached through an intersectional lens. There are nuanced differences between race groups, including differences in enrolment and graduation rates between Black and White females and between Black females and Black males. While more Black females enrol in doctoral studies, more Black and White males graduate with doctorates. Given the high enrolment rate among Black females, there should also be high graduation rates among this population group. The data also show that the highest dropout rates are among Black female students. The common thread in policy documents on the academic pipeline is that Black females need extensive support. This suggests that they need differentiated support during their doctoral studies taking into consideration their various backgrounds and possible barriers (language, socio-economic class, cultural, religious, disability and geographical location).

Based on the findings in the literature, it can be argued that South African universities need to re-evaluate their approaches to support Black female doctoral candidates; that these candidates and recent graduates should consider how they can collaborate as change agents to support one another's academic endeavours; and that the candidates should endeavour to continually develop their professional identities. Supervisors should periodically assess their supervision methods to ensure that these do not alienate students based on their language, race, socio-economic class, geographical location, cultural

identity, religion and disability. The proposed framework needs further work once more data is collected on the experiences of Black female doctoral students.

These experiences are not unique to Black women in South Africa. The framework can be used in any socio-economic and geographical location where it is appropriate. It is asserted that on-going exploration through research on Black women's experiences within Higher Education in South Africa, on the African continent and also internationally is important. Mentorship and supervision practices within the African and international contexts can also be explored. Collection and analysis of empirical data can assist in the realisation of this objective. These experiences and practices can be woven together and also compared across different socio-economic contexts to show similarities and differences in experiences and practices. This would also create a better understanding of Black women's experiences in Higher Education and the marginalisation and difficulties they continue to face.

In all contexts, on the African continent and internationally, power from male privilege and White privilege can also be leveraged and drawn upon, especially where holders of said privilege are also supportive of the advancement of Black women. If the professoriate and males in Higher Education also voice their disdain for the structural racism, sexism and practices that marginalise Black women, then half the battle is won. Mentorship of Black women by members of groups who hold power will also assist in addressing some of the structural discrimination in Higher Education Institutions. Black women need allies in these population groups and power sharing is vitally important. Nonetheless, the framework should emphasise the significance of supervision, mentorship and peer support in an intersectional context.

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# **Supervisors' and Students' Engagement with Postgraduate Education**



# CHAPTER 4

## Pivots, Provocateurs and Wallflowers: Postgraduate Students' Diverse Roles in Generating Dialogic Online Forum Discussions

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### Abstract

The concept of agency features with increasing prominence in academic discourse, particularly within the field of literacy education. This concept is highly relevant to research which focuses on students who are beginning their postgraduate journey and who need to make a shift from ‘being’ undergraduates to ‘becoming’ independent postgraduate students. Our concerns about enabling conditions of possibility for the development of student agency emerged strongly in 2020 when we switched from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. One specific concern was whether agentic and engaged dialogic learning could be facilitated in an online space. In attempting to address this concern we asked students in a Bachelor of Education Honours course to post,

in an online forum, their reflective responses to weekly readings and to each other's posts. This discussion forum became the engine of the students' course. In this chapter we analyse the forum posts of the 2020 and 2021 student cohorts, focusing specifically on how agency emerged in and from these forum interactions, and on the agency enacted in the various roles students played in their dialogic exchanges with peers and lecturers. We have termed these three roles: pivot, provocateur, and wallflower. We argue that the online discussion forums created 'the right to speak' (Norton 2013) and that the course requirement for all participants to speak created a rich learning environment in which students were exposed to, and gradually acquired, a range of voices. To conclude, we explore some implications of our findings for postgraduate curriculum design and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Agency, postgraduate learning, online forums, dialogic learning, voice

## **1 Introduction**

In April 2020, like many universities worldwide, the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa switched abruptly from contact teaching to emergency remote teaching (ERT). We were concerned about 'whether access to engaged dialogic learning could be facilitated' (Mendelowitz, Fouche, Reed, Andrews & Vally Essa 2022:21) in an asynchronous learning space for students in a B.Ed. Honours core course *Language and Literacy, Theories and Practices*. This is one of four modules, each taught for 14 weeks, which students need to complete to be awarded a B.Ed. Honours degree – the first level of postgraduate studies in South Africa. We agree with Samuel (2022:118) that postgraduate pedagogies should enable students 'to critique ritualistic research conventions and promote an independent, assertive academic voice' and thus we were also concerned about how to facilitate and support the development of our students' critical voices in this new teaching and learning environment. As explained in Mendelowitz *et al.* (2022:22), we made two decisions: '(i) to make online forum posts the new course engine; and (ii) to investigate possible affordances and limitations of these dialogic posts for student learning and for the development of critical scholarly voice'. Each week every student was required to post an individual response on our learning management platform (Ulwazi) to tasks

based on the course readings for that week and also to engage in a discussion of responses posted by at least two of their peers on this platform. In addition, for the first few weeks, course lecturers provided feedback to each student's individual post. Thereafter, global responses were given to students in weekly announcements (see Appendix A for further details). In a summative assignment, students reflected on their learning from both the readings and the forum discussions.

The research discussed here forms part of a larger Scholarship of Teaching and Learning project in which we investigate the impact of dialogic forum discussions on both undergraduate and postgraduate students' learning. This chapter focuses on how these forum discussions can be used to facilitate dialogic learning at postgraduate level. We began by analysing the 2021 B.Ed. Honours cohort's online discussion forums in the *Language and Literacy, Theories and Practices* course, in terms of the role of dialogic interaction in developing personal, professional and scholarly voices which can contribute to increased epistemic access (Mendelowitz *et al.* 2022). In this chapter, we consider how the agency evident in the 2020 and 2021 students' discussion forum posts manifested in the various roles they played in responding to course readings and in interacting with peers and lecturers. We also reflect on how playing these roles contributed to the development of a range of voices, including critical, questioning voices.

## **2 Agency, Investment and Dialogism in Postgraduate Learning**

The concepts of agency and investment are integral to our understanding of how students chose to interact and present themselves in an online dialogic pedagogic space. Drawing on Freire, we conceptualise a dialogic pedagogy as one that entails 'multiple dynamic interactions with the self, with others and with texts and cultural resources' (Mendelowitz, Ferreira & Dixon 2023:54). We conceptualise such a pedagogy as having four key elements: engagement with audience, reflexivity, multivoicedness and engagement with texts and cultural resources (Mendelowitz *et al.* 2022). Reflexivity entails dialogues with the self and we are particularly interested in how this 'inner conversation' (Bradbury 2020: 23) is reshaped by dialogue with others and with textual/cultural resources. We argue that these multiple layers of dialogic pedagogy

enabled students to become agentive and invested learners along a continuum of engagement, in varied ways and to different degrees.

Despite the wealth of recent conceptualisations of agency (Stenalt & Lassen 2022), we find most useful Emirbayer and Mische's (1998:962) conception of agency as:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its 'iterational' or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

Within the context of higher education, we add to this a sense of students' purposefulness, influenced by their ability to draw on available resources to achieve personal learning goals. Norton's (1995, 1997 2013) work on identity and investment in language learning is of particular interest here. For the purposes of this chapter, we extend the concept of 'language learning' in Norton's work to include 'targeted course content' since our course is not aimed at teaching a specific language, but rather at helping students understand key concepts and practices within the field of language and literacy studies. Like Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Darwin and Norton (2017) take into consideration students' 'projective capacity' by focusing on students' agentive imaginings of future identities.

Drawing on the above concepts, we take the position that the students in our study had to (re)define themselves within a temporary online space, starting from positions of past pedagogic and social identities and making purposeful choices about their investment in the course through actions and interactions (cf. Case 2015) aimed at achieving imagined future identities. In some cases, these choices shifted as students journeyed through the course.

We consider agency through the social realist lens offered by Archer's (1995 2000) morphogenetic approach which has been viewed as productive for reflecting on student learning in higher education (Case 2015; Williams 2012). This approach considers agency as one of three spheres of social life, the other two being *structures* and *culture*. Structures relate to 'the world out there' (Case 2015:843) and include material goods such as resources, but also intangible structures such as social positions, course curricula and course requirements.

Social phenomena emerge not only as a result of these structures, but also as a result of the agents (people) who interact within these structures and the cultures that influence these interactions (including institutional cultures, disciplinary cultures and also national and regional cultures). According to Archer (1995), these spheres work together towards either *morphostasis* (thus, emergent properties that cause a phenomenon to remain the same), or *morphogenesis* (thus, emergent properties that enable change in a phenomenon).

Case (2015:843) argues that in 'the arena of higher education, we are centrally focused on the morphogenesis of student agency; we aim for students to leave higher education with different knowledge and capacity for action than that with which they entered'. In this chapter, we consider structural and agential morphogenesis (in this case, how student engagement and agency were enabled at least partly through the way in which the course's dialogic pedagogy was structured to facilitate not only the right to speak, but also the requirement to speak). Though structures, cultures and agency are 'intimately ... intertwined' (Archer 1995:65), Archer argues that the emergent properties of these spheres can be analysed separately to better understand the phenomenon under investigation. It is this approach of *analytical dualism* that we follow in this chapter.

In a discussion of student agency through a morphogenetic lens, Case (2015:841) calls for a 'true higher education' which facilitates 'the development of an enlarged sense of agency for students'. Archer's (2000) concept of the social actor is important in the interplay between students' actions and interactions. She argues that we become 'recognisable to others' as social actors, embodying certain roles, 'through the consistency of our personified conduct in our social positions' (Case 2015:12). Norton's conceptions of identity and investment resonate strongly with Archer's argument, as is evident in the suggestion that highly motivated students might 'resist opportunities to speak in contexts where [they are] positioned in unequal ways' (Darvin & Norton 2016:20). Hence teachers need to create inclusive, hospitable classroom environments that facilitate 'the right to speak' (Norton 2013:170). In addition, learners invest in learning if doing so increases 'the value of their cultural capital and social power' (Darvin & Norton 2016:20). Norton (1997:410) makes a link between identities and desire: 'the desire for **recognition**, the desire for **affiliation** and the desire for **security and safety**' influence how we enact our identities. Thus, the roles we play in learning contexts relate to what we believe we might achieve through our engagement in the learning process. These roles

can range from positioning ourselves as strong and competent academic voices demanding recognition, to positioning ourselves as partial spectators who listen in on other conversations, playing safe as we measure ourselves in relation to our peers and navigate our own personal and academic identity journeys within the learning context. In fact, Darvin and Norton (2017) acknowledge the strategic aspect of investment - students learn to play the game strategically. They argue, 'learners exercise agency by choosing what they perceive as beneficial to their existing or imagined identities, by consenting to or resisting hegemonic practices and by investing or divesting from the language and literacy practices of particular classrooms and communities' (Darvin & Norton 2017:7). We argue that our dialogic pedagogy, and the range of possibilities for student engagement with self, others and texts (including the right and requirement to speak), increased the possibilities of student investment in the course that is the focus of this chapter.

Archer (2000) points out that the conditions we find ourselves in are rarely entirely of our choosing. For example, the structural realities of our course, preceded and to a considerable extent dictated the social interactions of students within it. Students are involuntarily placed as *social agents* within pre-existing structural conditions, which affect 'the *social actors* whom some of us can voluntarily become' (Archer 2000:249). For Archer (2000:12), the types of social actors we might choose to become are 'subject to continuous internal review' - thus, at least to some extent, we position and define ourselves in roles we choose to take on and which in turn impact on our identities (cf. Norton Peirce 1995). In higher education, these roles are likely to be most effectively executed when there is 'a synthesis of personal identity in concert with social identity relating to being a student', with 'full agential morphogenesis' (Case 2015:849) a likely outcome. Actively encouraging this synthesis between the personal and social (including students' academic and professional persona) has been a conscious pedagogic aim of the Language and Literacies course since its inception twenty years ago.

### **3 Context and Pedagogy**

In previous iterations of the course, we aimed to offer productive learning 'spaces' in small classes in which dialogic interactions were often generative. However, these discussions rarely included all students. Typically, confident students would participate while other students chose to listen, rarely contribut-

ing unless directly called upon by a lecturer. Furthermore, we realised that students sometimes came to classes without having read the prescribed articles, therefore being underprepared for engaging in conversations based on these texts. In moving to online learning, we were concerned about how this move would influence the levels of investment previously evident in the engaged dialogic learning of some students, and about the likelihood of students' investment in the course decreasing. In responding to the enforced structural change to online teaching and learning, as part of our curriculum strategy, we chose to integrate new requirements into the structure of the course as explained in the course outline extract below:

The weekly reading responses that you are required to do are an essential part of your learning. This is the engine of the course and will culminate in a summative reading response assignment in which you will pull together your insights gained from the weekly reading responses (Course Outline 2020 and 2021).

In the light of these structural changes, in this chapter, we describe and discuss how students signalled their investment by positioning themselves, in the roles they took on, to work toward a synthesis between their personal and social identities (cf. Case 2015).

## **4 Methodology**

With the rapid and unplanned switch to ERT in 2020, we planned as carefully as we could for teaching and learning in new ways, relying heavily on the discussion forums that took the place of weekly face-to-face discussions. When, towards the end of that year, we realised how unexpectedly rich and diverse students' interactions on these forums were, we decided that we needed to understand why this was the case and to integrate the affordances of discussion forums more purposefully into future iterations of the course. Then, at the conclusion of the course, informed consent was requested from students in the 2020 and 2021 cohorts for anonymously analysing their discussion forum and summative reading response assignment submissions (hereafter referred to as the summative assignment); data was only analysed after this consent was obtained. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identities of our students.

Students' written work (their discussion forum responses as well as their reading response assignment) was analysed using critical discourse analysis, which 'explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs .... It also investigates ways in which language constructs and is constructed by social relationships' (Paltridge 2012). Fairclough (2003) argues that discourse analysis is particularly useful for understanding 'the discursive aspect of ways of being, identities', and focuses on the process of identification that humans go through which, in writing, manifests as a 'textual process'. Considering identification as a process also points to a key argument of this chapter, that identities are not fixed, and that different roles can be taken on, sometimes over time, and sometimes concurrently. However, Fairclough (2003) warns that 'identification is not a purely textual process, not only a matter of language'. Thus, in our analysis, we refrain from directly commenting on students' identities as emerging from their written discourse, but rather consider roles they take on in this textual process of identification.

After a careful reading of the posts and the assignments we met to discuss what had emerged for each of us about the roles students 'performed' and possible reasons for these choices of roles. In our analysis, we focused on how discourse manifested in the online discussion forums; this included conversation analysis (Paulus, Warren & Lester 2016) which we applied to text-based conversations (focusing on the interactions between people in conversation, considering who spoke, who was silent, who responded to whom, and the sequence in which students responded), as well as text structure and language use. Through our analysis, we identified three fairly distinct roles, with some students playing more than one role across their various forum posts and have termed the three **pivot**, **provocateur** and **wallflower**.

The students whom we consider to be **pivots** played a key role in engaging other students by affirming their contributions and by drawing them into discussion with one another through their nuanced responses to both the readings and to what their peers had posted. They often performed a bridge-building role as both knowledge builders and interpersonal relationship builders, playing a synthesising role. From varied definitions and examples of **provocateurs** in action in a range of contexts, we have compiled the following general definition: one who incites or stimulates another to action, including the action of critical thinking; in education one function of a provocateur is to ask thought-provoking questions that encourage perspective shifts. In the context of

our data, the provocateurs push boundaries and sometimes serve as role models of confident, compelling and critical academic engagement. When applied to a person rather than a plant, a **wallflower** usually refers to someone who remains on the fringes of a social occasion such as a dance. We chose the descriptor 'wallflower' for students who remained on the margins for much or all of the course – whether confidently self-contained or lacking initial confidence to engage with others, seemingly uninterested in such engagement or, particularly in 2020, because of contextual constraints.

Having identified these roles, we undertook a textual analysis of students' forum posts and summative assignments with the aim of understanding how students enacted agency through the roles they assumed in the online forum space. Our analysis was informed by the theorisations of agency and investment outlined above.

## **5 Pivots, Provocateurs and Wallflowers**

In this section, we analyse the agentic positions evident in the discussion forum posts of selected students in the 2020 and 2021 student cohorts, using the roles of pivot, provocateur and wallflower to frame the analysis. However, for the role of provocateur, we only include an example from the 2021 cohort, because the student from the 2020 cohort who most strongly emerged as provocateur did not give informed consent for her responses to be included in this study. Direct quotations are indicated verbatim in *italics*. We use bold formatting to highlight words or sections for the reader.

### **5.1 Pivots**

#### **Anathi (2020)**

In 2020, Anathi played the role of a pivot from Week 1 to Week 7, and of wallflower in the last few weeks of the course. In this section, we focus on her role as a pivot - a role that was enabling for other students in two ways. Firstly, in her individual posts, she models ways of writing that show the blending of high personal and affective engagement, critical self-reflexivity and intellectual engagement. These ways of writing, thinking, knowing and being are taken up, often with acknowledgement to her, by other students. Secondly, in responding to other students' posts she first affirms aspects of the content of these posts before moving to suggestions for alternative ways of responding. These

responses to her peers are similar in format to the ‘praise-question-encourage’ model advocated in the assessment literature as a support and confidence builder for students (Lipp & Davis-Ockey 1997).

Week 1 of the course focused on conceptualisations of language and literacies. Since 1994, schooling in South Africa has been officially desegregated but the effects of apartheid structures linger. Anathi attended a school that had excluded black students during the Apartheid years and which, after 1994, continued to offer only English and Afrikaans as subjects, despite the admission of African language-speaking students. In her first reading response, she quotes teachers who made remarks such as *stop clowning, this is not a township school, and you can only speak Zulu in the township schools*. She concludes her introductory paragraph with the following:

*These two articles have **opened my eyes** to understanding the negative attitude I have bared towards African languages as an African and my negative attitude towards township schools.*

In reflecting on languages of power and the power of languages Anathi uses the rhythms and repetition of oratory, reminiscent of Martin Luther King’s (1963) *I have a dream* and Thabo Mbeki’s (1996) *I am an African* speeches:

*As mentioned in the articles, **for years** I have been naïve and English has been a priority language that I should master and not a foreign language that threatens the elevation of African languages. **For years** I too have been caught up in ‘literate and illiterate binaries’ where I have been taught that the inability to read and write specifically in the English language is illiteracy regardless of the ability to read and write in an African language. This is where even **I as an African became an oppressor** to my fellow African peers in Township schools where I would disassociate myself from those who struggled to communicate with me in English. Perhaps this is a reflection of the success of imperialism as stated in the Wa Thiongo article as the foreign language was successfully the ‘means of spiritual subjugation’. I would rather have learned Afrikaans as an additional language than isiXhosa (...) These articles bring about a call for action to **Africans such as myself** to liberate ourselves from false consciousness and **embrace our true African selves** even to the realms of our languages.*

In this first individual reading response, Anathi demonstrates that exposure to alternative conceptualisations of language and literacy in socio-cultural contexts, together with an invitation to respond in a range of voices – personal, professional and academic – *lifted the veil* for her. Throughout her responses, Anathi illustrates the personal and social synthesis that Case (2015) advocates. Her juxtaposition of her past (*for years I have been*) and present selves and ideas (*call for action to Africans such as myself*) illustrate her investment in the course and her agentive move towards an imagined future self (Emirbayer & Mische 1998) which embraces her activist African identity and its relation to new ideas about literacy and language.

Her passionate and critically self-reflexive writing provokes almost equally passionate responses from four of her peers, two of whom focus more on the personal aspects of her post and two on her initial exploration of her intellectual shift. The more personal responses begin in very similar ways by showing appreciation for her honesty. For these students the frankness of Anathi's post was pivotal in creating a safe space for critical self-reflection, as indicated in Sarah's response:

*Hey Anathi, Firstly, thank you for **being so honest** about how you feel about township schools and suburban schools. It's not often you get to see **how students feel** about them (...). **I enjoyed** reading your response as it **made me realise** that there are normalities of language within our society, specific to the South African society, that I too have fallen in. **These normalities** are the very essence, as mentioned throughout your response, of the way in which we begin to value one language over another. The example of preferring the more classic stories of Red Riding Hood and dismissal of stories of your mother's past was an **experience that I can relate to** as well. (Sarah)*

Sarah's informal greeting suggests she felt comfortable from the start to engage with Anathi's response to the readings and to confess both her own normalising of English and her preference for Eurocentric fairy tales. The cluster of words in the extract signals Sarah's high level of affective engagement and how Anathi's role as a pivot opens the space for her peers. Sarah then begins to consider how to value local languages. Her affirmation of Anathi's response to the readings continues in Week 2 and is echoed by Na'ilah whose Week 2 response to Anathi is similar to Sarah's:

*Hi Anathi. Your response really **has me thinking all over again**. I love how you **related the articles to your experiences** and it's in this discussion that I agree with Sarah in **rethinking my place of privilege**. (Na'ilah)*

Anathi reciprocally affirms aspects of Sarah's and Na'ilah's responses:

*Sarah, I enjoyed reading your response (....) I'm glad **somebody spoke up** about being unable to relate to American readings and experiences, even though we are able to apply them to the South African context. I just think it would be more interesting to really engage with South African texts reflecting real South African issues, thank you for that.*

Anathi's comment that she's glad 'somebody spoke up' encapsulates the pivotal space she creates around her. She acknowledges the risk that Sarah has taken in an unthreatening way, thus opening the floor for her and others to continue speaking their minds. Anathi contributes to creating a forum environment that facilitates 'the right to speak' (Norton 2013:170). In responding to Na'ilah she comments:

*Na'ilah, I enjoy responses **that are integrated with personal reflection** on experiences and reflection on how what you have read relates to you.*

Her response illustrates the pivotal role she played in supporting Na'ilah's shift from her initial reading response, which backgrounded the personal and experiential and foregrounded summaries of the readings, towards posts in which she continues to demonstrate understanding of the readings while including her own response to them. Na'ilah's final comment on the challenge of working with 'diverse forms of literacy' in the classroom as advocated in one of the readings illustrates the shifts she has made:

*(...) it seems like an incredibly difficult task and one that would require a highly skilled teacher, something that I don't think I would be able to attempt as a teacher straight from varsity.*

In responding to Na'ilah, Anathi agrees that embracing the *difficult task* is a great challenge for newly qualified teachers. She then states the necessity of

doing so and ends on a note of encouragement to Na'ilah and to the whole student cohort of newly qualified teachers:

*I think with **the right kind of attitude and resilience** it wouldn't take many years of experience to do so. Thank you for your lovely response.*

Anathi, Sarah, and Na'ilah continued to respond to each other's posts in the first half of the course, but in the second half, Anathi became so burdened by adverse personal circumstances – both structural and cultural - that she was unable to sustain a high level of engagement with either the course or her peers. At that point, she became a wallflower, posting only her individual responses to the readings.

By providing Sarah and Na'ilah with guidance for understanding the readings, models of ways of responding, and affirmation of their efforts to do so, Anathi, in her role as the 'synthesiser', had encouraged them to make tentative steps towards 'postgraduateness' (Samuel 2022:126). For example, in Week 7 Na'ilah wrote the following:

*Hi Anathi. Again, I absolutely love reading your weekly responses. Your experiences show the validity and challenges that these articles highlight, while bringing it [them] to life in a way I would never have thought of.*

When Anathi became a wallflower, they too retreated, with Na'ilah posting only her individual responses and two further responses to peers and Sarah posting only her individual responses. We suggest that this retreat was to the detriment of their summative assignment.

## **Refilwe (2021)**

Across all her individual posts, Refilwe illustrates a high level of reflexivity and engagement with key concepts and debates in relation to the readings. However, what is most striking is her agentive formulation of questions, and her dialogic engagement with texts, peers and lecturers in her quest to find answers. Refilwe does not embrace new concepts unquestioningly. She grapples with ideas and considers different perspectives. Thus, her responses are more nuanced, more questioning, and less authoritative than those of Siboniso, the provocateur, to

be discussed in the next section.

In Week 10 (multilingualism), Refilwe navigates different positions within the multilingualism debates, embracing recognition of learners' languages, language varieties, and identities but expressing concerns about the implications of this recognition for practical classroom implementation. In this moment, there seems to be a conflict between her postgraduate student identity and her teacher identity. She raises a number of important questions while modelling a tentative and unthreatening, emerging critical and scholarly voice to peers:

*Because language is said to be fluid and everchanging, it is apt to fight for the recognition of township lingua **although I do not perceive it as something that is practical**. Sibanda challenges the idea that township lingua is deficit, granted, **but I still ask, how do we accommodate this lingua in a classroom environment**.*

Refilwe poses six questions in Week 10, and these become more insistent as she writes, with each one structured as in the extract above: an acknowledgement of an idea supporting multilingualism (usually supported by a source) followed by a question. Her conclusion indicates that her position is still unresolved and in her summative assignment she comments on feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of multilingual education:

*For a moment the topic on multilingualism seemed too complicated for me. I kept asking questions as to how practical it is for a multilingual country like South Africa to implement mother tongue education. I kept thinking that we are biting more than we can chew. (Refilwe, summative assignment)*

Refilwe's engagement across different parts of the forum is quite striking. She keeps the conversation going by participating consistently with a range of students and continues to ask thought-provoking questions that indicate both critical engagement and ambivalence about the issues raised in each week's theme, especially the theory/ practice divide. A significant part of her quest is to find theoretical answers that enable viable implementation within her own language classroom and in the wider society. Through this sustained engagement with her peers and the questions she asks of them and of the readings, she

enacts the role of a pivot in the forum. Interestingly, at times she also takes on the role of a provocateur through her use of critical and thought-provoking questions. At these times, she presents as a provocateur through insistent questioning, occasionally being quite confrontational.

This discussion of Refilwe's engagement in the forum illustrates that students do not restrict themselves to one specific role. While Refilwe's insistent questioning and her nuanced grappling with ideas mostly serve a pivotal role as shown in this section, towards the end of Week 10 she takes on the more confrontational style of a provocateur.

## **5.2 Provocateur**

### **Siboniso (2021)**

From the outset, Siboniso engages with the forum in a confident, authoritative voice, reflecting in detail on his intellectual shifts while engaging deeply with key theoretical concepts. He consistently plays the role of a provocateur, both in his individual reading response postings and in his participation in forum discussions. He began the course with a clear set of goals and pursued these goals throughout. In the discussion that follows, we illustrate his provocateur role in Week 10, which focused on multilingualism.

Siboniso's strong, scholarly voice is evident in the high modality of his discourse (Martin & Rose 2003) and in the confidence with which he expresses his ideas and refers to key sources. He enacts his agency assertively, demonstrating substantive moves towards 'full agential morphogenesis' (Case 2015:849) in his rapid and convincing take-up of new ideas. Related to this, he increasingly shows investment (Darvin & Norton 2015) in becoming an emerging scholar.

There are moments in his response that resonate powerfully with Case's (2015:12) argument that the types of social actors we might choose to become are 'subject to continuous internal review'. He consciously juxtaposes his previous beliefs with his new emerging beliefs in relation to the Week 10 readings. He begins by stating that: *This week's readings have **made me aware** of how widespread, misleading, and perverse the Western understanding of language and multiculturalism is.* He briefly problematises a traditional definition of multilingualism (Van der Walt & Dornbrack 2011) that does not foreground the fluidity of language boundaries and then he systematically shows how one course reading challenged a number of his assumptions and

beliefs about languages.

*First, the article by McKinney and colleagues challenged me when I read that ‘deconstructing the notions of stable, bounded languages can be read as a poststructuralist move’ (2015: 104).... After reading this article I was **challenged** and **forced** to acknowledge that I had **succumbed** to the stratified monoglossic orientations to language and never had I perceived language from a heteroglossic perspective.*

A striking element of this response is that Siboniso already positions himself as being part of an academic dialogue in which he embraces the challenges to problematise previous perspectives and engage with heteroglossic conceptualisations of language and multilingualism. He distances himself from his prior position acknowledging that he had *succumbed* to it - a verb striking in its foregrounding of this prior position as intellectually flawed. In engaging with and accepting new ideas, Siboniso displays the morphogenesis of his scholarly identity. Siboniso is excited by these new possibilities for thinking and being, yet simultaneously there is some discomfort as he writes about being *challenged and forced to acknowledge* the limitations of his previous position - not an easy process as his choice of the verb *forced* indicates. At the same time, Siboniso capitalises on the relatively safe and ‘comfortable’ space of the forum which encourages play with ideas and shifts in thinking.

In responding to a course reading on multilingualism and monoglossia, Siboniso highlights the practical implications of monoglossic orientations in multilingual classrooms and unpacks the problems of the term ‘home language’ when for many students the so-called home language used in schools is vastly different from the variety of language(s) they use at home. He concludes that: *In my view, this monoglossic language teaching and school home language selection undermines dialects and renders learners’ spoken languages as null and void.* His strong conclusion is extended in his final sentence: *What lacks from the Western view of language is the acknowledgement of the ever changing, flexible and context specific nature of language which is very much acknowledged and highlighted in Sibanda’s articles and Jamilla’s TED talk.* In these two sentences, he pulls together two of the most important ideas raised in Week 10 and in the course as a whole, taking ownership of these ideas by using his own words and presenting his ideas as statements of indisputable fact.

Siboniso’s post elicited five responses – amongst the highest number to

a single student in any week of the 2021 course. His careful selection of key issues and his positioning/ (re)positioning of himself with dexterity in relation to these issues, prepared the ground for some lively, high-quality discussion. The opening lines of each response show a strong endorsement of and alignment with Siboniso's new position and his process of rethinking his previous position. This is not surprising given the authoritative, confident presentation of his ideas. To some extent, other students' alignment with Siboniso's position illustrates Darwin and Norton's (2017:7) argument that 'learners exercise agency by choosing what they perceive as beneficial to their existing or imagined identities'.

Two students begin by juxtaposing their previously held ideas about multilingualism with the new ideas that have emerged from the readings and Siboniso's response. Elenor begins as follows: *Like you, Siboniso, I was unaware of the diverse nature of multilingualism in South Africa. ... now I realized that there are different versions of isiZulu and of all other African languages.* She then explores the implications of this diversity for the conceptualisation of mother tongue and picks up on Siboniso's interrogation of the dominant *western lens*.

Even more interestingly, Malik, who posted her response ahead of Siboniso's, makes a shift from her individual post, in response to Siboniso's comments on that post, as well as to his reading response. Malik initially conceptualised multilingualism in traditional ways but moved towards a more fluid conceptualisation that recognises its role as a *multi-faceted tool* in response to Siboniso's catalytic input:

*I, too, held the conventional definition of multilingualism. ... Language is a multi-faceted tool that we have only begun to touch on and will never truly come to learn in its entirety.*

Another student, Alice, also begins with agreement: *I agree with your reasoning about differing home languages being taught in schools especially in the cases where students already speak about 3 to 4 other languages.* This introduction is followed by a thoughtful question about the impact of LoLT (Language of Learning and Teaching) on identity: *... However, if a child speaks many languages and is forced to undertake a 'main' language such as a Home Language, who does the child become? What is their identity?* Alice's question picks up on Siboniso's argument about the marginalisation of students' home

languages, dialects, and varieties. Finally, Refilwe ends the discussion by complimenting Siboniso on his use of references:

*Hi again Siboniso. I must say, I love the energy and dedication you show in referencing. You always do it so well. Please share tips because that's my weakness.*

The rich discussion among the six students who interact with the thread highlights the role of the forum in students' learning, and the ways in which they learn from each other. What it shows most strongly is their developing sense of agency and how this emerges through dialogic, interdependent exchanges, explicit reflections on shifting ideas, and a range of 'textual' resources. In this instance, the main textual resource is Siboniso's reading response which models engaged and thoughtful academic practice. Refilwe's final comment encapsulates this. She is not only referring to the correct use of references in terms of citation conventions but also to his engagement with sources and his integration of these ideas into his discussion. For those who have not posted their individual reading response, there is a sense that they are 'warming up' to the task, and possibly even rehearsing the academic performance by engaging in this discussion – reflecting on their shifting ideas, stating their position, elaborating on ideas and raising questions.

Siboniso's role as provocateur also emerges from lecturers' positioning of him in their global feedback to students' responses. While we made a conscious effort to include examples from a range of students, Siboniso's input tends to be foregrounded with reference to both his high level of reflexivity, his confident pulling together of key ideas and the way he elicited responses from his peers. While one of the affordances of the online reading response was that students could read and learn from each other's responses, we also chose to foreground the most productive responses in our global responses each week in order to consolidate their learning from each other.

### **5.3 Wallflowers**

Our analysis of the posts of students whom we term wallflowers revealed that these students may have chosen this role for contrasting reasons. Having already explained that Anathi became a wallflower so that she could meet the minimum requirements of the course, rather than drop out of the Honours degree, in this

section we focus on Frances from the 2020 cohort and Tholakele from 2021.

### **Frances (2020)**

In her first individual forum response, Frances positions herself as an authoritative writer through aligning herself with extensive expert sources and her lexical and syntactic choices. Her opening paragraph concludes with the following:

*Just as Dr X stated in the last few minutes of her lecture, language and literacy are interwoven – language is used as a tool in terms of literacy teaching; this is expanded by both Janks and Wa Thiong'o in terms of literacy, language and more specifically what resonates with me, the aspect of power.*

She chooses verb forms that convey certainty, or high modality (Martin & Rose 2003): *language and literacy are interwoven ... language is used as tool ... this is expanded*. While she asks some critical questions and makes some insightful observations, she also indicates that she values the authority of those she perceives to be experts: *as Dr X stated* and *this is expanded by both Janks and Wa Thiong'o*.

Although Frances responded enthusiastically to two of her peers in Weeks 1 and 2, in Week 3 she posted that she was feeling *almost overwhelmed* by the on-going demands of ERT. As a result, she appears to have made a strategic choice to 'stick with the experts'. Ironically, making this decision may have been influenced by the praise she received from the peers who responded to her initial individual posts: they enjoyed the clarity of her writing and the links she made to her own experiences, and agreed with her responses to key concepts discussed in the readings – for example, *I agree with you on the role power plays in language and how that then affects literacy* (Na'ilah). Her fellow students affirmed her as a competent reader and writer of academic texts.

In the summative assignment, based on the weekly reading responses, Frances scored the highest mark in her cohort. In this assignment her reflections include several examples of her responsiveness to lecturers:

*Feedback provided by Dr [X] opened the doors to a concept I now find incredibly important for access to language and literacy learning – translanguaging.*

*With the feedback gained from Dr [Y], I felt more confident in questioning the identities and the identity construction of those around me ....*

*I was still undergoing what Dr Y referred to as 'the heart and head tussle' ....*

In this assignment, Frances chose the metaphor of the life cycle of a butterfly to illustrate her 'journey' through the course. To mix metaphors, choosing to be a wallflower appears to have been enabling for aspects of Frances's journey from caterpillar to individual butterfly. She left the course with more and different kinds of knowledge than she entered (Case 2015). She had capacity for individual action from the start and in several of her posts wrote about how new understandings from the course were influencing changes to her classroom pedagogy. However, after the first two weeks she was not responsive to either the personal-experiential or academic-critical voices of her peers, making no direct reference to any of these in her assignment, although it is possible that she engaged silently with their ideas. By choosing not to become a social butterfly it could be argued that Frances exemplifies what Darwin and Norton (2016:33) write about language learners:

Because of the fluidity with which learners can move in and out of diverse spaces, they attain greater agency to not just engage but also disengage from others, to invest in and disinvest from shared practices, and to seek or shun a collective endeavour.

Frances chose to disengage from her peers while investing in the ideas of those she considered 'experts'. It is hard to know what to make of her wallflower mode of learning in terms of agency and the development of critical questioning voices. Perhaps the choices she made illustrate the flexible affordances of online learning for individuals, even if such choices may be more positive for the individual than for fellow students who could have benefited from exchanging ideas with a student such as Frances.

## **Tholakele (2021)**

Conventional descriptions of social wallflowers tend to include shyness or lack of confidence as defining characteristics, and this seems to have been the case

for Tholakele. Initially, her choice was to see how others 'performed', by first responding to the posts of selected peers and finally to post her individual response. Her early responses to peers began with affirmation, as in these examples from Week 2: *Unpalatable truth right there, the manner in which language is taught should be looked into as it may affect learners negatively, and Very interesting points and claims highlighted in your response*. Later in one post, she introduces a very elementary critical voice, not towards students or texts, but towards education curricula - potentially a structure which is socially more acceptable and 'safer' (cf. Norton: 1997) to critique.

In her individual Week 2 reading response, Tholakele offers a very good summary of pertinent points from all three readings but there is no indication of how the ideas raised in these articles relate to her own lived experiences, or whether they have impacted her own thinking. She relies heavily on direct quotations, with occasional signals that she agrees with the points raised. At times, there is evidence of ability to relate articles to each other, but her own scholarly voice remains backgrounded:

*Gee states that 'Social groups are deeply affiliated with formal school often incorporated into the socialization of their children, practices that resonate with later school-based secondary discourse'. However Kucer talks about different literacies acquired in different places. The literacy of home and how children benefited or got affected by these literacies when they reach school level. There is a similarity among these two claims. In a sense that Gee mentioned that primary discourses adapts or changes to second discourses. On the other hand, Kucer indicates how home literacy differs or align with school literacy.)*

Her responses start at a point where texts are seen as entirely authoritative, where her engagement with these is almost exclusively restricted to summary (*According to Gee ..., Kucer talks about groups of memberships ...*). However, she does make relevant links between the two readings. In the next week (Week 3), she moves towards making connections between herself and the text at an elementary level, mainly indicating agreement (*Engaging with this week's reading made me realize that there is more to our job [as teachers] than what people actually know and I also liked the manner in which he highlighted ...*). Towards the end of the course, her discourse illustrates how her engagement with course material has moved to a more personal level as she links texts to

lived experiences. For example, in relation to a discussion in Week 10 about the complexity of living and working in multilingual and plurilingual societies, Tholakele displays a more authoritative voice than was ever evident in earlier weeks, indicating: ***I believe** [multilingualism] tends to be a learning barrier to learners as it tempers with their progression to the next grade.* Adding to this, in response to an article by Sibanda (2019), Tholakele challenges the author's stance on promoting some use of dialects in the language classroom:

*I for one believe that the recognition of Lok 'shin (South African dialect for 'township') lingua can also pose a challenge in a sense that, those spoken languages are mostly informal, differs in terms of dialects and they cannot be administered in formal schooling as they are not developed as well.*

Though Tholakele's stance is problematic in the context of the course, and there is still much room for deeper thinking on her part, at the end of the course, we see a definite morphogenesis of agency (cf. Case 2015), displayed in the finding of Tholakele's authorial scholarly voice rather than mainly restricting her interaction with texts to agreement:

*The unspoken truth is that we teach to cover the syllabus and administer assessments, forgetting the most crucial factor which is to instil more than just content to our learners. This is because of the curriculum prescribed to us which has loops here and there. Unfortunately, if we continue to accept this and not initiating change, we are still going to face challenges like these.*

In the first weeks of the course, her lecturers typically asked Tholakele probing questions, urging her to reflect more deeply about comments made, and to interpret course texts based on her own lived experiences and development of scholarly thought. In the final weeks, we acknowledge Tholakele 's growth in doing just this. For example, in a global response to all students in the cohort in Week 11, Dr Z highlights a response by Tholakele: *[Tholakele] hits hard with the observation that 'There is indeed linguistic racism in our country, and we should not pride ourselves as being diverse. Having read this week's articles and watched that video. I see no diversity'.* In this week, Tholakele's reading response triggers more dialogic interaction from students responding to her than

had been observed anywhere else in the course; there are seven extensive responses following her original post. Tholakele has moved from observer to a position closer to that of pivot. This level of engaged dialogic interaction is what we would have liked to see more regularly in the forum discussions. To draw on Frances' metaphor, at the end of the course Tholakele became a social butterfly, finding her voice in the course and amongst her peers.

As is the case with her individual reading responses, Tholakele's comments in relation to other students' responses also show progress towards authorial voice and concomitant agency. In responding to a Week 11 reading response in which Refilwe argues that English competence is still used as a gatekeeper, Tholakele adds:

*I encore your point on English competence. It is also viewed or seen as a measure of intelligence. This was even evident in Makoe and McKinney (2014) where they interviewed the Head of language that mentioned 'Brighter girls.... Good English' by that you can see that students' intelligence is basically judged upon their proficiency in English.*

With increasing confidence Tholakele draws connections between texts, critically integrating her own voice as she does so. Her questioning voice, however, remains largely absent throughout the course.

We see Tholakele's progression from being a wallflower to being a more active and critical course participant with an increasingly foregrounded voice, at three levels: in her interaction with texts, in her interactions with fellow students, and in lecturers' responses to her. By the end of the course Tholakele is still not amongst the strongest students and has some way to go before reaching the level of critical engagement we would like postgraduate students to exhibit. Despite this somewhat limited progress, the discussion forums became a vehicle through which she could navigate her role shift from that of unconfident wallflower to that of emerging scholar. The move from one role to another as the course progresses can also be seen in Frances' journey, which in many respects is the inverse of that of Tholakele. Both students are purposeful in their journey from one role to another and even in the role of wallflower, strategic agency is enacted.

## **6 Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter illustrates how student engagement, and an enhanced sense of

agency (Case 2015) was brought about at least partly through the way in which the course's dialogic pedagogy was structured to facilitate not only the right to speak, but also the requirement to speak. This postgraduate journey gave students opportunities to reflect on past, present and future imagined identities and to begin taking on the identities of emerging scholars. It is our hope that many of them will take these new ways of being and knowing, the 'capacity for action' (Case 2015) and 'the right to speak' (Norton 2013) into their further postgraduate studies and their classrooms.

Theoretically, we take Norton's 'right to speak' further in two ways. Firstly, we argue that 'the right to speak' needs to be coupled with 'the requirement to speak' for optimal student engagement in a postgraduate context such as ours. The course was set up in such a way that it was not possible for students, even for the wallflowers in our course, to bypass posting the weekly reading response as it formed the foundation of the summative reading response assignment. This requirement to speak, we believe, worked towards enabling the 'parity of participation' (Luckett & Shay 2017: 3) required of more equitable postgraduate pedagogy, which Luckett (2017) argues is our ethical responsibility, particularly in the Global South. Secondly, our data analysis highlighted that students, specifically those embodying the role of pivot, can play an important role in encouraging their peers to speak in courses that are underpinned by a carefully structured dialogic pedagogy. How students chose to take up the right to speak differed as they embodied different roles within the online pedagogic space. The roles we identified in our study, namely those of pivots, provocateurs and wallflowers, were likely similar to those typically evident in a face-to-face classroom, but the online space has specific affordances which a face-to-face environment cannot replicate, and therefore allowed us to see nuanced manifestations of these roles. This is because the online space enables not only the strong voices (provocateurs) to speak, but also encourages the quieter voices (wallflowers) to operate agentively within a learning space when they are required to participate beyond just listening. Students have opportunities to re-read and to reflect before offering their own responses, rather than having to respond 'in the moment', thus enhancing the possibility of the 'high levels of self-reflexivity' which according to Luckett and Blackie (2022:8) are a key part of the 'intentional human agency' involved in social change.

In her summative assignment, Tholakele, in response to a course reading on language narratives, states: *Having read these language narratives,*

*it [is] indeed evident that our identities are not fixed. Instead, they keep on changing with an effect of our environments or new surroundings.* Similarly, one could argue that how students' express agency is not fixed and that structural course conditions which are designed to promote positive expressions of student agency can indeed do so. In the examples we have used in this study, the majority of students enacted very clear roles at various points in their learning journey, though these roles shifted for many of them, sometimes within the same discussion, and sometimes as the course progressed. Students made agentive choices about the extent to which they engaged and invested in the course, and this impacted on the roles they played and the development of a range of voices: critical, questioning voices; ambivalent, confused voices; authoritative, assertive voices; personal, professional, and academic voices. Their exposure to a range of roles and voices made the learning environment particularly rich, opening up numerous possibilities and choices for them. In our initial reading of the data we were struck by the specific roles that students took up in the discussion groups. However, after a few closer readings, our preliminary analysis was disrupted by the realisation that in many instances students made agentive micro choices to shift roles in response to personal and structural factors. For example, Anathi shifted from pivot to wallflower, while Tholakele briefly shifted from wallflower to pivot. Refilwe at times shifted from pivot to provocateur. Only Siboniso sustained a single role as provocateur throughout. Hence, we needed to adopt a more nuanced, flexible way of understanding student roles.

The findings of this study have implications for postgraduate curriculum design and pedagogy. Postgraduate courses frequently entail weekly discussions of readings with this approach underpinned by assumptions of homogenous postgraduate students who already have all the academic reading and writing knowledge and skills required for success. However, there is a paucity of research about what a meaningful and inclusive postgraduate pedagogy might entail. A carefully structured dialogic postgraduate pedagogy opens the space to students from diverse backgrounds to find multiple entry points to learning, while the focus on theory and practice enables the students to make connections between new knowledge, their lived experiences, and social change. Moreover, in both online and blended learning postgraduate courses, weekly online reflexive reading response forums can play an important role in facilitating engaged, agentive student learning for a wide range of students. It is useful for course lecturers to be cognisant of the nuanced and

changing roles students choose for themselves within a postgraduate learning space that is inclusive and hospitable and which facilitates ‘the right to speak’ (Norton 2013:170) for all students.

In summary, we argue that while creating an inclusive postgraduate course that promotes student agency continues to be a challenge for many lecturers and students throughout Africa, our research findings suggest that the following can contribute to transformation in postgraduate education:

- provision of safe spaces for ‘risk-taking’ and exploration of new ideas, dialogically;
- facilitation of opportunities for lecturers and students to reflect, both affirmatively and critically, on their own lived experiences within African contexts;
- validation of those lived experiences by drawing on texts from the Global South which are positioned as being in conversation with those from the Global North;
- affirmation of the right to speak, while simultaneously making participation in online discussion forums a requirement for completion of a course.

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## CHAPTER 5

# A Supervisor-led Cohort Model of Supervising Postgraduate Students: A Reflective Account

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### Abstract

Located within national concern about the quality, quantity, and low capacity of doctoral supervision and the National Development Plan's goal to enhance postgraduate studies within South African public Higher Education Institutions, this chapter presents a descriptive and reflective account of a supervisor-led cohort postgraduate supervision model. Using a case study of a supervisor-led supervision process and reflections to generate data, the reflections of the supervisor and the sample of graduated students illuminate how this model can contribute to increasing the supervision capacity of public Higher Education Institutions, promote high-level teaching and learning within postgraduate studies and improve the quality of postgraduate research supervision. The chapter concludes that this is a promising approach to meet demand for postgraduate education while emphasising quality outcomes as anticipated by the National Development Plan.

**Keywords:** Supervisor-led supervision model; Postgraduate research supervision; Doctoral supervision; Research supervision capacity; Quality postgraduate supervision.

## **1 Introduction**

Two crucial findings from the most recent review of doctoral education within South Africa (CHE 2022) frame this chapter. The first is the recognition that both public and private Higher Education Institutions have limited research supervision capacity to serve the growing number of doctoral candidates and, indeed, provide postgraduate supervision in general. The second relates to concern about the quality of doctoral graduates given the rapid increase in enrolment for doctoral studies and the targets set by the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Planning Commission 2012). The current number of PhD graduates per million South Africans stands at 28, a figure considered very low by international standards. The NDP sets a target of 100 PhD graduates per million people by 2030. In 2010, 1 421 PhD candidates graduated from Higher Education Institutions, with the number expected to increase to 5 000 by 2030. While the number of doctoral graduates per year increased twofold over the past decade, the NDP's goal is unlikely to be met. The constraints are not restricted to enrolment numbers, but also pertain to the quality of doctoral degrees and capacity to supervise. Achieving the NDP's target will require that institutional factors be addressed. These include the fact that in 2010, only 34% of academic staff held PhDs. The NDP aims to increase this to 75% by 2030. Against this background, this chapter examines how institutions can improve their supervision capacity while increasing the number of staff with doctorates. Other imperatives for a transforming and developing country include addressing critical socio-economic challenges and the need to address historical imbalances in terms of access to Higher Education and research opportunities.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) has placed significant emphasis on the importance of doctoral degrees, recognising their value in enhancing South Africa's development. Indeed, Lange, Pillay and Chikoko (2011) note that increasing the number of researchers has become a national priority. This chapter presents a cohort model of research supervision that could assist in achieving this objective. Motshoane and McKenna (2014) add that the postgraduate sector is a significant driver of knowledge production and innovation that will enable South Africa to compete in the global knowledge economy. This requires that the quantity and quality of doctoral students be increased. Apart from their contribution to the economy (Maistry 2022) and society (Lange, Pillay & Chikoko 2011), doctoral programmes contribute significantly to upholding academic standards, imparting academic expertise,

enhancing student development, and venturing into unexplored spaces through a collaborative research agenda (Bruce & Stoodley 2009).

Human and financial investment will be required to grow South Africa's postgraduate Higher Education sector. While this may be possible, as noted in the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) recent review of doctoral education across public and private Higher Education Institutions (CHE 2022), the greater challenge is the quality of postgraduate supervision. As such, supervision of postgraduate students in the country is a critical area of research. This chapter contributes to ongoing discussion on enhancing supervision capacity to accommodate the growing number of postgraduate students in Higher Education within South Africa and in other contexts. It does so by presenting a reflective account of a supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate supervision with the aim of illuminating how such a model can offer collaborative supervision processes with quality outcomes.

## **2 Postgraduate Supervision Processes**

Face-to-face, one-on-one supervision has historically been the dominant form of supervision. This was based on the traditional master-apprentice model of knowledge transmission (Harrison & Grant 2015). Furthermore, in the late 1990s, few South African academics held Masters and Doctoral degrees and as such, supervision capacity was extremely low. At the same time, few students sought to pursue postgraduate studies. With the increase in the number of academics having completed Masters and Doctoral degrees and a larger pool of students interested in postgraduate studies, the traditional model of master-apprentice supervision practice has evolved into collaborative supervision models. Opportunities and challenges within traditional and emerging models have come to light, providing opportunities for innovation. For example, one-on-one supervision provides opportunities for real-time feedback, immediate problem-solving, and relationship-building between the supervisor and supervisee (Lovitts 2008). However, one of its key limitations is the potential for power dynamics between the student and the supervisor (Kiley & Wisker 2009). Boud and Lee (2005) argue that effective supervision requires a balance to be struck between support and autonomy; students need the space and agency to develop their own ideas and approaches to learning, an opportunity that is lacking in the one-on-one supervision process.

Collaborative approaches to supervision emerged in response to these concerns. Samuel and Vithal (2011) reflected on a cohort model of supervision of doctoral students, which they conceptualised within a historically disadvantaged South African university with a high number of postgraduate enrolments and low supervisor capacity. They argue that alternative models of doctoral research teaching and learning pedagogy are possible and that the cohort model can also address the under-productivity of doctoral graduands due to limited supervision capacity, as noted in the NDP 2030 (National Planning Commission 2012). Collaborative team-based supervision models such as the cohort system have the potential to reduce power dynamics between student and supervisor by offering a diverse range of perspectives and expertise, providing a supportive and collaborative environment that encourages peer learning and feedback, and enriching the student's research journey (Bovill *et al.* 2015). This model has since expanded from a year-cohort grouping to other forms of groupings, including discipline-based, supervisor-based, and inter-institutional-based cohorts.

While innovations and new framings for research supervision of postgraduate students are unfolding, deeper insight is required into teaching and learning processes (pedagogies), the quality of engagements and quality research outcomes within supervision processes. Macro factors such as neo-liberalism, transformation, and decolonisation discourses that impact postgraduate studies also need to be considered.

### **3 Neoliberalism and its Influence on Postgraduate Research Supervision**

Higher Education Institutions have been under increasing pressure to submit to a neoliberal agenda focused on competitive engagement in the information economy (Adkins 2007). One of the challenges universities face is students enrolling for postgraduate degrees and not completing within the specified time (CHE 2016). The demand of time to completion potentially creates tension and conflict between the supervisor and the postgraduate student and is an unnecessary drain on university resources, either through the loss of state subsidies or inefficient use of human resources (supervisors working with students beyond the minimum period of study). Low throughput rates also negatively impact universities' ranking (Masek & Alias 2020), which itself is part of the overall neoliberal architecture of universities, reflecting excellence

and efficiency. Masek and Alias (2020) assert that effective doctoral programmes and effective thesis supervision are imperative to mitigate dropout from doctoral programmes. The cohort model of supervision, with its strong focus on a collaborative and community-of-learning approach, could play a significant role in developing and enhancing students' research capabilities and in creating an enabling research space to prevent dropout, hence improving doctoral student throughput. Time to completion, reduced dropout, and increased throughput (efficiency) are all part of universities' neoliberal agenda.

The quality of students admitted to postgraduate programmes is also linked to issues of neoliberalism. Institutions that are highly ranked or have substantial infrastructure, including resources, tend to attract a larger pool of applicants from which selection can be made based on merit. Hence, meritocracy contributes to improved throughput rates (Shawa 2015), with resultant benefits for institutions. The marketisation of institutions through university rankings, resources, competition and outputs furthers the neoliberal agenda within Higher Education Institutions.

Cohort supervision does not exclude the numerous hours that supervisors spend supervising individual postgraduate students that require personal engagement. This resonates with Apple's (1986) workload intensification thesis, whereby, as part of the neoliberal agenda, educators are expected to perform an increasing number of tasks for which they have insufficient time and resources. Apple (1986) adds that workload intensification erodes the development of collegial relationships and affects educators' private lives; the same is true of supervisors. It is possible that personal and moral reflection, which are part of a supervisor's repertoire, could be negatively impacted due to workload intensification. The cohort supervision process, therefore, has workload implications for individual supervisors and contributes to workload intensification.

#### **4 Transformation's Implications for Postgraduate Supervision**

The White Paper 3 on Higher Education Transformation (Department of Education 1997) in South Africa spells out the plans for transformation within the Higher Education system. A clear goal is a change in demographics from a predominantly White student population to one that is representative of the national racial profile. Read together with the NDP and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2013), it implies that postgraduate

students, emerging researchers and academics require more support and development. Thus, building research supervision capacity within Higher Education Institutions calls for a national support system. This would involve the CHE, the NRF, the Department of Higher Education and Training and other funding bodies supporting the emerging generation of qualified and competent academic staff to meet South Africa's growing transformation agenda. Given the current status of academic mentors within Higher Education Institutions, building the next generation of competent academic staff within an accelerated process (see NDP targets) requires innovative mentoring processes. Collaborative methods, including the cohort supervision process could contribute to this transformation imperative. Graduates of such a cohort system would be exposed to supervision processes and develop as supervisors who then contribute to the growing pool of potential supervisors.

## **5 Decolonisation Discourses in Relation to Postgraduate Research Supervision**

Initiated by the #FeesMustFall student protest action of 2015-2016 across South African Higher Education, the second wave of decolonisation (le Grange *et al.* 2020) emerged as a strong discourse, targeting Higher Education curriculum and calling for a more relevant curriculum experience. What decolonised education is and how it is to be implemented within Higher Education Institutions remains a subject of intense debate and scholarship abounds in this area of intellectual engagement. Institutions have initiated interventions to decolonise the curriculum and programmes are being reviewed through a decolonial lens. At postgraduate level, a national association, the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association (HELTASA), has initiated a national doctoral programme drawing students, supervisors and advisory teams from across institutions into a single doctoral programme, which it claims is a decolonised one (see the chapter on **Exploring Decolonised Doctoral Supervision Pathways**). While the notion of quality is complex, relative, and contextually bound (Sayed & Ahmed 2011) what constitutes a quality doctoral programme finds expression in various programmatic attempts within institutions within the decolonisation discourse. This chapter presents an example of a programmatic attempt that uses collaborative supervision processes to respond to contextual challenges (a decolonisation discourse), which could shed light on notions of quality research supervision.

## **6 Pedagogies of Supervision within Collaborative Supervision Models**

McCallin and Nayar (2012) regard the pedagogy within doctoral supervision as a specialist form of high-level teaching. While this descriptor signals a sophisticated form, it is important to understand what constitutes high-level teaching and learning. Manathunga (2006) suggests that the private pedagogical space within a one-on-one supervision process constitutes high-level teaching. Hence, specialist forms of teaching and learning within supervision processes could vary from interactive social learning to spatial learning moments. Lee (2008) identifies various aspects of supervision, from functional aspects to parenting and developing relationships, suggesting that supervision pedagogies are far more complex than the generic description of a specialist form of high-level teaching and learning. This chapter contributes to the literature by suggesting some characteristics of this high-level teaching and learning within post-graduate research supervision.

Trusting relationships among doctoral students as well as between them and their supervisors and co-supervisors are a core aspect of the pedagogy of supervision within a cohort group. Malone (2017) and Chapman *et al.* (2016) argue that professional collaboration establishes solid, trusting relationships, which are key to the success of the cohort model of supervision. This model plays a very significant role in enabling and sustaining relational trust (trust that the doctoral student puts in other groups or an individual); self-trust (the doctoral student's confidence in his/her capabilities and judgement); and structural trust (trust in the university) (Harris *et al.* 2013). Care and trust are essential components that underpin the relationship's success and sustainability. Pastoral care is an integral part of the cohort supervision process that enables a solid community of relationships within the cohort. Despite the neoliberal constraints of throughput and time-to-completion, research supervisors find ways to overcome these challenges with the use of attentive care as part of a humanising pedagogy (Maistry 2022). When a supervisor displays an authentic, sincere attitude, students feel a sense of care and belonging, which contributes significantly to their self-belief and self-worth and also strengthens the relationship of trust between the student and supervisor (Maistry 2022). Many students that are part of a doctoral programme may not possess the agency required to make independent decisions; a trusting, empowering environment within a cohort can have significant outcomes for the doctoral student. Lee's (2008) model of supervision, which includes five elements - functional aspects,

partnership, teaching and learning, parenting and developing a relationship - alludes to the power of critical thinking and emancipation as factors that inspire students to find their own voice and enable personal meaning-making, thinking and development, which are core to augmenting doctoral students' agency.

## **7 Research Design**

This chapter contributes to the scholarship of postgraduate research supervision. It adds to discourses on building supervision capacity for increased enrolment of postgraduate students across Higher Education Institutions within South Africa and beyond, while maintaining quality research supervision and outcomes in line with the NDP's goals. It presents a reflective account of a supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate supervision to illustrate its potential to offer collaborative supervision processes with quality outcomes. A case study design was adopted, with the case study constituting a supervisor-led cohort offered by a supervisor (one of the authors of this chapter) at a public Higher Education Institution in KwaZulu-Natal. Data was generated by the supervisor who led this cohort through reflection on setting up the cohort, the activities included within the supervision processes, the process of learning and the outcomes. The reflective account is supported by vignettes of reflective accounts by a purposive sample of five graduates of the cohort. This data was generated through a reflective writing process guided by three broad areas of engagement: their experiences of coming into the cohort, their learning journey and their interactions within a collaborative learning space within the cohort and beyond. Reflections as a means of generating data in participatory and self-study research are well established in the literature (Burke 1998; Koster & van den Berg 2014) to illuminate learning, historical accounts and group dynamics related to the focus of research. Given its ability to enhance self-understanding and track developments, this method was deemed most appropriate to elaborate on this supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate research supervision. Five graduated students who joined and exited the cohort at different times were purposefully selected to reflect on their experiences of this form of research supervision. These experiences are presented as vignettes to holistically capture the insightful moments of their reflection. The description of the supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate research supervision was achieved through a self-reflection process that conceptualised the cohort group through what happened across the group gatherings and an analysis of the key aspects of a supervisor-

led postgraduate research supervision cohort.

## **8 Reflections on the Supervisor-led Cohort Model of Postgraduate Supervision**

Having located supervision of postgraduate research studies within the broader context of research development in terms of capacity development to cater for the increasing enrolment of postgraduate students within Higher Education as well as the need to address the quality of postgraduate research, this section presents the reflections on the supervisor-led supervision model at a public Higher Education Institution in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The self-reflection by the *supervisor* is presented in italics (shaded grey), while the reflections by the *graduates* of this supervision process are presented as vignettes in boxes. Both sets are presented in the first person so that assertions are located in the respective reflections rather than in an interpretation of the supervisor and graduates' experiences of the cohort system of supervision.

*8.1. Soon after obtaining my reports on the examination of my Doctor of Education degree, I began leading cohorts of doctoral students within a cohort supervision model that emerged when I commenced with my doctoral studies in the late 1990s. Doctoral students were taken on a study-year programme (year 1; year 2 and year 3 progression through the cohort model of supervision) within this cohort supervision model. All first-year students focused on their research proposal development; all second-year students focused on their field work; and all third-year students focused on their data analysis and report writing. Since then, I have led several cohorts of doctoral students. Simultaneously, my supervision of master's and doctoral students increased far beyond the norms of a productive academic, and my uptake of supervision had to be curbed and occasionally reduced, resulting in asking my prospective students to wait until I had supervision capacity that I could manage with. This stalling resulted in a growing group of potential doctoral students waiting to be supervised by me. In 2014, I made the decision to start a supervisor-led cohort supervision process and I invited my potential students to join this cohort. Immediately, 12 new PhD students enrolled in this cohort supervision programme and this marked the commencement of the supervisor-led cohort supervision process. Initially, only doctoral students formed the cohort group, but soon thereafter I brought in my masters' students. Progressively, the group grew in size, with masters' gra-*

*duates re-joining the cohort for their doctoral studies, new entries into masters and doctoral studies and more recently, some doctoral graduates of the programme becoming part of the supervision team. The graduate output from my supervision process increased. Before 2015, my graduate output was on average three per annum. Since 2015, my graduate output has increased, with some years exceeding six graduates per year. In 2019 and 2021, there were eight graduates respectively, six of them at the doctoral level, and in each of these years they were produced under my supervision (Source: university records).*

*So what was this supervisor-led cohort supervision process? Five key aspects defined the supervisor-led cohort supervision process. The first was finding a suitable place to meet. We explored the use of one of the venues on the campus where I was located, but that was deemed to be not comfortable. I then booked an executive seminar room at a campus near my home and this became the home of the cohort. The room was booked every Saturday and made available to students on Sundays when requested. Students were able to access this venue every Saturday and could work in this space alone, in smaller groups, or in the larger group outside of the formal cohort sessions that I led. Accessibility, a sense of belonging, being comfortable and feeling safe enabled the students to work on their studies at a pace they felt manageable.*

The nature of the cohort required care, support, commitment, sharing and extra hours of joint working together beyond supervision. Students in the cohort voluntarily took on the responsibility of fostering group cohesion, logistical arrangements for the venue and refreshments. The choice and suitability of the study venue served as a huge benefit to the group for travelling purposes and as a conducive learning environment. The tea station became an assembly point for dialogue and informal discussions. This engendered trust, cohesion, and support for the members of the group. The supervisor played a significant role in establishing and maintaining healthy group relations and dynamics. The commitment, dedication and academic prowess of the supervisor carried every student to completion of the process and the learning journey. (Graduate A)

The cohort sessions provided an environment that was conducive to learning, and development of myself as a person. I remember the sessions started in dusty classrooms at Edgewood campus to one of the best boardrooms at Westville campus. When the cohort session started around March 2014, I took a conscious decision that I will attend all of them. My plan was to have more attendance

than absenteeism. I am positive that I did just that. At some stage, I would be alone in the boardroom from 9h00 to 15h00 every Saturday. These sessions provided unintended spaces for socialisation. I would meet my fellow members, share thoughts about life, work, politics, sports, families, and many other life aspects. We would constructively engage about anything. I remember that I had one space to sit at. I still have memories of where I always sat. Every one of us had a spot that ended up creating a safe working space. (Graduate B)

The tea station initiated by RXXX was another opportunity and platform for him to display his love and care for us. It was a beautiful time to engage informally with him about other aspects that bothered us in life as well as collaboratively engage with fellow students about issues relating to the PhD and personal issues as well. (Graduate E)

*8.2. The second key aspect was a sustained focus on theory and theoretical frameworks. Having attended some very inspiring sessions on theory and theoretical framings at the American Education Research Association's annual conferences, I made a conscious decision to foreground theory within the cohort sessions. The initial cohort of students was introduced to two theories: Bourdieu's (1986) key constructs of capital, habitus and field and Bronfenbrenner's spheres of influence. The students were encouraged to read about these theories and to explore the possibilities of framing their research study within either or both of these theories. They were also given the option of not using these theories as their theoretical framing for their particular study. Collectively and individually, the students engaged with theory, understood the value of theory within their study design, and became intimate with the key constructs of their theoretical frameworks to the point where they could visualise these key constructs within their daily lives. The fluency in the knowledge of and the use of these theoretical key constructs were the goals.*

The joint supervision sessions were constructive and robust. The session created much contestation, avenues for critical thinking, and incisive questioning. There were opportunities for insights into paradigms, philosophical underpinnings, the theorising of concepts and constructs, and the generation of new ideas. The way forward through this academic quagmire was for me to record the sessions, listen and re-listen, and to transcribe. Thereafter, further supervision was necessary and the transcriptions were brought back for re-supervision and the feed-

back loop became the basis for clarity, reconstruction, and sifting of content. Reflecting on the feedback and contestations enhanced the clarity of thinking, sifting of essential concepts, ideas, and constructs, and further conceptualisation. At the end, the final two chapters came to fruition with the inputs, supervision and feedback from the main supervisor. (Graduate A)

It forced me to have a plan. It forced me set weekly targets as the supervisor would ask us to present on key aspects of our thesis. I believe learning happened most when ‘the other was presenting’. The quality of feedback from the supervisor on the structure of what was being presented immediately shaped my thoughts. If five students presented on a day, you would have literally five versions of, for example, theoretical frameworks. (Graduate B)

*8.3. The third key aspect of this supervision process was the on-going seminars on research design issues. Appropriate input sessions on research design were an ongoing supervisor-led activity. Each seminar on research design was purposefully developed to respond to where the students were or in preparation for where they might be in the near future. Academic literacy and academic writing also formed part of the input sessions. The research design inputs ranged from proposal development through literature review, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research methodology, working with data, data analysis, and writing for presentations and publications. The input sessions were individual and collaborative, some led by students of the cohort. Sessions were repeated as and when needed by the students.*

Joining RXXX’s PhD cohort group, that was made up of students ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> years to students who were ‘ready to submit stage’, I quickly became a part of a community of scholars who became my support structure. And we engaged with each other constantly as despite the various PhD topics, and various stages of research, we were able to advise and assist each other under the mentorship and guidance of RXXX, who displayed patience as though we were toddlers, guiding and explaining in a meaningful manner. Listening to RXXX speak, engage and teach reminded me what real teaching is all about because even though I am an experienced teacher, RXX’s patience was a breath of fresh air. Taking his time in explaining concepts, pacing the flow of knowledge, he presented how one should go about conducting and presenting research in a manner that one could easily grasp. Each aspect of the thesis was discussed from

the proposal to the conclusion. I found myself sitting with a group of students, encountering a new world of big words in the research field (as my previous degrees were not in the education field) and having to come to grips with concepts that were extremely intimidating. RXXX was also very generous with his time as over and above the time spent in the cohort sessions, students were allocated personal time at his home to further discuss aspects of the PhD. (Graduate C)

*8.4. The fourth key aspect was the pedagogy within the postgraduate cohort supervision process. An ecology emerged in the interplay between cohort engagements, smaller group engagements, individual one-on-one engagements, externally invited speakers, and out-of-cohort supervision moments. Accessibility for me as a supervisor was a key factor in our interactions. I view being an academic as a way of life, and as such, I make myself available to my students on demand. This meant that they could call me at any reasonable time to have a conversation on an issue that they were working on independently at that time. My perspective was that when a student is deeply engaged with an aspect of their study, it would be more productive for them to engage with me instantly rather than lose the momentum of their thought processes should they have to wait for a consultation request sometime later. Interest in the students 'academic growth through accessibility, care, trust and robust critical engagement were central to my supervision pedagogy.*

We encountered some bumpy roller-coaster rides. It also felt like treading on a tight rope with rubbery legs. Prof. RXXX addressed us individually in an adjoining physical space. He carefully guided each student, swinging us towards a particular understanding and a specific situated study context. The intense but special academic encounters generated extreme solidarity among students. We encouraged each other and placed particular emphasis on streamlining the focus. Students also engaged collaboratively with each other. The tea/lunch interludes exuded a strong sense of community. Our informal discourses succeeded from what we absorbed beforehand. We engaged in narratives that engendered upon events at school, union developments, household chores, and much more. We also unpacked some mind-boggling issues pertinent to society and civilians over tea/lunch. The doctoral cohort model determinedly steered by Prof. RXXXX attained a high degree of success. He executed his duties with extreme humanness, rectitude, integrity, intellectual

humility and astuteness, compounded with rigour and vigour. Certainly, an effervescent cohort inclusive of supervisor and students in humanity, social development, and intellectualism. (Graduate D)

*8.5. The fifth key aspect of the cohort system of postgraduate supervision was the shift from supervisor dependency to self-dependence, collective dependence and collaborative dependence. The movement of students in and out of the cohort allowed for a constant mix of students who were early entrants into a masters or doctoral programme with those who were longer in the programme and those who were nearing exiting the programme. This mix engendered a sense of self-dependence and collaborative dependence. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) key constructs of field, habitus and capital, the students were able to understand the social field of the cohort programme, strengthened by owing the seminar room as their doctoral space. They began to understand their shifting positions within the social field of the cohort, at times being in recessive positions and at other times taking leading positions. The students embodied themselves as postgraduate research students, understanding who they are and how to navigate the cohort space. Each of the students, because of the uniqueness of their study project, gained confidence in their areas of research focus, was able to contribute to discourses and debates beyond their study domain, and as such, positioned themselves as critical friends within the cohort sessions. Their knowledge and process skills capital grew as they progressed within the cohort and were able to position themselves at various levels of dominance and influence, both personally and collegially.*

My experience of being a doctoral student started in 2014, with mixed feelings of excitement and trepidation. Trepidation was an intense feeling as I was experiencing anxiety about thinking of a feasible topic, the defence of the proposal and whether I had the capability to complete the thesis in the required time. But just like my masters' thesis, RXXX created such an enabling environment from day one for the entire cohort group. He displayed his great care and other humane skills to create an egalitarian environment - not positioning himself as 'Mr-know-it-all'. His humble and caring disposition made me believe in myself that I could complete this thesis with confidence. One of RXXX's strengths was encouraging the cohort group to freely articulate their views, even if some views were bizarre. This provided an enabling environment for critical discussion, critical and reflexive thinking. It also

allowed us to exercise our metacognitive skills and disruptive thinking. The space for disruptive thinking allowed the cohort to freely contest and express dissent about any issue that was up for discussion within the cohort. Some of us, including myself, used to digress from the issues at hand but RXXX was so skilful in adjudicating our thoughts (with great care not to upset us). His relationship with every student was customised, caring and trusting which deepened the professional bonds between supervisor and student. His penchant for high-level thinking, which made us as students raise our standards in our thinking and the presentations during the cohort sessions deepened our thirst for innovative out-of-the-box thinking. He pushed us to understand that a PhD involves nuanced and critical thinking. Another amazing aspect of RXXX's supervision was the efficient feedback we got about work that we sent to him. It was succinct, clear and unambiguous. This helped greatly to transition to the various stages of the PhD in a coherent manner. (Graduate E)

*There were, however, some challenges within the cohort. There was a core group of students that made every attempt to attend the planned sessions and independent collegial sessions, but some just came in to listen, engaged little and only responded when asked specifically for comments. Perhaps these students had their own reasons; perhaps it was just cultural (meaning a traditional way of attending and receiving a lecture) or just non-committal. Not all of the students (e.g. two of the original cohort of 12 students) who attended the cohort completed their studies. Some took breaks due to various personal issues, like illness and work commitments. Some could not cope with the demands of a Masters or PhD study despite the generous support that they received within and outside of the cohort. More insights are needed on how to encourage these students to persevere despite personal, professional and academic challenges.*

The cohort model did have its downsides as some would just pitch up for the session but were not prepared for work they had to do. This was disconcerting and did create discomfort in some of us. There was a tacit agreement that we all had to prepare for the cohort sessions but some didn't prepare or were absent from the sessions. But in the main, the cohort mode of supervision was a most enabling platform for me in completing my PHD in four years in terms of transitioning through many different phases of the PhD as well as my own personal and intellectual development. (Graduate E)

## **9 Discussion**

This supervisor-led supervision process has the potential to contribute to the national project envisaged in the NDP of increasing the number of postgraduate students in South Africa. More postgraduate students were supervised simultaneously through this model of supervision than within the workload framework that guides the supervision of postgraduate students in universities. The lack of adequate supervision capacity within Higher Education Institutions identified in various reports (e.g., the CHE, Department of Basic Education, and NDP) calls for innovative ways to grow the supervision capacity that this model shows potential to do. There are, however, constraining factors. The first is the experience of the supervisor leading such cohort supervision processes. Novice supervisors may not be able to manage their own development alongside that of a heterogeneous group of students. The second is the supervisor's competence in terms of his/her scholarship, supervision, and social and human capabilities. In this respect, one can explore the notion of professional capital expounded by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), professional capital includes human, social, and decisional capital. Noting the high-level pedagogy required for doctoral supervision, these three forms of capital complement one another in developing a doctoral graduate. Capital relates to the trust and confidence one builds through working with people within a social environment and making appropriate decisions. The supervisor's competence is not only located in the content of supervision, but also concerns how one harnesses students' inclusion within the social setting of a cohort; understanding the individual and how this understanding can be used to support the doctoral student in the journey to completion of his/her studies amidst his/her personal life and how the decisions taken by the supervisor build the student's confidence to make on-going decisions.

Framing supervision within collaborative learning models through the conception of professional capital attends to the personal, social, and academic aspects of postgraduate research supervision, especially as the outcome of such an opportunity is the reinforcement of independent studies characteristic of graduate attributes at this level of study. Malone (2017) notes that professional collaboration (within a cohort platform) builds professional capital that enhances an individual's desire for risk-taking and innovative thinking – core aspects of research in a doctoral programme to produce new knowledge or ideas.

This supervisor-led cohort system also responds to concerns about the quality of doctoral graduates given the rapid increase in registration for doctoral

studies. Drawing on McCallina and Nayar's (2012) notion of pedagogy within doctoral supervision as a specialist form of high-level teaching and learning, the teaching and learning moments within this system are vast and diverse. While the pedagogy of care across teaching and learning processes has been widely written about, it is evident within this model of postgraduate research supervision. Both the supervisor's and the postgraduate students' reflective accounts point to care and trust as fundamental to teaching and learning processes. Other pedagogical moments are also evident within the supervisor-led cohort model. These include the pedagogy of contestation (*the sessions provided much contestations*), disruptions, and critique as a way of teaching and learning; the pedagogy of place (*I remembered the cohort started in a dusty classroom at the Edgewood campus to one of the best boardrooms in the Westville campus*); and the pedagogy of complexity (*it also allowed us to use our metacognitive skills and disruptive thinking*). Teaching and learning moments located within contestations between and among students were evident. The boardroom and the tea station became safe spaces for personal, collective, and cohort engagements that led to personal learning moments that moved the students into deeper thoughts and expressions. The complexity associated with both the substance of what is to be learned as well as the process of how the learning should occur was evident in these reflective accounts.

Postgraduate research supervision through a supervisor-led cohort system is firmly located within Gough's (2008) notion of becoming pedagogical within a place—process tension. Drawing on this notion gives expression and characterisation to what high-level teaching and learning are within an ecology. The supervisor's and students' accounts suggest that the ecology that constitutes such a high-level pedagogy is, amongst other things, the self, the supervisor, the research, the institution, peers and colleagues, family and friends, the rationale for conducting a postgraduate study, the purpose of the research, and the examiners. In this ecology, people and other elements interrelate in a productive and transformative process. McCallin and Nayar (2012) identify various factors that may influence supervision outcomes, including the supervisor's expertise and communication skills, the student's level of experience and motivation and the organisational context in which supervision takes place.

## **10 Conclusion**

The supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate supervision offers a promising solution to the increasing demand for postgraduate education outlined in the

NDP. It allows for simultaneous supervision of a larger number of postgraduate students than traditional workload frameworks, helping to alleviate the current lack of adequate supervision capacity in South African Higher Education Institutions.

While the model shows potential, there are important factors to consider. Supervisors' experience in leading cohort supervision processes and their competence in terms of scholarship, supervision skills, and social and human capabilities are critical considerations. Exploring the concept of professional capital, which encompasses human, social, and decisional capital, further highlights the benefits of the cohort model. It enhances postgraduate students' social capital through collaborative learning, human capital through guidance and mentorship, and decisional capital through prudent decision-making within the cohort.

By framing supervision within collaborative learning models and the concept of professional capital, the cohort model addresses the personal, social, and academic aspects of postgraduate research supervision. It reinforces independent study skills and fosters a desire for risk-taking and innovative thinking, which are essential to produce new knowledge in doctoral programmes. Moreover, the students' reflective experiences show that the cohort model enhances quality by incorporating various pedagogical moments such as care, trust, contestation, disruptions, critique, place, and complexity. These elements create safe spaces for personal and collective engagement, deepening learning experiences. The supervisor-led cohort system aligns with the notion of becoming pedagogical within an ecological framework, where human and other elements interact in a transformative process. Factors such as the supervisor's expertise and communication skills, the student's experience and motivation, and the organisational context also influence supervision outcomes.

In summary, the supervisor-led cohort model of postgraduate supervision offers a promising approach to meet demand for postgraduate education while emphasising quality outcomes as anticipated by the NDP. By embracing this type of model, institutions can enhance their supervision capacity, promote collaborative learning, and nurture the professional development of both supervisors and postgraduate students.

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## CHAPTER 6

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

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### Abstract

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

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

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

## 1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

## **2 Literature Review**

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

### **2.1 Personal Attributes**

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

### **2.2 Academic**

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

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

### ***2.3 Emotional Experiences***

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

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

## **3 Conceptual Framework: Habits of Mind (HOM)**

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

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

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

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

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Persisting</li><li>2. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision</li><li>3. Managing impulsivity</li><li>4. Gathering data through all senses</li><li>5. Listening with understanding and empathy</li><li>6. Creating, imagining, innovating</li><li>7. Thinking flexibly</li><li>8. Responding with wonderment and awe</li><li>9. Thinking about thinking (metacognition)</li><li>10. Taking responsible risks</li><li>11. Striving for accuracy</li><li>12. Finding humour</li><li>13. Questioning and posing problems</li><li>14. Thinking interdependently</li><li>15. Applying past knowledge to new situations</li><li>16. Remaining open to continuous learning</li></ol> |
|--|

#### **4 Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy**

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

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

## **5 Methodology**

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

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

### **5.1 *Methods of Data Generation and Analysis***

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

### **5.2 *Ethics and Limitations***

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

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

## **6 Autoethnography: Data Generation, Findings and Discussion**

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

### ***6.1 Aligning my Personal Attributes and HOM***

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

#### ***6.1.1 From an Early Age***

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

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

### *6.1.2 Reflections on My Own Supervisors' Attributes*

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

### *6.1.3 Experiences as a Novice Academic and Supervisor*

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

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

#### ***6.1.4 Reflections – My Positionality within Critical Pedagogy***

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

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

#### ***6.2 The Supervisor – Supervisee Relationship***

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

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

### *6.2.1 Academic Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 6.2.2 Social Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership

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

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

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

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

### *6.2.3 Emotional Perspectives on the Supervision Partnership*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 7 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER 7

# Transitioning Doctoral Students to University Teachers: A Case of an Online Teaching Development Programme

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### Abstract

Doctoral programmes in many research-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) focus on equipping students with research capabilities with little emphasis on teaching skills. This study examines doctoral students' experiences of a four-day voluntary teaching development programme that inducted them into the craft of university teaching. The aim was to ascertain how the experience contributed to building their teaching capabilities and informing their career choices in academia. Data from 24 student evaluation forms administered to all 80 participants in the 2021 cohort and subsequent student reflections on the programme were reviewed to understand the extent to which the opportunity empowered them to teach and informed their subsequent career decisions. The findings indicated that participants felt capacitated for university teaching by attending the programme, enabling a smooth transition to academia and contributing to a successful doctoral education. They provide valuable insights for transforming doctoral education and improving university teaching while contributing to the scholarship of teaching in doctoral programmes.

**Keywords:** Doctoral education, Teaching Development Programme, Transition to teaching, Online teaching, Doctoral students

## **1 Introduction**

The South African Higher Education sector is undergoing many changes, such as massification, diversification, transformation, digitalisation, and other innovations. The demand for highly-skilled, innovative academics to work in this transforming milieu has thus grown exponentially. However, Higher Education scholars have noted that a significant problem associated with university academics is the lack of pedagogical training that can assist them in transitioning from being disciplinary content experts to teaching such content knowledge to their students (Shawa 2020).

In many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), doctoral qualifications are a prerequisite for career progression and are viewed as the pinnacle of educational attainment (Bullin 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017; Jones 2013). Like many other educational programmes, Higher Education is a period of socialisation in preparation for a prospective career, including academia (Austin *et al.* 2009). As an academic, one is expected to engage in teaching, research, and service (community or leadership) with administrative duties across all categories (Khan & Siriwardhane 2021; Chan *et al.* 2019; Bexley 2013; Martin 1984). However, for decades, the focus of doctoral studies in many research institutions has been on research and disciplinary content expertise to the detriment of teaching (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Bonner *et al.* 2020; Barney 2019; Marx *et al.* 2016; Boman 2013). As such, there have been calls for HEIs to incorporate teaching into doctoral education (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Chan *et al.* 2019; Connolly *et al.* 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017; Lewicki & Bailey 2016).

In response to this call, HEIs such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) are beginning to include teaching development components in their doctoral programme offerings (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Bonner *et al.* 2020; Chan *et al.* 2019; Connolly *et al.* 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017; Lewicki & Bailey 2016; Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). These teaching programmes, which are usually organised by academic units, graduate schools, or teaching and learning units, range in format and duration from discussions to once-off workshops and more rigorous semester-long and certificate courses (Connolly *et al.* 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017; Marx *et al.* 2016). In a bid to enrich the doctoral programme at UKZN in line with its curriculum transformation drive, the University Capacity Development Plan (UCDP) hosted by the University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO) developed a four-day Teaching Development Programme (TDP) workshop to acquaint doctoral candidates with teaching and research supervisory skills while enabling them to make informed

choices about a career in Higher Education (Reddy 2018). However, two years into the commencement of the workshops, the extent to which the objectives of the programme are being achieved remain uncertain.

This chapter, therefore, aims to ascertain the extent to which doctoral candidates' experience of the TDP at UKZN contributed to building their teaching skills and informing their career choices by answering the following questions: How has doctoral candidates' experience of the UKZN TDP empowered them with teaching and supervisory skills? How have doctoral candidates' experience of TDP at UKZN enabled them to make informed choices about pursuing an academic/teaching career in Higher Education? Premised on Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Lent *et al.*'s (1994; 2000) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), the research used evaluation reports and subsequent reflective qualitative questionnaires to answer these research questions. Exploring doctoral candidates' perceptions of their teaching and supervisory skills post-attendance of the TDP can provide useful insight into the programme's effectiveness while informing policy and curricula reforms. The remainder of this chapter proceeds with a review of relevant literature, followed by an exposition of the SCCT and transition theories before the research methodology is described. Thereafter, a detailed presentation of the research findings and discussion ensues, followed by the conclusion.

## **2 Literature Review**

Doctoral programmes have evolved over the years. The word doctorate originated 'from the Latin verb "docere" which means "to teach"' (Bullin 2018: 13). It is usually bestowed on a 'successful candidate who has something to teach on the premise that teaching [is] ... both an honour and a rare opportunity' (Winter *et al.* 2000: 36). These authors explain that what is taught could be new and worthy of passing on to a particular audience in a specific context. Over time, doctoral programmes became associated with the production of new knowledge in a specific field or context. They typically focus on producing independent scholars capable of advancing the discipline by creating new ideas and knowledge foundations upon which subsequent learning can be established, nurtured, and sustained (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Bullin 2018; Maynard 2017; Jones 2013). Thus, the doctoral programme in many HEIs is basically a research degree (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Bullin 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017). Many are therefore structured to equip students with 'content expertise and

research practices’ (Bonner *et al.* 2020: 436) with little regard for teaching (Lumpkin & Achen 2021) as originally intended.

Doctoral studies play a crucial role in shaping a candidate’s future career in academia or practice (Jones 2013). The literature suggests that many doctoral students take up lecturing during their studies while the majority obtain academic positions on completing their programmes (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Bullin 2018; Maynard *et al.* 2017; Marx *et al.* 2016). In her systematic literature review, Bullin draws on the work of Redmond (2015), and reports that ‘80% of Ph.D. graduates take up a position in college/university as teachers’ (2018: 2). Coupled with the fact that these programmes have become a prerequisite for progression in academia, it is vital that they go beyond equipping students with research skills to equip them with all the skills needed to thrive in academia (Chan *et al.* 2019). In recent years, a PhD qualification or a commitment to embark on a doctoral programme and complete it within a specified time have become a requirement to apply for a position as a lecturer in many HEIs. If obtaining a doctorate is vital in pursuing an academic career, it is imperative that the programme prepares the student for all facets of academic life, including teaching (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Bonner *et al.* 2020; Chan *et al.* 2019). Integrating the teaching component in the doctoral curriculum is critical considering that the traditional model for academic recruitment is based on some qualification, trade, experience, or content expertise save for pedagogical competencies (Bonner *et al.* 2020; Barney 2019). As is widely known, disciplinary expertise and research accolades do not make for instructional and pedagogical competence (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Lewicki & Bailey 2016).

Some of the reasons adduced for focusing on research in doctoral studies include the fact that research is more valued than teaching, as academics have to ‘publish or perish’ (sink or swim) (Bonner *et al.* 2020; Marx *et al.* 2016). There is also a notion that general teaching strategies are not ideal for all disciplines, including the need to teach disciplinary threshold concepts in a specific manner (Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). Others firmly believe that research is more highly rewarded than teaching (Bullin 2018; Marx *et al.* 2016; Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). Some institutions do not have the additional resources (financial, human, or time) to accommodate the teaching component (York 2019-20, cited in Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Marx *et al.* 2016). Yet, some academics/professors are of the flawed view that teachers are born and not made (Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). Still others believe that those who have contributed most to knowledge creation make the best teachers (Marx *et al.* 2016).

Nonetheless, research has shown that many doctoral and newly-graduated students feel stressed or less confident in their teaching skills compared to their research skills (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Barney 2019; Marx *et al.* 2016). Chan *et al.* (2019) found that undergraduates ranked Accounting doctoral programmes with formal teaching components higher than those without. In their study on international doctoral students' preparation for teaching, Li and Liu (2020) concluded that teaching support by older professors in terms of syllabus development and other learner-centred methods of student engagement was helpful to students. Course coordinators in Lumpkin and Achen's (2021) study concluded that doctoral students were ill-prepared to design and facilitate active learning because the programme is predominantly research-focused. Furthermore, many post-doctoral students desired and supported the inclusion of the doctoral programme's teaching component (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021). Non-inclusion of a teaching component in the doctoral curriculum may imply that future academics may not be effective teachers even though they are experts in research and specific subjects. Since students learn less from a 'very bad teacher' (Marx *et al.* 2016: 512), graduates taught by ineffective academics may not be properly trained. As such, it would appear that many doctoral programmes are failing not only their students, but also their undergraduates, whom these future academics may not teach effectively (Bonner *et al.* 2020; Chan *et al.* 2019; Bullin 2018; Marx *et al.* 2016). In other words, a lack of training in teaching could become a liability for students in the job market while undermining undergraduate programmes (Marx *et al.* 2016; Austin *et al.* 2009).

As the call to incorporate a teaching component into doctoral programmes intensifies, many HEIs are beginning to include some elements of teaching in their doctoral curriculum (Lumpkin & Achen 2021; Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Bonner *et al.* 2020; Chan *et al.* 2019; Lewicki & Bailey 2016; Rousseau 2016; Marx *et al.* 2016; Boman 2013). This takes different forms. Drawing from a sample of teaching development programmes, Marx *et al.* (2016) described four structured programmes. The first includes an in-house three-year teacher training programme (in pedagogical competence, classroom management, and teaching practice, amongst other things) which is a prerequisite for doctoral certification. Another strand is the inclusion of a mandatory semester-long teaching practicum component in the curriculum. The third comprises a series of teaching seminars offered by the institution's Teaching Office. The last strand is an intensive six-day teaching seminar which

may not run continuously as a prerequisite for receiving the doctoral degree. Bonner *et al.* designed a semester-long, four-hour weekly workshop for students to develop competencies in five broad areas ‘(1) content expertise; (2) a teaching philosophy; (3) instructional design skills; (4) course administrative skills; and (5) instructional delivery skills’ (2020: 438). Barney (2019) proposed three possible strategies for incorporating teaching into the doctoral curriculum – teaching mentorship programmes, direct observation of excellent teachers, and obligatory teacher improvement seminars. Besides equipping doctoral candidates with pedagogical skills and strengthening undergraduate programmes (Austin *et al.* 2009), this provides a pathway for executives and industry technocrats to venture into academia (Brightman & Nargundkar 2013).

## ***2.1 Structure of the TDP – UKZN Approach***

To incorporate a teaching component into its doctoral curricula, UKZN’s UCDD under the auspices of the UTLO, designed a Teaching Development Programme (TDP) for doctoral candidates. The TDP is designed to ‘enhance the competence of PhD students through strengthening and consolidating their knowledge of teaching, learning, designing, assessing and evaluating curricula in higher education’ (Reddy 2018: 1). More specifically, it aims to:

- Empower currently enrolled PhD students with teaching and supervision skills
- Increase the number of academic staff with teaching capabilities
- Enable PhD students to make informed choices on whether to pursue an academic/teaching career in Higher Education

The TDP is a four-day voluntary online workshop that commences on day one with Teaching and Learning in HEIs. Students engage with philosophies and theories of teaching and learning to rationalise their perspectives to guide practice. It also involves interrogation of diverse teaching strategies and learning styles. Day two focuses on assessing learning in Higher Education, where students are introduced to the principles and practices of assessment. Drawing on theory, participants construct assessment tasks across different levels of learning while striving for constructive alignment between their module learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and assessment tasks. The session also makes room for the participants to critique various forms

of assessment and their applicability in their respective disciplines. In addition, there is an opportunity to interrogate the institution's assessment policies. On day three, the focus is on curriculum design and evaluation in Higher Education, where students are introduced to different models of curricula design and evaluate their curricula 'in relation to the transformation/decolonisation agenda in the South African higher education context' (Reddy 2018: 2). They also critique their respective curricula in light of Higher Education curricula policies. The workshop concludes on the fourth day with supervising research in Higher Education, where participants are acquainted with the relevant policies on supervision, deliberate on supervisory ethics, and devise their own supervisory approaches based on the case studies they are presented with.

The workshops were facilitated using active learning approaches (reflective practices, whole class discussions, group work, case studies, debates, plenary presentations, research and questioning) that allowed participants to contribute from their experiences and question their ideologies and understanding of teaching and learning in light of the course material and information. Drawing on their experiences, group discussions, theory, and the literature, participants were encouraged to reflect critically on diverse teaching and assessment strategies. Each session included individual or group activities to show their level of understanding and pedagogical competence. The zoom breakout rooms were used for group activities within a specified time. The groups would then join the plenary session to present their discussions. Group presentations were followed by constructive feedback from peers and the facilitators, prompting rich debate while enhancing learning. Some of the materials and activities were sent to participants in advance to allow sufficient time to prepare and make meaningful contributions to class discussions. The workshop also encouraged the use of diverse teaching and assessment strategies, including debates, power-point presentations and panel discussions. Students were encouraged to mimic these active teaching and learning strategies in their own classrooms when they were appointed as university teachers.

At the end of the workshop, students evaluate the programme and are given a certificate of completion. Two years into the programme, the extent to which its objectives have been achieved remains unclear since the programme has not been formally researched. Hence the aim of this study was to determine the extent to which the online TDP contributed to developing PhD students' teaching and supervision skills and informed their career choices (to pursue academic positions at universities). Indeed, there is limited literature on the

effects of teaching development initiatives in doctoral programmes (Connolly *et al.* 2018; Boman 2013), providing further impetus for this study.

2.2 Transition Theory

This study draws from the 4 Ss system of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory which can be used to explain transitions of all kinds (Wall *et al.* 2018). It involves taking stock of the resources available to the individual to determine the person’s ability to cope with the change or transition (Powers 2010; Moran 2017; Walls 2018, Reddy 2018; Gbogbo 2020). Drawing from the work of Schlossberg and other scholars, Powers (2010) explains the 4 Ss as follows: ‘Situation’ refers to the individual’s opinion of the transition. The situation or change may be expected or unexpected or a desired non-event (Barclay 2017). Other factors that affect the transition are the timing which could be good or bad, the duration, the student’s previous experience with such a situation, and the possible triggers of the transition (Barclay 2017). ‘Self’ relates to the individual’s sense of ‘meaning and purpose’, which is a function of ‘their beliefs, self-perceived abilities, perceptions and attitudes’ (Barclay 2017: 26).

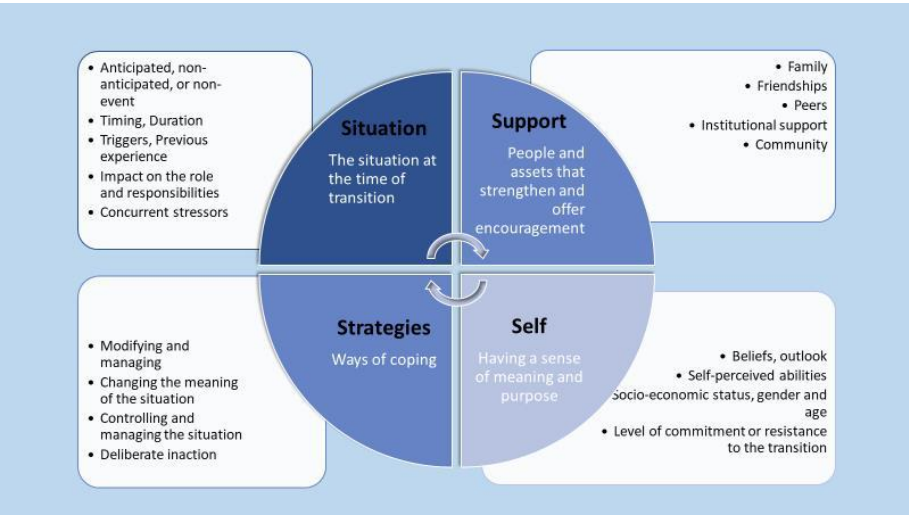
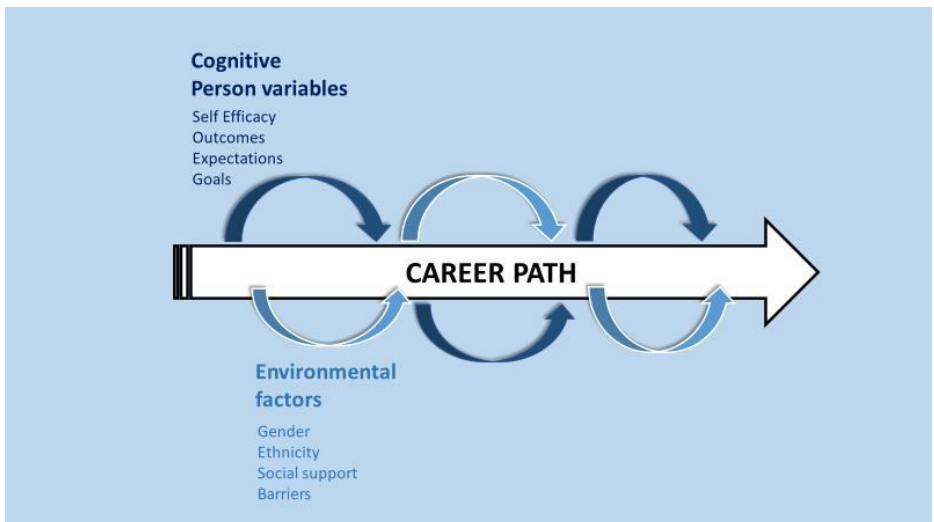


Figure 1: Transition Theory (adapted from Marcr 2019)

Powers viewed the ‘Self’ as the individual’s ‘strengths and weaknesses’ (2010: 88) at the time of the transition, which encompass their feeling of control over the situation, their optimism, and their resilience (2010: 88). One’s ‘Support’ structure could emanate from friends, relatives, community, or institution (Walls 2018). To cope with the transition, individuals devise diverse ‘Strategies’ which may involve ‘modifying the situation, changing the meaning of the situation, ... controlling and managing the situation, ... or taking a deliberate inaction’ (Barclay 2017: 28). For Anderson *et al.* (2011), moving through a transition usually involves letting go of something, learning new roles, and taking stock of available resources to develop coping strategies to address the situation. Eventually, growth may be realised. Since Schlossberg’s transition theory is usually employed ‘to understand adults transitioning between careers, relationships, education, etc.’ (DeVilbiss 2014: 6), it is deemed suitable to explain doctoral students’ transition into becoming university teachers.

### **2.3 Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The SCCT by Lent *et al.* (1994; 2000) can also explain how individuals choose and attain varying degrees of success in their academic and work endeavours.



**Figure 2: The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Adapted from (Lent *et al.* 1994))**

It posits that ‘cognitive-person variables (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals), and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person and his or her environment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) shape the course of career development’ (Lent *et al.* 2000: 36). Cognitive variables enable individuals to exercise agency over their academic or career path. Self-efficacy refers to one’s confidence in one’s ability to attain an objective or succeed in an activity (Brown & Lent 2019). Self-efficacy determines how individuals approach a task, how much effort they put in and how long they will persist when confronted with challenging situations.

Educators with strong teaching self-efficacy are known to be more enthusiastic, open to trying new teaching methods, and more likely to persevere in difficult times (Hoy 2004). Outcome expectations can be described as one’s understanding of the consequences of engaging in an activity (Jordan *et al.* 2020; Brown & Lent 2019). They motivate appropriate behaviour and sustain persistence in difficult situations (Lent & Brown 2019). Goals refer to a person’s desired outcome or target, which also helps to maintain their effort in the programme (Jordan *et al.* 2020; Lent & Brown 2019). Amongst the environmental variables, factors such as social support and barriers may hinder or promote access to relevant learning experiences that shape self-efficacy and outcomes while inhibiting the actions needed to actualise goals.

The SCCT is used in academia to explain the self-efficacy and career trajectory of students and academics participating in training development. Rogers and Creed (2011) investigated high school students’ career choice activities and found that self-efficacy and goals were the key drivers of career exploration. Connolly *et al.* (2018) concluded that doctoral students who participated in a TDP were more confident in their teaching self-efficacy than those who did not. Jordan *et al.*’s (2020) study on the impact of a faculty development programme revealed its positive contribution to medical education scholarship. It enhanced career trajectories as participants later became education leaders and scholars. In this study, the SCCT was used to explore doctoral candidates’ perceptions of their teaching and supervisory skills post-attendance of the TDP and the extent to which the learning during the programme informs/informed their career choices in academia.

### **3 Methodology**

The study employed a mixed-method research design located within an interpretive research paradigm to explore doctoral students’ experiences of a TDP.

A mixed-method approach which allows for data to be generated quantitatively and qualitatively is known to enhance the validity of a study and strengthen the conclusions reached (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017). Thematic analysis that is commonly used in examining narratives (Jordan *et al.* 2020; Castleberry & Nolen 2018; Jones 2013; Ritchie *et al.* 2003) was employed. This involves searching for themes by carefully going through the data repeatedly to identify patterns with similar meanings to elicit rich interpretation (Clarke & Braun 2017; Ritchie *et al.* 2003). Thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be used to identify patterns across participants' lived experiences and perceptions (Clarke & Braun 2017), thus making it ideal to understand doctoral students' experiences of the TDP.

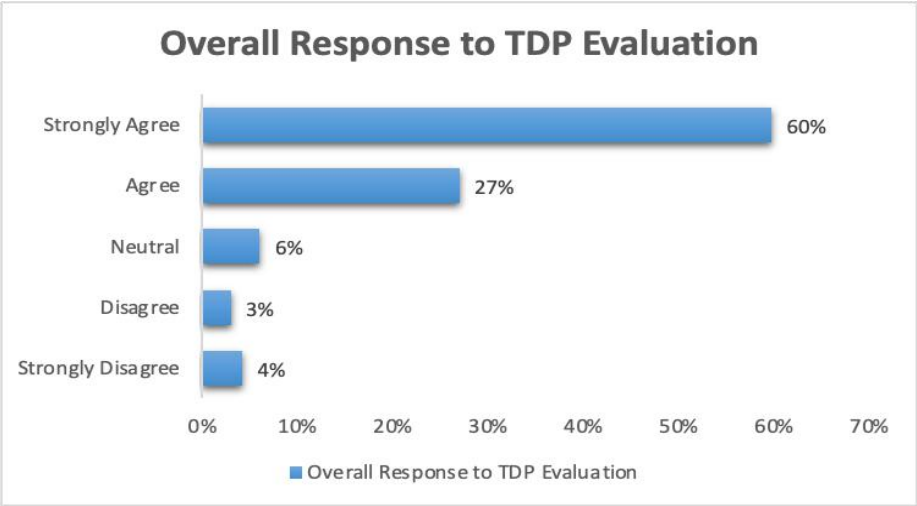
Data from students' evaluations via a semi-structured online questionnaire and subsequent reflection guided by open-ended questions were used to elicit the participants' experiences of the programme. While Clayson's (2014) study suggests that students rate academics they consider helpful higher in their evaluation, a survey by Symbaluk and Howell (2010) showed a positive correlation between academics who were ranked higher by students and those who won teaching awards. As such, scholars (Chan *et al.* 2019) have continued to source data from students' evaluations for research as these provide feedback for assessing participants' experiences (Marx *et al.* 2016). All the students who participated in the voluntary TDP in 2021 had access to the evaluation form on completion of their workshop, and links to the forms were later sent to participants to ensure a maximum response rate. Of the 80 participants who attended the programme in 2021, 24 responded. A 30% response rate is higher than the 20% threshold deemed adequate for a survey (Lumpkin & Achen 2021); thus, the response rate for this study is deemed statistically significant to report on. Ten responses were received to the post-programme reflective unstructured qualitative questionnaire emailed to participants where they shared their experiences and thoughts on the TDP.

## **4 Data Presentation**

The TDP evaluation form mainly comprised of closed-ended questions to obtain participants' views on the programme. The questionnaire was structured in three sections using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The first section addressed the logistics of organising the workshop, such as timeous dissemination of workshop information and docu-

menttation and the suitability of the venue. The second focused on the workshop, touching on the objectives, structure, content, pace, duration, expectations, and learning. The final section dealt with the facilitation process, considering the ease of understanding, accommodating and answering questions, and group management. Two open-ended questions addressed participants’ previous teaching experience and suggestions for improvements.

The summary of the responses in Figure 3 below shows overwhelming support for the 2021 TDP judging by the extent to which participants agreed and strongly agreed on the logistics, the main workshop, and facilitation. Overall, 87% of the responses from a total of 24 participants suggest that they were relatively satisfied with the workshop objectives, offerings, and execution. The research outcome thus confirms the work of previous scholars (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Li & Liu 2020) who concluded that the inclusion of a teaching component in a doctoral studies curriculum is helpful to students. Our findings resonate with Bishop-Monroe *et al.*’s (2021) study, which assessed doctoral students’ participation in an online TDP and reported higher levels of teaching self-efficacy following the programme.



**Figure 3: Doctoral students’ evaluation of the 2021 TDP workshop**

The details of participants’ responses to the statements in the different sections of the 2021 TDP evaluation shown in Table 1 below offer more visibility on the variation in students’ experiences.

**Table 1: TP Evaluation questions**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>Workshop logistics</b>					
• I received information about the workshop timeously		2	5	5	12
• I received workshop documentation in good time	1	1	5	4	12
• The venue was suitable for the workshop	1	2	3	4	9

<b>The Workshop</b>					
• The workshop objectives were clear				5	18
• The workshop was well structured	1		1	7	14
• The content was easy to follow and understand	1		1	9	13
• The pace of the workshop was appropriate	1	1	1	7	14
• The duration of the workshop was appropriate	2	3	2	6	11
• The workshop met my expectations	1	1	1	9	12
• I will be able to use what I learned in this workshop.	1			8	15

<b>The Workshop facilitators</b>					
• The facilitation made it easy to understand the content	1			7	16
• The facilitation accommodated questions from the participants	1			5	18
• Participants' questions were answered	1			5	18
• The group was well managed	1		1	8	14

Apart from one student who consistently strongly disagreed with all facets of the workshop, some participants were not happy with the duration. Hence suggestions offered for future improvement included: *'More time needed,'; 'Need to be longer,'; 'Increase the time of the study,'; 'Make it the whole week and in person.'* *'Since the COVID-19 cases are no longer as before, kindly make the in-person program and increase the number of days and evaluation for a good understanding'; 'Make it a face-to-face event, increase the time'; 'Maybe make it in-person.'*

Five months after completing the last 2021 workshop, all the participants were emailed a qualitative reflective questionnaire to determine how their workshop experience impacted their teaching and supervisory skills and if the experience gained through the TDP influenced their choice of a possible career in academia. It was envisaged that, by this time, many participants would have processed their experience of the workshop sufficiently and would be in a better position to make an informed choice on pursuing a career as a university teacher. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the programme's four areas: teaching and learning in Higher Education, assessing learning in Higher Education, curriculum design and evaluation, and supervising research in Higher Education. It explored the participants' previous experience, how the activities and materials impacted their perspectives and a post-workshop self-evaluation of their capabilities in the different aspects of the programme offerings. The second section solicited the participants' views on the extent to which the TDP prepared them for teaching and a possible career in academia.

**In terms of previous experience,** most respondents had never taught or supervised postgraduate students before. One stated, *'I never had any teaching/supervision experience prior to the workshop'*, while another had *'low to moderate experience,'* one had *'good'* prior experience, and another was *'a teaching assistant for a 3rd-year module and occasionally led lectures and pracs'*. Their experience in assessing learning in HE was similar to that of teaching. Three had never assessed students, while two had *'Low to moderate'* experience. For another participant, *'It was not highly advanced until I got the opportunity to learn from the TDP.'* Only one participant appeared to be *'okay'* with assessing student learning. In the same vein, the majority (five) of the students had never been involved in curriculum design and evaluation. In

contrast, others (three) had low levels of experience, with one stating that *'It was low until I get exposed to the workshop.'* One had *'okay'* experience. From the responses, it is clear that most of these doctoral candidates had never taught before, while others had low levels of experience of teaching and supervising research. The question is, why would doctoral students with no prior teaching experience attend a voluntary TDP?

All the participants were relatively satisfied with the materials and activities they engaged in **during the workshop**. As one said, *'I was capacitated with a lot of information from this workshop'*. Others referred to *'better understand knowledge transfer'* and curriculum design. The workshop was acknowledged as *'an active learning environment'* where they learned *'how to engage better with students and how to deal with difficult students effectively.'* It further taught a participant *'that as a teacher, I can learn from my students.'* All in all, the workshop *'significantly influenced'* students' perspective of teaching and supervising research, with one confidently stating that *'I now know how to set a test and exam,'* while for another, *'It changed the way I design my teaching material.'* Thus, the workshop offered doctoral candidates a fresh perspective on the world of academia.

The participants' **post-workshop self-evaluation** on the different sections of the programme was quite revealing. They generally agreed that they had *'greatly improved'* in various aspects of the programme, as they *'learnt a lot and the information I learned will improve my teaching and supervising research in future.'* One participant stated, *'I am now significantly equipped to offer teaching and learning effectively.'* For another student *'serving as a replacement teacher currently,'* it would appear that the fear of teaching has diminished as *'I don't see it as rocket science like prior the workshop'*. Regarding assessment, a participant stated, *'I would rate myself to be at 80%.'* Another said, *'I am now way better and above average.'* Yet another felt *'significantly equipped to design/set assessment tasks.'* The participants appeared to be more confident in their teaching/learning/research supervision and assessment abilities than in curriculum design. This is understandable because the latter is not a regular classroom activity. While some confidently stated that they had *'highly improved'* and were *'above average'*, others considered their curriculum design abilities as *'fair'*, and *'good'* as they *'can moderately undertake curriculum design and evaluation.'* With regard to teaching, a participant stated, *'I am a calm-*

*er, more centred teacher who commands respect in both an in-person and virtual classroom. I am able to keep the students interested in the topic at hand and be more approachable with regards to queries and questions’.*

#### **4.1 Preparation for University Teaching**

Regarding preparation for university teaching, most (seven out of eight) respondents felt that the programme did them good. One felt *‘ready to teach and supervise research at university level.’* Comments from others who had never taught included, *‘Very well,’ ‘I’m highly prepared now,’ ‘To a greater extent,’* and *‘I am now equipped and prepared.’* One participant who had experienced some form of teaching said the programme *‘greatly improved my teaching skills.’* The participant who was teaching during the programme felt prepared to *‘a large extent. It allowed me to see things from a student’s perspective. To understand that every student is unique and learns in different ways. Modules need to be designed to cater for every kind of students. To feed their strengths in a fair way’.* The eighth respondent felt *‘moderately’* prepared after the TDP. Two participants did not respond to this statement.

#### **4.2 Possible Pursuit of an Academic Career**

To answer the second research question, participants were asked if the TDP influenced their choice of a possible career in academia. There was a resounding ‘yes’ from all nine respondents. Of those who had not taught or supervised research before, one felt *‘motivated to consider a job in academia,’* while another became *‘more capacitated to follow a career in academia.’* One remarked that, *‘it has opened my mind and added a new career of vision,’* while another *‘looks forward to have an opportunity to put into practice what I learnt.’* The participants who already had teaching experience also felt encouraged to further their academic pursuits. It made one *‘see how I can change the world through teaching,’* and another understood the different components of the TDP, *‘which is highly important in the academic fraternity.’* The participant who had a teaching post *‘wants to be an academic now more than ever.’* As for the participant with no prior teaching experience, the TDP appeared to be a game-changer. The response was, *‘Yes, it did. Am now employed as a lecturer at the University’.*

### **4.3 Transitioning to Become a University Teacher**

The study also aimed to determine if the programme enabled a smooth transition from being a doctoral student to a university teacher. All seven of the participants who responded to this question were quite optimistic. Transitioning to teaching in HE will evidently be smoother for them because *‘this course was really an eye opener’* and *‘because now I have an idea of what is expected of me.’* As such, one participant *‘cannot wait for the opportunity to present itself.’* The reason for anticipating (or prospecting) an academic career could be that they are *‘now confident’* since they have been *‘highly capacitated to impart knowledge to students correctly’* from a teaching and learning as well as a research supervision perspective.

## **5 Discussion**

The study aimed to ascertain how doctoral students’ experiences of a TDP contributed to developing their teaching and research supervision capabilities and informing their future career choices. One of the questions that it sought to answer was, ‘How has doctoral candidates’ experiences of the UKZN Teaching Development Programme (TDP) empowered them with teaching and supervisory skills?’ The findings indicated that the respondents found the programme helpful as they felt capacitated, motivated, and ready to engage in university teaching and research supervision. These results affirm the work of previous scholars (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Brightman & Nargundkar 2013; Boman 2013). Participants in the study conducted by Bishop-Monroe *et al.* (2021) reported higher levels of confidence after participating in an online TDP. Based on a review of selected doctoral teaching programmes, Brightman and Nargundkar (2013) concluded that those who participated in a TDP ‘were highly motivated to try out different strategies to improve their students’ learning’ (2013: 301). Boman (2013) found that graduate students, including those pursuing doctoral programmes found a two-and-a-half-day teaching workshop beneficial. Similar to our study, some of the participants in Boman’s (2013) study had no prior teaching and research supervision experience but were already working as newly-appointed teaching assistants.

As excited or capacitated as the participants may have felt, the teaching fraternity would attest that a four-day teaching programme is only the tip of the iceberg. While these short voluntary courses expose candidates to the craft of teaching, scholars Connolly *et al.* (2018) and Brightman and Nargundkar (2013)

are of the view that they are somewhat inadequate. Besides the teaching, assessment, supervising research and curriculum design and evaluation sections, other sections which are deemed essential to enhance teaching competence include mentoring (Bulin 2018), feedback (Connolly *et al.* 2018; Boman 2013), classroom observation (Connolly *et al.* 2018; Brightman & Nargundkar 2013), teaching practicum/teaching experiences (Connolly *et al.* 2018) and classroom management (Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). These scholars argue for the inclusion of a more comprehensive and formal teaching development component in the doctoral curriculum to allow for more time and repeated opportunities to engage with course materials and peers (Connolly *et al.* 2018). They suggest that the teaching component be made compulsory with a minimum of three credits (Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). Connolly *et al.* (2018) advise that a 30- to 50-hour programme would enable more meaningful engagement for doctoral students' teaching and research supervision self-efficacy.

These suggestions were echoed by participants in the TDP workshop who suggested '*more time*,' '*evaluation*,' '*certificates with NQF level*,' and '*a refresher after some time*' as a means of improving the programme. While the drawbacks associated with limited resources (time, finances, and personnel) are very real in the UKZN context, we argue that the long-term benefit of a more elaborate TDP far outweighs the costs. Such a programme would go a long way in consolidating participants' teaching and research supervision skills, easing the anxiety associated with the relatively unfamiliar teaching and postgraduate supervision load and classroom management, enhancing the quality of undergraduate/ postgraduate programmes, and freeing 'more mind-share for research' (Marx *et al.* 2016: 488; Brightman & Nargundkar 2013). In other words, since doctoral programmes are currently more focused on research, the inclusion of a teaching component would likely ease the anxiety associated with teaching and research supervision and reduce preparation time, thereby making more time available for disciplinary research. In a way, it would contribute to building capacity to support a comprehensive doctoral education programme that also prepares graduates for the world of academia. Ultimately, a comprehensive TDP will contribute to developing a more holistic cohort of doctoral graduates with improved capacity to thrive in academia. This is pertinent as research (Rivkin *et al.* 2005 cited in Marx *et al.* 2016) suggests that students taught by a poor teacher learn only half of the year's material while those taught by a competent one learn one-and-a-half years' worth of material on average. Policymakers' buy-in and revision of the doctoral studies curriculum are

required to implement a comprehensive TDP. While some of these changes may not be feasible immediately, we suggest extending the current workshop by two days to incorporate more content such as giving constructive feedback and classroom management. The TDP was offered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic but can be offered face-to-face or via a hybrid mode. This may also influence the response rate in future student evaluations.

Nonetheless, the TDP initiative is a step in the right direction. The participants responded positively to the workshop as it opened their eyes to the world of teaching, allayed their fears, and gave them the confidence to either venture into the world of teaching or consider academia as a choice career. The SCCT postulates that, by acquiring the requisite skills from the TDP, students develop a robust sense of self-efficacy to delve into university teaching, which also allows them to persevere through difficult times (Lent *et al.* 1994). Furthermore, it increases their willingness to try different strategies to enhance learning (Connolly *et al.* 2018). This aligns with the work of scholars (Bishop-Monroe *et al.* 2021; Connolly *et al.* 2018) who concluded that PhD students who participated in TDP felt confident in their teaching abilities and were less anxious about embarking on teaching. These results respond to the second research question on how doctoral candidates' experience of TDP at UKZN enabled them to make informed choices about an academic/teaching career in Higher Education.

Drawing on the tenets of the SCCT (Lent 1994; 2000), evidence from the current research suggests that the TDP enhanced participants' self-efficacy. This is because participating in it empowered them and enhanced their belief in their teaching and research supervision abilities, as indicated in the response: *'I am now significantly equipped to offer teaching, supervision and learning effectively.'* Although the questions did not directly address the participants' goals, one's career interests affect one's participation in activities likely to enhance one's knowledge and abilities in these areas (Lent *et al.* 1994). As such, it would appear that students' aspirations for a possible academic career prompted their decision to attend the voluntary workshop. Hence, the majority stated that the programme's objectives were achieved as it helped to *'better understand knowledge transfer'* and they are *'now confident to pursue a career in academia.'*

Doctoral candidates' capacity to transition to the world of teaching can also be considered via the lens of the 4 Ss system in Schlossberg's transition theory. Faced with the possibility of a future transition into academia ('Situ-

ation'), the perceived weaknesses in 'Self' arising from insecurities about their current teaching and supervision skills may have prompted participation in the TDP. Their evaluation of their 'Self' capabilities was rather inadequate to transition to teaching (the next level in their career trajectory). As such, the programme provided 'Support' that alleviated their fears and anxiety about teaching and supervising research while building the confidence needed to transition to academia. Participants accessed 'Strategies' from the programme for coping with the transition to university teaching.

Indeed, as Wall *et al.* (2018) concluded in their study on enrolled nurses' journey to become registered nurses, institutional support has been identified as a critical attribute in handling transition. Anderson *et al.* (2011) also affirmed the importance of support in any transition as it enables the individual to adapt better. The research further confirmed Gbogbo's (2020) finding that the social support received by adolescent mothers aided their unplanned pregnancy journey. Moran (2017) also found that support services offered to the families of military personnel were an invaluable resource in their children's transition to military schools. As Walls *et al.* (2018) noted, the support afforded by the TDP enhanced participants' self-efficacy, which is crucial in attaining one's desired objectives. Hence, the participants felt empowered to teach and supervise research, answering research question one.

## **6 Conclusion**

In ascertaining the effectiveness of the TDP designed for doctoral students at UKZN, this chapter examined how it capacitated them with teaching and research supervision skills while informing their choice of a possible career in academia. Based on students' evaluation of the programme and a subsequent reflective qualitative questionnaire, the results affirm the work of previous scholars, as participants found the programme useful in their developmental journey. They felt empowered to pursue an academic career as the knowledge and skills acquired from the workshop opened their eyes to teaching, minimised teaching anxiety, and boosted their confidence in teaching. Thus, the institutional support afforded by the TDP enabled participants to access the coping strategies required to improve their teaching self-efficacy. The research also provided evidence that participants' expectations and goals were met as they accessed strategies that will assist them in managing and controlling the transition to academia. While the external transition from a doctoral student to

a graduate is imminent, the participants thus also demonstrated a kind of internal transition from identifying as doctoral students to becoming university teachers.

This chapter echoes the call for the inclusion of a teaching component in doctoral programmes as it contributes to the literature on the importance of teaching in doctoral education. It foregrounds the need to reconceptualise the design of the doctoral curriculum in order to produce more holistic doctoral graduates with enhanced capacity to succeed as university teachers. It motivates for the need to equip doctoral graduates with an academic identity ready to face the transforming Higher Education milieu. Doctoral students become more effective teachers through a TDP that offers them a theoretical understanding of learning, teaching, assessment, curriculum design and evaluation, and supervising research. Besides enhancing their confidence in facilitating learning and classroom management, it frees their minds for research, thereby supporting successful completion of the doctoral programme. In addition, it stimulates their desire to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Finally, such a programme will assist in improving undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Chan *et al.* 2019), directly impacting the quality of graduates who will be ready for the world of work. This chapter thus offers useful insights to doctoral curriculum reviewers tasked with developing programmes that proactively respond to the needs of stakeholders while strengthening the education system.

Despite the insightful contributions enumerated above, the authors identified some limitations, such as the low response rate. Future research could aim for a larger sample size to enable a detailed analysis, possibly along the lines of race, gender or discipline. One way to achieve this could be to enforce mandatory evaluation of such programmes so that the feedback is more comprehensive. In addition, this research was based on participants' post-workshop reflections on their teaching and research supervision abilities, which may not reflect an objective classroom reality. Interested scholars could focus on the actual classroom experience of doctoral students who have participated in TDPs to obtain a richer understanding of the enactment of their teaching and supervision abilities. Nonetheless, the analysis of participants' reflections enabled a broad evaluation of the effectiveness of the TDP, which will go a long way in informing policy directions. It further contributes to scholarship in the transformation of doctoral programmes in Africa where there is currently scant knowledge of capacity development of doctoral students.

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**Inter-institutional,  
National and  
Transnational Discourses**



## CHAPTER 8

# Building a Next Generation of Scholars: The Approach of the South African Education Research Association

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### Abstract

This chapter discusses how the country's premier educational research organisation, the South African Education Research Association (SAERA), has approached building the next generation of scholars. The chapter briefly describes the inception of SAERA in 2013, with its specific aims of rupturing historical, racial and institutional divisions and promoting socially relevant research. In seeking to advance scholarly inquiry in South Africa, a key goal of SAERA has been to lead the next generation of scholars. Drawing on interviews with key informants, the chapter describes how early career researchers have experienced the strategies towards this end. Such strategies include doctoral awards, public seminars, mentorships, support for writing for publication and, most importantly, establishing a community which provides critical and supportive engagement. Through fostering a collaborative culture, the organisation has sought to challenge dominant discourses of performativity and competition in academia. The chapter reflects on the successes and challenges of this endeavour.

**Keywords:** Early career researchers, research capacity building, peer learning, pedagogical discourse, South African Education Research Association

## **1 Introduction and Background**

A focus on the advancement of research is a global phenomenon. The argument made is that knowledge plays a central role in economic growth, national welfare, and social development (Govender *et al.* 2022; Lee & Kuzhabekova 2019). Postgraduate education has also been closely linked to socioeconomic transformation in both developed and developing nations (Atibuni 2020). In Europe, doctorate-trained researchers are seen as essential to ‘smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth’ while in Southern Africa, East Asia, and Latin America, research students are considered central to the development of ‘knowledge societies’ (Brennan *et al.* 2014).

In South Africa, too, much attention has been paid to the promotion of research in general and research capacity-building in particular. For example, the White Paper on Science, Technology, and Innovation (2019) under the heading, ‘Increased human capabilities and an expanded knowledge enterprise’ indicates how knowledge from many disciplines interacts to deepen awareness of and assist in addressing South Africa’s serious and long-standing challenges. The White Paper goes further to argue that ‘research and the creation of knowledge have far more than just instrumental value’ (Department of Science and Technology 2019: 44), but also contribute to the development of an informed, empowered populace that functions efficiently, creatively, and ethically as a component of a democratic society.

Despite the interest in advancing research in the country, several investigations have also highlighted concerns about the number and demographics of active researchers. Universities South Africa (USAF), for example, noted that in 2019 just over a third of the teaching staff at universities were actively publishing, and 44% of senior lecturers and 82% of lecturers did not have a PhD. Statistics for countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States have also indicated that the number of masters by research graduates is extremely low (Morgan 2014). The expansion of research is thus a global phenomenon that is not restricted to a particular country.

The South African Education Research Association (SAERA) is one of several organisations in the country that seeks to promote and advance research. Working in the field of education, SAERA’s broad goals are to promote research and academic collaboration, link research policy, theory and practice, encourage the promotion of research quality, and help develop the next generation of researchers. Each year, several initiatives and workshops are offered as part of a larger strategy to expand SAERA’s reach and support for the next gene-

ration of academics, encourage academic networks to affiliate with SAERA, and foster the growth of the SAERA community. Drawing on the comments of purposively selected early career researchers (ECRs), this chapter reflects on how these researchers have experienced the strategies used to achieve the set goals. Such strategies are designed mainly for research capacity building and establishing a community which provides critical and supportive engagement. The chapter reflects on the successes and challenges of this intention.

## **2 Early Career Representation within SAERA**

This section provides some background to SAERA's commitment to research capacity-building. After three years of extensive consultation among various educational organisations and interest groups, SAERA was established at a launch conference in the Northwest province of South Africa at the end of January 2013. The launch represented a historic attempt to bring together education academics and researchers from all over South Africa into a single educational research organisation, thereby unifying different research traditions with roots in the racialised academic structures of the pre-democracy era.

The aim of SAERA, as contained in its Constitution, is to contribute to the development and enhancement of education as a research field in South Africa by enhancing the capacity of South Africa's education scholars to do appropriate education research in various areas related to the country's educational development and progress. This objective is achieved by inter alia:

- providing a national home for all education researchers and scholars and a forum where the interests of South African education are critically engaged with for the public good;
- setting up and running workshops and training for new educational researchers;
- providing platforms such as conferences, public lectures and journals for the dissemination of research into education;
- engaging with policymakers to promote the utilisation of research for policy development, and securing support and funding for education research; and
- liaising with national and international bodies with similar objectives, with the aim to promote research in all fields of education globally (SAERA Constitution 2021).

To achieve the goal of promoting research and the commitment to supporting the next generation of scholars, SAERA established the early career researchers' portfolio on its executive committee in 2020. An expansive definition of an early career researcher was adopted, namely, a person who, within 5 years of completing a PhD, or during doctoral or master studies or a research career, is interested in working at a national, regional and international level to:

- broaden research training and professional development experiences;
- exchange experiences and ideas about research and research training;
- develop research projects in collaboration with researchers of different institutions and countries; and
- actively participate in a research community for emerging academics (SAERA Constitution 2021: 8).

Significantly, the focus on supporting early career researchers within SAERA was not only about research capacity building as an exercise in and of itself but, derived from a strong concern to democratise processes of research production. The formation of the ECR portfolio in SAERA took place against the background of a student movement that demanded real change. This was explained by Thomas Salmon, a key driver of the inclusion of ECRs in the SAERA Constitution. Salmon highlighted the disconnect between the reality of the conferences and what was happening on the universities' campuses around 2015-2016. As he put it:

There was a lot going on in higher education, protests from students, campuses shutdowns, etc. One of the students' concerns was that year after year, conferences would be held at 5-star hotels with discussions around transformation, decolonisation and other pertinent issues without tangible change and impact on students' lives. The students put forward ideas to enhance access and participation at the conference, including providing financial support for students to attend conferences, and more support for workshops to support students in developing papers for students from disadvantaged institutions (Thomas Salmon, interview, 3 March 2023).

As he explained, some of the suggestions that were put forward included changing the format of presentations to include more roundtables to en-

courage inclusive and transformative dialogues and adding an ECR representative on the SAERA executive. The position of ECR representative on the executive was then created in 2020, and an election process followed. Nominations were called for a representative who met the set criteria. The first incumbent, Dr. Mpho-Entle Modise, was elected in 2021, thus confirming the formalisation and institutionalisation of the initiative in terms of the organisational strategy.

### **3 Activities within the ECR Portfolio**

Activities geared towards ECRs predated the formalisation of the ECR representative position in 2021 within the SAERA executive committee. The first step in this process involved enhancing the association's ability to engage with the wider research community digitally with a series of online seminars led by Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and leading academics via SAERA's YouTube channel. 'SAERA News', social media and digital platforms were extensively used to extend and expand the reach of the activities. It is noteworthy that some of these activities have also been attended by ECRs from SADC countries, as well as from countries such as Turkey, Mauritius, Ethiopia, and Cyprus.

Other ongoing activities have included pre-conference workshops, online workshops and seminars, and roundtables at the conference focusing on the challenges faced by ECRs. These ECR activities are aligned to SAERA's strategies, such as doctoral awards, public seminars, mentorships, and support for writing for publication.

The underpinning philosophy of the work with ECRs is key to this chapter's argument. It is important to note that the principles of collaboration and peer support are central to the SAERA activities. In contrast to the individualised and competitive culture of many universities, the goal of the ECR portfolio is to create an infrastructure where younger researchers can be nurtured, away from the tensions of institutional power relations and performance appraisals. The intention has been to establish a community that cuts across institutions and research areas and shares experiences in a safe and non-judgemental environment, within, as Lee and Boud (2009: 99) put it, 'a distributed network of learning and practice'.

### **4 Context of Research Promotion**

The South African Education Research Association (SAERA)'s commitment

to supporting the next generation of scholars is significant when placed within the context of research promotion in South Africa and its associated challenges. These have been outlined in various writings. Frantz *et al.* (2014) argue the important role of strong capacity-building programmes and systems in higher education in advancing Africa's intellectual capital. At the same time, they identify various limiting factors, including an absence of research capacity, fewer staff with advanced degrees, inadequate research and publishing skills, poor research cultures, and inadequate resources. Govender *et al.* (2022) further highlight insufficient number of academics to replace many senior scholars about to retire and the vast discrepancies between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions. For Breetzke and Hedding (2020), limiting factors on early career researchers include the reduction in funding of the National Research Foundation incentive grants and the 'publish or perish' regime.

A report by USAF (2019) also identified many impediments to research. These included insufficient time for research, linked to enormous teaching loads, large numbers of undergraduate students, the demands of supervisory, administrative and other professional service-rendering tasks, bureaucratic red tape, and a compliance culture. Others reported challenges such as performance demands by management, working with academically under-prepared students, heavy supervisory workloads at the postgraduate level, the absence of a conducive research environment, limited research networks and insufficient mentors and role models in the system.

On a more positive note, Singh (2015) outlines key initiatives at her university to promote research. However, she sets this against several limiting factors, including the increased demand for experienced supervisors as universities enrol more postgraduate students in an attempt to increase subsidies for postgraduate throughput, as well as the rapidly ageing cohort of experienced supervisors and limited supervisory capacity at historically disadvantaged institutions.

Many of these challenges and limitations are echoed in the Council on Higher Education Doctoral Degrees National Report on doctoral programmes at universities in South Africa, of March 2022. The review identified a high demand for more academics with doctoral degrees and capacity for supervision, the burden of teaching and research workloads on academics and the lack of appropriately qualified supervisors to mentor an increasing number of doctoral students.

Interestingly, these policy pressures are not confined to South Africa but have been identified in other countries as well. In their work on doctoral supervision, Boud and Lee (2005), for example, highlight problems of ‘poor supervision, inadequate levels of departmental support and limited access to quality infrastructure’ and increasing calls for a ‘high quality of research learning environment’ (Boud & Lee 2005: 501 - 502). Low research productivity has been reported in Africa (Ezema & Onyancha 2017) as well as poor visibility and dissemination of postgraduate research reports (Ezema 2013).

Various strategies have been identified to address these challenges. Ezema and Onyancha (2017) strongly advise adopting open access for the great opportunities it provides for wider dissemination of research findings, particularly among the developing countries. International collaboration in research and education (Williams 2019), and university – industry collaborations and joint research (Chobphon & Wongpipit 2022) are also highly recommended.

## **5 Theoretical Framing**

SAERA’s approach to research capacity-building finds strong resonance with the conceptual work of Boud and Lee (2005). Their theory of ‘Peer learning as pedagogical discourse’ highlights the complexity of a conception of a research pedagogy and becoming a researcher and emphasises the role of peer relations and co-production. Although their focus is more on doctoral students, whom they refer to as research students, their key principles of peer learning, networks of learning relationships, and the social situatedness of learning, are concomitant with SAERA’s vision and philosophy. Participation in a community of research practice (Boud & Lee 2005: 504) is emphasised, as is the provision of a research environment and culture that involves interaction with multiple parties. They propose an expanded definition of pedagogy that attends to the entire research environment and use the term distributed learning to refer to networks of learning in which learners take advantage of opportunities in various ways without necessarily requiring the involvement of teachers or supervisors (Boud & Lee 2005: 503).

Boud and Lee (2005) argue that the peer is a defining figure in research practice and point out that the discourse of peer learning attends to the specificity of learning in relation to research. They outline some of the various research activities that research students as peers may participate in at different stages in their candidature, including the following:

In-house seminar presentations, reading and writing groups, conference presentations, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, reviewing journal articles and conference abstracts, writing research grant applications, undertaking re-search in teams (of colleagues, students, industry partners), co-authoring, jointly publishing, conference organisation and journal editing (Boud & Lee 2005: 510).

Interestingly, the CHE recommends a similar approach to research development within doctoral programmes, with recommendations for cohort models, peer support networks and student communities of practice (CHE 2022: 44).

Lee and Boud (2009) looked at ‘how do researchers become researchers’ and believe that the most common route is through a doctoral study, through which candidates learn how to do research ‘on the job’ and the training ground that supplies a credential for undertaking advanced scholarly research. While SAERA does target doctoral students in its understanding of ECRs, its approach includes ECRs from higher education institutions beyond the doctoral qualification.

## **6 Methodology**

The research reported on here followed a phenomenological qualitative approach to engage the early career researchers’ (ECRs) experiences of SAERA as a research organisation in South Africa. The inquiry centred on real-life experiences (Neubauer *et al.* 2019; Williams 2021) of ECRs affiliated with various higher education institutions who had interacted with or participated in SAERA activities. The aim was to gain deeper insights into SAERA’s identified strategies for research capacity-building, through exploring the experiences of those who had actively participated in the processes.

Data were collected from three sets of purposively selected participants, with a total of 21 participants. All three sets of participants were purposively selected based on their availability and because they had in recent times actively participated in SAERA workshops and conferences.

- 1) A semi-structured interview with Thomas Salmon, who had played a pivotal role in the inclusion of the ECR portfolio in the SAERA Constitution.
- 2) The ten candidates who were awarded funding subsidies by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) for attendance at

SAERA's 2022 Conference (Table 1). Sixty-three applications were received for the funding, and through a strict screening process, ten deserving candidates were selected: seven South African citizens and three candidates originally from Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Nigeria who are/were studying at South African higher education institutions. The candidates were invited to give feedback on how the NIHSS funding impacted their research careers, by enabling them to attend and present their work at the SAERA 2022 Conference. Additionally, they were asked to share their overall experience of the conference.

- 3) A random selection of twenty-three ECRs from a database of those actively participating in SAERA's ECR activities. An online survey was sent to these twenty-three participants (i.e., ECRs) which yielded ten responses (Table 2). The survey consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit a detailed narrative of participants' experiences (Cassol *et al.* 2018). This group included those who were part of the 2022 ECR online workshop entitled 'From a long PhD to a short article'. At this workshop, three recent PhD graduates who had subsequently published at least one article from their thesis shared their journey towards this end, and a senior researcher provided suggestions as to how one PhD dissertation could generate multiple publishable articles.

**Table 1: NIHSS funding awardees**

Participant	Qualification	Institution	Position at this institution
1	M.Ed. (2018)	Nelson Mandela University	PhD Candidate, Associate Lecturer
2	PhD (2022)	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Lecturer
3	PhD (2021)	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Senior lecturer
4	M.Ed.	University of South Africa	Lecturer, PhD candidate
5	PhD (2021)	Nelson Mandela University	Lecturer
6	PhD (2022)	University of the Free State	Lecturer
7	PhD (2019)	University of the Free State	Lecturer
8	PhD	University of Johannesburg	Postdoctoral Research Fellow

9	PhD (2018)	King Sebata Dalidyabo Public TVET College	Lecturer
10	M.Ed.	Rhodes University	PhD Scholar / Study permit

**Table 2: Participants in the online survey**

Participant	Currently registered for a qualification	Institution	Position at this institution	Years in the current institution	Years of teaching and/or researching in higher education	Publications in the last five years
1	No	Rhodes University	Doctoral Student	3	11	6 articles
2	PhD	University of South Africa	Lecturer	1	2	2 articles
3	No	University of Western Cape	Lecturer	10	10	4 articles
4	PhD	University of Lusaka	Lecturer	6	6	1 article
5	PhD	Stellenbosch University	Doctoral Student	5	0	None
6	PhD	University of Johannesburg	Doctoral Student	3	2	None
7	PhD	Namibia University of Science and Technology	Lecturer	8	8	1 article
8	PhD	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Lecturer ,	7	7	1 article
9	No	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal	Senior Lecturer	10	10	1 book chapter 1 book 2 articles
10	PhD	National University of Lesotho	Lecturer	4	14	6 articles

As shown in Table 2, the participants in this group had experience in teaching and/or researching in a higher education environment of between zero

and fourteen years. The participants were affiliated with various higher education institutions in and outside South Africa, such as the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Rhodes University, University of South Africa, University of Lusaka, Stellenbosch University, Namibia University of Science and Technology, and the National University of Lesotho. Most participants were either doctoral students or lecturers, with publications between zero and six in the last five years.

Other than in the first interview, where permission was granted, all names have been anonymised to protect confidentiality. The study used the iterative step-by-step thematic analysis process to unpack the collected data across all the participants. By analysing the participants' accounts of their experiences in relation to the study questions, the thematic analysis seeks to identify patterns of meaning (Sundler *et al.* 2019). Following Sundler *et al.*'s (2019) phenomenological thematic analysis process, we sought to achieve familiarity with the data through open-minded reading, searching for meanings and themes and finally organising themes into a coherent whole. To uphold the trustworthiness of the data, we constantly met and discussed any emerging discrepancies and continually asked ourselves Sundler *et al.*'s (2019) reflexive questions about the credibility and transferability of the research process.

## **7 Findings**

This section documents the key findings of the research. It outlines participants' experiences of SAERA and identifies what participants indicated were the factors influencing these experiences. The section also highlights the organisation's impact on individuals' academic trajectories and reports on participants' views on SAERA's role in building the next generation of scholars.

### **7.1 Positive Experiences**

Participants in the online survey were asked to describe their involvement with SAERA and their positive and negative experiences of this involvement. Significantly, no negative experiences were cited. Most of their experiences derived from the annual conference and online workshops. It also came to light that many ECRs were attending and presenting at a conference for the first time:

*I participated in a conference that took place in 2022. It was a great experience as it was my first time to present at that conference.*

Participants were generally enthusiastic about the fact that SAERA offered them practical skills and many networking and collaboration opportunities as can be seen in the comments below:

*I was lucky to attend a SAERA conference in 2021 and 2022 and I presented the paper in my 2022 attendance, I received constructive feedback from fellow scholars and that improved my academic writing.*

*I enjoyed the ECR workshop, and the SAERA conference gave me the opportunity to showcase my PhD research.*

Others focused more on personal experiences, including inspiration and positive growth. One respondent was enthusiastic about her ‘*motivation and mental preparation for PhD study*’, while another said: ‘*Since I joined SAERA, I have been experiencing positive growth in my research*’. A further comment referred to the opportunity to give shape to a ‘*quest for collaboration, learning and development*’.

Participants in the online workshop on writing articles also provided very positive reactions, using words like insightful, interactive, relevant, interesting, informative, and eye-opening, and provided explicit guidelines. The workshop evoked some reflection and emotion in some participants, with one participant saying:

*I participated in a workshop on writing from your PhD - the experience was positive in terms of reflecting on my journey post PhD, but also frustrating in realising that I have not published much since I completed my PhD.*

## **7.2 Networking**

It was clear that networking at the conference was a major factor contributing to the positive experiences expressed. This was in the form of networking with more experienced researchers, as well as with peers. On the point of exposure to more experienced researchers, respondents spoke of meeting other researchers, making contacts towards writing for publication, engaging with journal

editors, and getting feedback from others: *'Feedback and listening to experienced academics helped'*.

One participant had the opportunity to meet his supervisor for the first time in a face-to-face manner, as they had previously only communicated online. Academic feedback from others was also valued through listening to different presentations and receiving comments from the audience.

Participants were particularly enthusiastic about the value of meeting other emerging researchers. As one respondent put it:

*I met the novice researchers like myself who were nervous about standing in front of the audience and sharing their work. We managed to motivate and support each other during the sessions.*

### **7.3 Funding**

One of the major themes highlighted in the data was the need for funding for early career researchers in Southern Africa. SAERA often collaborates with other organisations to help the ECRs struggling to find funding for conference attendance. An example here was where SAERA partnered in 2022 with the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) to subsidise ten ECRs to attend the annual conference in Cape Town.

This funding played a major role in the participants' involvement. Some awardees attended the conference for the first time, while others presented their first academic paper. The participants mentioned that the funding also assisted and exposed them to networking and possible research collaborations. Two comments express this well:

*The NIHSS funding enabled me to present my work and get valuable feedback for my papers. Some colleagues expressed interest in my studies, and we exchanged contact details.*

*Attending the conference exposed me to new research undertaken by experienced colleagues and new scholars. The grant also helped to form new academic links and networks for future use.*

### **7.4 An Understanding of the ECR's Needs**

Another emerging theme was a sentiment that SAERA had a good understand-

ing of the ECRs' needs. Several ECRs reported the need to be understood and mentioned that SAERA had a better understanding of what they needed, as shown in the following comments:

*It is the eagerness to support emerging researchers as there is a great need to support us.*

*SAERA is so understanding and encouraging.*

The representation of the ECR constituency on the SAERA executive was noted as a particular strength:

*SAERA prioritises young and emerging scholars. Besides providing financial support to emerging scholars, it also creates a platform for young scholars to have a voice. For example, SAERA has a representative representing emerging scholars in the organisation's committee. During the conference, SAERA gives young scholars a chance to share their work (research) and get feedback from other scholars.*

A few participants mentioned the lack of relevant support from their institutions and the need for proper mentoring, such as that could be provided through SAERA: *'Inexperienced researchers at [my institution] cannot contribute to the professional and research development of novice researchers'*. Another participant revealed that he/she had an opportunity to network with fellows *'at least at my level while also learning from established scholars in several platforms'*.

Participants indicated an appreciation for SAERA's approach, highlighting the creation of an environment with a culture of collaboration and an openness to sharing resources and knowledge. This was contrasted with experiences in other conferences where they felt a lack of ECR involvement and inclusion, for example, one participant said *'many of the activities focused on established scholars (e.g., panel discussions/SARCHI. etc.)'*,

Another participant indicated that his/her institution follows many of the SAERA approaches in the faculty and workshops.

## ***7.5 Impact of Involvement with SAERA***

Respondents were asked whether their participation in SAERA had impacted in

any way on their own academic writing and/or research involvement. Participants mentioned the development of presentation skills, as well as improved writing skills that led to the successful publishing of an article. Another participant acknowledged the opportunity to showcase his PhD research at the SAERA conference.

Feedback from other conference attendees was highlighted as the major benefit to their academic trajectories:

*The comments from the audience were so good and helped me improve my presentation skills.*

*I have gone on to publish my presentation papers after benefitting from feedback from colleagues at conferences.*

The opportunity to engage with established scholars was a further factor that was felt to have made a significant difference in research development.

*I was able to engage in conversation with established scholars in researchers both nationally and internationally.*

*I learnt new research skills from experienced scholars.*

## **7.6 SAERA's Role in Building the Next Generation of Scholars**

Respondents from the online workshop on writing articles from their PhD were asked to suggest further topics for SAERA workshops. Suggested topics included plagiarism and citation, supervision of postgraduate students, choosing a relevant research design, methodology, and a mentoring programme. Significantly, all these suggested topics were for practical assistance, or what the CHE calls 'skills attributes' (2022: 22), highlighting the key concerns of this sample.

Respondents in the survey requested more opportunities for novice researchers to engage and collaborate with seasoned academics, especially to help those in less active research institutions. This would include investing in research capacity development and the coaching and mentoring of new researchers. Greater international collaboration was suggested, especially among SADC countries. At a practical level, it was suggested that SAERA

consider creating avenues for funding and knowledge sharing among early researchers.

The context of research production in South Africa is heavily driven by an incentive scheme whereby institutions and individuals are rewarded in monetary terms for published outputs. Two different perspectives on the role of SAERA here were noted. The first was from the perspective of working within the system:

*Allow papers to be submitted and reviewed before the conference so that ECRs can get conference proceedings' accreditation and incentives. The issue is that submitting and having an article published by the journal is extremely difficult, and this defeats the aim of SAERA, that of building a next layer of scholars who have published.*

This position was challenged from an alternative perspective, with the plea that SAERA:

*Become a champion for innovative and challenging research that addresses the real challenges of education in the global south rather than promoting publication for publication's sake. Research with real impact for beneficiaries.*

In broader terms, one respondent made a special plea for SAERA to play a role in advancing the values of society as a whole:

*We need competent future professors with an ethic of care and humility. SAERA is the perfect organisation to provide this kind of learning to beginner researchers.*

## **8 Discussion**

Our interest in this chapter has been to explore how early career researchers experience the work of SAERA, particularly those activities aimed at building research capacity. Underlying this is the broader aim of establishing a scholarly community based on critical and supportive engagement that can resist dominant practices of performativity and competition in academia. Based on the findings as outlined above, this section of the chapter reflects on the successes

and challenges of this endeavour, from the perspective of a group of ECRs.

The data reveal that SAERA has indeed had much success in promoting a culture of support and growth. The ECRs who were part of this study spoke consistently about how exposure to the organisation had motivated them in their scholarly work. This included feeling part of a broader community that included both experienced and novice researchers, participating in workshops, listening to and getting feedback on conference presentations and engaging in dialogue with others about their work. A contribution to funding was of particular significance to the ten ECRs who received it for the 2022 conference, in that it provided the opportunity to present their work and meet others that would otherwise not have been possible.

It would appear then that SAERA is being relatively successful in creating a space where research students and ‘experts’/ professors/ experienced researchers and academics can engage in a mutual dialogue. The organisation’s annual conference has been designed to transcend the much-spoken-about power relationships in academia by bringing participants at different levels of development and expertise from various contexts, research and education institutions together to share, present and discuss pertinent issues and to a certain extent, critique and improve each other’s research ideas and products. Such an approach has the potential to attain, what Thomas Salmon refers to as a ‘duty of care and fairness and responsibility for scientists and researchers of the future’ (interview, 3 March 2023).

As indicated earlier, SAERA makes extensive use of social media in promoting its activities. This approach ensures that resources are not privatised within institutions but are broadly accessible to a wide audience. Better marketing of such features could, however, probably be done if one notes that one respondent, clearly unaware of the many resources on the SAERA website, suggested that SAERA should ‘*consider creating avenues for funding and knowledge sharing among early researchers*’.

Boud and Lee (2005: 511) argue that a necessary feature of peer learning is that it is reciprocal. Within this symbiotic and co-productive relationship, the differential relations of power and authority and expertise are necessarily flattened out (Boud & Lee 2005). While power relations and hierarchies will always exist, some success in addressing this seems to be present in the work of SAERA. SAERA provides the framework to move out of the political and policy pressures existing in many institutions and creatively ushers both the early career researchers and experienced academics and researchers into a

space of positive critical engagement, inter-generational dialogue, and possible collaborations. Some of the activities that SAERA designs to build the next generation of scholars are indeed similar to those outlined by Boud and Lee (2005), in their call for networks of learning relationships.

The earlier part of this chapter outlined several barriers that exist to research promotion in South Africa, particularly of early career researchers. Clearly, SAERA's existence cannot wish these away, and all researchers are faced with systemic and institutional challenges. Structural restrictions cited in the literature include limitations on funding, the expense of in-person conferences, high teaching loads, and the expense of travel, while cultural challenges exist where there is a climate of individualism and performativity as the measure of success. However, it is noteworthy that, despite these challenges, the ECRs in this study remained enthusiastic, optimistic, and forward-looking, seeing the research opportunities provided to them as empowering and energising.

Arising from these findings, it is possible to identify some opportunities for SAERA in the future. It is clear that becoming a researcher is a collaborative, dynamic, developmental process which participants consider as worth holding on to. In this respect, it remains a priority to establish and maintain patterns of peer learning and collaboration and to advance the notion of networks of learning relationships between individuals and institutions. Further priorities are the insertion of ECR activities and orientation into the SAERA Special Interest Groups, to seek linkages with other organisations with similar goals and strategies, such as the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, and to build on the vast existing national network of research capacity building activities.

## **9 Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter is located within a policy imperative to advance research in South Africa, even as several systemic barriers to research promotion, especially of emerging researchers, are acknowledged. SAERA's commitment to research capacity-building and various strategies towards this end are outlined. The chapter describes the experiences of a sample of early career researchers who have participated in the activities of SAERA and presents the key roles of networking and funding as enabling factors in their development. A culture of collaboration within a supportive research environment is a further identified as

an enabling factor. The impact of participation in SAERA activities on these ECRs' research trajectories is presented, as well as their views on SAERA's role in building the next generation of researchers. Notions of peer learning and networked and distributed learning communities, as put forward by Boud and Lee (2005) form the theoretical framing of the paper. The lessons captured in this chapter and the recommendations drawn from the data significantly support the objective of this book, which is to foster a productive dialogue about effective approaches to fundamentally reform the postgraduate education sector on the African continent.

The framework for capacity building developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as cited by Lee and Kuzhabekova (2019), forms a useful way of summarising the conclusions of this study. The UNDP distinguishes between three levels of capacity building: 1) individual; 2) entity; and 3) system (UNDP 1998 2008). According to Lee and Kuzhabekova (2019) research capacity building at the individual level is the most common one in practice because many projects focus on training individuals. In their own study, participants identified infrastructure and funding as key strategies of capacity building. In a similar vein, they are critical of a deficit view of research development where 'practitioners and scholars conceive research capacity building mainly as a one-way process whereby experts impart knowledge to recipients' (Mark & Nakabugo 2011, cited in Lee and Kuzhabekova 2019: 346).

The findings of our study have shown the limitations of a narrow conception of capacity-building. Our argument that 'an accounting of publications, patents and doctorates does not fully capture the complexity of capacity building' (Lee & Kuzhabekova 2019: 343) resonates with extant literature. While not denying the essential role of resources and infrastructure, we would argue for greater attention to building cultures of collaboration and support that allow for the flourishing of peer networks and reciprocal learning. In this way, the emphasis moves from seeing the purpose of research capacity-building as shifting from 'what is produced [outputs] to the production of the person who produces' (Lee & Boud 2009: 97).

It is encouraging to note that this approach is in line with some of the recommendations made by the CHE in its review of doctoral programmes. These recommendations include mentoring, where experienced individuals (who are not the main supervisors but are academically qualified) offer the student advice, informal support, and wisdom (complementary to formal

supervision). A second priority is what the CHE calls engaged scholarship, where programmes ‘have, as their purpose, ways of enabling students to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and communities outside of their immediate research group’ (CHE 2022: 48).

Such an approach is, in our view, a more sustainable and embedded way to approach SAERA’s goal of establishing vigorous and responsive epistemic communities. In terms of the three levels of capacity-building of the UNDP, we believe that individual growth will flourish within such an environment, thus impacting the entity (the institution) as well as the system. As more young researchers advance in their careers, it will add to the pool of experienced researchers in the country. Such strategies, we believe, can make a meaningful contribution to postgraduate education within the African context.

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# 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 productively. 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 activating 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 reimaginings 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* (section 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 indictments. 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)<sup>1</sup>.

## **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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 *relationally*, 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 ascendance 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.

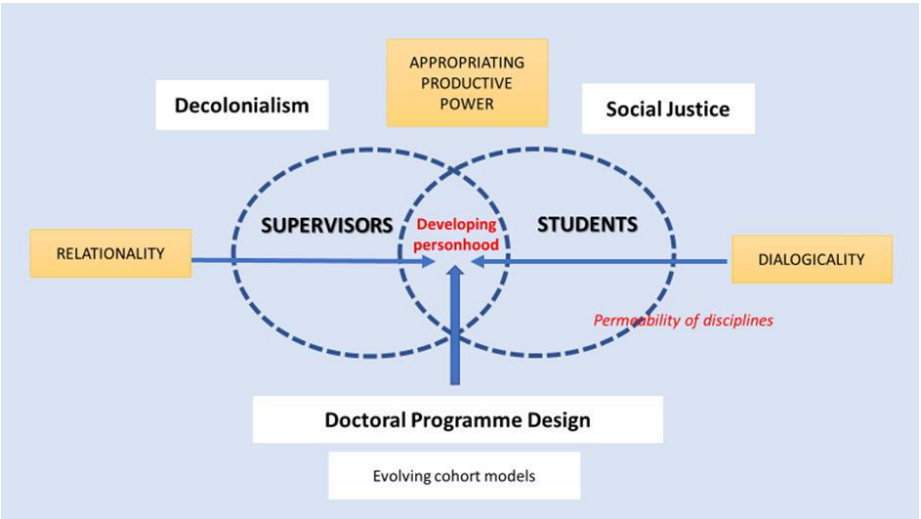
*Thirdly*, the supervisory - student dyads can be arranged in multiple formats, each of which embeds contested manifestations of power.

*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 legitimacy'* 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'<sup>2</sup>. 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-

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<sup>2</sup> <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 co-ordinated 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 unlearned and re-learned. 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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## CHAPTER 10

# Transition into Transnational Postgraduate Education: Reflections from Programme Facilitators

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### Abstract

The present chapter examines, through the lens of two transnational partnerships (located within North-South and South-South contexts), the possibilities for strengthening student transition into postgraduate studies in education. Drawing from the experiences of facilitators across three transnational postgraduate programmes, namely a Master of Arts in Education, a professional doctorate in education (EdD) and a PhD in Education, it reflects on what has been learned with respect to the barriers and enablers to transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate learning, highlighting aspects of transnational education which could prove to be supportive of strong student outcomes. The paper thus re-situates the debate on postgraduateness, responding to the critique of postgraduate education being much talked about but misunderstood. The chapter has implications for exploring how institutional partnerships across Africa could enhance transition into postgraduate studies because it

offers a space for modelling out expectations of collaboration, sustained dialogue, critique, shared understanding of epistemological and methodological rigour and intercultural sensitivity which cohere with the attributes expected of postgraduate education.

**Keywords:** Transnational education, Postgraduate learning, Partnerships, Collaborative work

## **1 Introduction**

Transnational education (TNE) is a specific form of International Education (IE) where the programmes move to the students, rather than students moving to the institutions which offer the programmes (Knight & McNamara 2017). Sending countries which have successfully extended their international reach include the UK, Australia, Germany, France and the US, as well as Qatar, China, Malaysia and Singapore, with enrolment hitting the thousands (Buckner *et al.* 2022; Kosmutzhy & Putty 2016). Although undergraduate studies represent the largest recruitment, especially in engineering, medical and computer sciences, postgraduate programmes are garnering interest (Alam *et al.* 2022). These are often proposed under collaborative arrangements whose resulting programmes of study can be in the form of a joint or dual award between an international higher education institution (HEI) and a local private or public HEI, as a response to the demands for more affordable study options for low and middle income. The anticipated gains reside in the financial advantages from recruitment, the influence and reputational dividend, legitimacy and branding, especially through the establishment of branch campuses (Tight 2022). TNE offers a range of value-added in terms of building research capacity and promoting cultural understanding (McNamara and Knight 2014; Hoare 2013). It has also been politically appropriated to create support for policies related to the development of a student and knowledge hub, as in the case of countries like Singapore and Malaysia.

The challenges facing African education are multiple, ranging from chronic under-resourcing and its impact on the quality of outcomes especially at postgraduate levels, as this is strongly linked to research capacity and quality of faculty (Knight & Woldegiorgis 2017). The project of Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence represents an attempt to enhance postgraduate provisions across more than 50 universities in 20 African countries. However,

in the literature, drop out at the level of master's programmes is 12%, 40% in doctoral education (Rotem, Yair & Shustat 2021). Objective factors which explain attrition are related to the demands of full-time enrolment (Barry & Mathies 2011). Cohen and Greenberg (2011) argue that academic and social integration constitutes an important factor in the persistence of postgraduate students. It echoes the four elements of Tinto's (1987) conceptual model: a feeling of estrangement, disappointment with the expectations of being challenged, feeling at home within the university (O'Keefe 2013); and institutionally hospitable environment, with the latest factor having more significant impact. Interest in TNE is also increasing on the African continent especially among those who are seeking career enhancement opportunities through flexible formats. The higher demand for transnational provision is also associated with the higher prestige and mobility of international awards. In 2021, out of the 510,835 students who were enrolled on TNE programmes in the UK, 56,140 were hosted in African countries. 63% were from Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa, with Mauritius being one of the top ten providers (Kigotho 2022).

## **2 Postgraduate Provisions in the Field of Education in the Mauritian Context**

Mauritius has developed a multipronged strategy to expanding TNE based on independent and collaborative programmes and provision, through franchise programmes, dual/ joint degrees, and/or through the setting up of a branch campus with a local partner. Not all of these formats necessarily involve shared academic responsibility for programme design and outcomes, as the management of the quality may rest predominantly with the international partner.

The rise in national tertiary enrolments at the turn of this century evidenced by a Gross Tertiary enrolment ratio of 50%, has been accompanied by a steady rise in postgraduate enrolment which stands at 15.4 % for the year 2020-2021 at 5,0339 (Knight & Motala-Timol 2021). Education, as a discipline, accounts for 9% of total yearly new enrolment, with taught postgraduate enrolment accounting for the larger share of higher degrees (Higher Education Commission 2022). Transnational postgraduate provision constitutes a smaller share of total enrolment, given the much higher cost of postgraduate awards even when delivered in flexible modes.

In the discipline of education, master's level study was first offered through a partnership between the University of Brighton (UoB) and the Mauritius Institute of Education allowing some 500 school teachers to earn higher qualifications (Mariaye *et al.* 2022). At the turn of this century, similar provision was offered by the University of Technology, the University of Mauritius and more recently, the Open University, the University of Mauritius and a host of private providers making the Master of Arts in Education programme one of the most preferred choices of postgraduate study, together with the MBA (Higher Education Commission 2022). Doctoral provision however, first appeared on Mauritian campuses after 2010, again through a partnership offering by the University of Brighton, which expanded the existing postgraduate portfolio with the MIE, by means of a Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD). This was later supplemented by a second doctoral programme (PhD), similarly provided through a transnational partnership with the School of Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (Samuel & Mariaye 2014). Public universities in Mauritius also offer doctoral degrees in education through their respective faculties but uptake has been relatively less, given the demands of doctoral education.

Whilst the professional affordances of postgraduate education are becoming increasingly acknowledged (Sbaffi & Bennett 2019) within the context of knowledge economies, higher education institutions continue to experience challenges in resourcing programmes adequately and facilitating student transitions into postgraduate studies, despite efforts to set up dedicated structures which acknowledge the specific requirements for learning the skills set expected (Crane *et al.* 2016; Steele 2015). Student surveys reveal the manifold difficulties such as academic writing, understanding of the research language, autonomy and criticality, indicating the steep learning curve for students (McPherson *et al.* 2017).

For students who are registered on transnational programmes, the transition may be further complicated given the need to understand and meet the expectations of learning of a foreign institution, adapting to new sets of rules and policies they may be totally unfamiliar with, and adjusting to the supervisory relationship within novel pedagogic and administrative frameworks (Sun *et al.* 2022; Menzies & Baron 2014; Chapman & Pyvis 2013).

However, there are equally interesting possibilities for enhancing students learning within the collaborative spaces of partnerships through the cross fertilization of approaches and the extension of best practices across

contexts (Mariaye *et al.* 2022; Barnes *et al.* 2021). Extant literature on collegial practices within partnerships signals the merits of professional learning nested within cross-institutional and cross-cultural contexts which impact positively on student learning (Shagrir 2017). With the expectations of postgraduate education being constructed around complexity, creativity and autonomy, TNE has added value in enabling students to interact with peers and tutors across diverse practices, realities and worldviews.

The purpose of this chapter is not to celebrate the practices being engaged with, but rather use experience to problematize the nature of postgraduate learning and the practices which are currently in place. The argument presented is that TNE contexts offer an ideal terrain to explore the issues around postgraduate education because collaborative arrangements across radically different cultural, legal, historical and institutional contexts make more demands on the need to articulate and justify positions. Working together implies becoming conscious of differences and negotiating with partners about every single aspect of the curriculum, and achieving a coherent approach to generate expected student outcomes. It also affords an added opportunity for collaborative work to be enacted and modelled for students.

### **3 Transitioning to Postgraduate Learning**

In Mauritius, as in other countries, the distinction between postgraduate and undergraduate studies is embedded in the qualifications level descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework which defines the level of expected learning outcomes. The difference is often framed in terms of criticality, complexity, research skills, depth of specialist knowledge demonstrated, as well as autonomy and creative problem-solving in non-routine situations through research inquiry and development of innovative procedures and methods (Barnes *et al.* 2022; McPherson *et al.* 2017).

Transition from undergraduate to postgraduate level is experienced as a learning challenge by many students, although they expect workloads to be heavier and more intense, especially if the expectations are not made clear enough and adaptation time is short. Tobbell *et al.* (2010) considered transition as a process of negotiating complex identities through the experiences of communities of practice and broader valued institutional practices. They argued against the view that students joining postgraduate courses are already ‘experts’ by virtue of their undergraduate success. Recognising the deep learner identity

shift required, has implications for the ways in which pedagogical support is organised to ‘mind’ the multiple discontinuities as students learn to become members of a different community (Tobbell *et al.* 2010). Current literature indicates that while other aspects of educational transitions have been documented, transition to postgraduate studies has not been as deeply explored, with only a few studies on doctoral students and some focussed on taught master’s level provision. The claim that postgraduate students are already experts persists despite Tobell *et al.*’s (2010) work more than a decade ago, as it is regarded that there is little change in students’ educational environment. However, Heussi (2012) and McPherson *et al.* (2017) contest this assumption, highlighting the following discontinuities may characterise postgraduate studies:

1. Firstly, the students may have completed their undergraduate studies in another university, possibly from another country, in case of international or transnational students.
2. Secondly, students may be crossing over disciplinary boundaries. Entry to master’s level courses in education may be open to applicants who do not necessarily have a background in education.
3. Thirdly, they could have a background in vocational sector and as such, may not totally be familiar with higher education culture and environments. Added to the shift in environment integration in a new community also poses a set of challenges, if expectations are not made clear at the onset and deliberate effort is not put into creating opportunities for interaction and creating a sense of belonging.
4. Fourthly, unlike doctoral studies which span a longer period of time, master’s students have limited time to achieve a complex set of target research and specialist knowledge.

The term ‘postgraduateness’ invokes those specified features in relation to expectations of autonomy and criticality developed by means of different types of student-student and student-teacher interactions, and modes of assessment within the context of a dense workload, for which undergraduate experience does not really prepare learners. Anxiety and stress often result

(McPherson *et al.* 2017; Heussi 2012) as an outcome of the ‘shock’ of the new social and cognitive challenges (Neves 2022), giving rise to what is referred to as the ‘imposter syndrome’. Menzies and Baron (2014) posit further that transitioning into an online environment adds an additional layer of complexity to masters’ study, by requiring a supplementary type of transition for those students who completed their undergraduate education in a face-to-face mode (Lemay, Bazelaïs & Doleck 2021). Although technology has become an integral part of master’s level studies, there is little research on how it supports learning (Robb & Moffat 2020), how ready students are, even when it is planned, and how it is likely to be more disruptive for staff and students if it is unplanned.

#### **4 Student Experiences of International and Transnational Programmes**

Students registered on international postgraduate programmes identified a range of concerns that are related to either the programmatic expectations of learning or the particular life circumstances associated with settling in economically, socially and culturally in a foreign country. International students also find it challenging to understand the expectations associated with the new rules and how these will be performed within the university context (Liu & Zhu 2020; Chapman & Pyvis 2013). Given the varied circumstances of postgraduate international students and their diverse profiles in terms of age and professional contexts, the quality of their engagement and the challenges faced are likely to be different across disciplines and groups (Neves 2022).

While transnational students registered with a foreign university in their home country may be advantaged in terms of cultural acclimatisation, the issues experienced remain largely similar to those on more traditional, international programmes, specifically those associated with expectations of criticality and cognitive autonomy. These are arguably more pronounced when postgraduate students have studied in a local context, where learning cultures are still rooted in a more teacher/knowledge-centred approach to teaching and learning, even at undergraduate level. The first few months are likely to be experienced as destabilising for many who find the costs of unlearning past practices onerous (Van der Rijst *et al.* 2022).

Increasingly, TNE programmes are delivered in a range of modes requiring the use of technological skills to operate in an online environment. However, while these technical skills can be rapidly developed, the learning

skills which are required to be a successful online learner are far more complex, involving the enhancement of cognitive and social skills, and teacher presence (Kreijns *et al.* 2014) through careful instructional design and curricular adaptation appropriate for postgraduate level work. The success of TNE programmes, experienced through online modes of delivery, varies from institution to institution and across programmes. Despite the fact that a common platform may be used for both home and foreign students, the online readiness of students as it is understood and expected from the transnational education provider may not reflect realities of local students in terms of internet penetration and speed, and their understanding of online engagement (Alam *et al.* 2022; Kanwar & Carr 2020).

For programmes which are delivered under partnership arrangements, complications may arise out of organisational compatibilities in terms of values, expectations, structures and practices, notwithstanding divergences created by discontinuities in the legal frameworks and economic and political ambitions of each partner. How these are understood and managed may create further transition issues for students (Ma & Montgomery 2021).

The foreign collaborating institution is likely to be larger than the local higher education institution, and may often be dealing with a range of partners across differing contexts. The local institution may find itself in a relationship of compliance, on account of imbalances and lack of equity in terms of reputational power and prestige. Control of the academic aspects of the programme may rest with faculty located on the main campus, with only second-hand knowledge of the local contexts and students. This can then result in curricular provisions which are not meaningful for students and local faculty alike (Hoare 2013; Chan 2011).

Administratively, the partnership may be handled by an office which oversees a number of similar arrangements. The implications for students are manifold. *First*, they have to navigate complex regulatory frameworks which govern registration and progress mediated through local intermediaries. If these are not made sufficiently clear or appear incoherent between institutions, it can result in significant delays which, in turn, can be a source of additional stress and anxiety (Stafford & Taylor 2016). *Second*, with high rates of staff turnover in larger organisations, disruptions in supervisory arrangements could also mean delays in progress. *Third*, equitable access to resources, though often guaranteed under the partnership agreement, may not always translate seamlessly in practice, resulting in weaker integration of transnational students

into the academic life of the main campus. All this then has the potential for differential and fragmented learning experiences for students, making the transition even harder (Van der Rijst 2022; Liu & Zhu 2020).

## **5 Three Postgraduate Transnational Programmes**

### ***5.1 The Master of Arts in Education (MA Education) Programme [Part-time]***

The MA Education programme offered by the Mauritius Institute of Education in partnership with the University of Brighton is a two-year, part-time programme offered to working professionals in the field of education. It is a cohort-based model, accommodating an annual intake of 20 students. It is co-delivered under collaborative arrangements, with staff from both institutions team-teaching, co-marking and co-supervising. The modules are in a synchronous, remote mode, supplemented by online tutorial with the presence of partner tutors. A critical support group system has been set in place with groups of about five students meeting regularly, without supervision to discuss their assignments and research projects.

### ***5.2 The Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) [Part-time]***

Offered since 2011 on the Mauritius Institute of Education campus, the programme builds on the model of the MA Education, although the cohorts are ostensibly smaller, with 3 to 8 students, who work under co-supervision arrangements between the collaborating institutions. Students who are educational professionals, working in different contexts, complete taught modules in the first three years, in preparation for a move onto the thesis study for the next three years.

### ***5.3 The PhD (Education) [Full-time]***

This University of KwaZulu-Natal doctoral programme is delivered jointly with the Mauritius Institute of education and offered to larger cohorts of 20 students, who are afforded four years to complete their thesis, with the provision of an additional year based on supervisor recommendation. They are also placed in supervisory teams of 2 to 3 supervisors, with one supervisor being appointed from the local team.

## **6 Student Transition in Three Transnational Postgraduate Programmes**

Based on our experiences as leads and tutors on the programmes, we report here on some issues which have been repeatedly foregrounded in assessment and planning meetings, discussion with other tutors, and the students themselves during staff-students meetings or tutorial meetings. These themes, which relate to transition issues, have been clustered in four overarching categories which are presented in an exploratory rather than explanatory manner. Similarly, in the following section, we discuss some of the practices which we have found to be useful in easing students into transition at postgraduate level.

### ***6.1 On Preparedness for Postgraduate Studies***

The diversity of student experience generally, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, explains the large differences in entry knowledge and skills of students. For the field of education, this is even more conspicuous on account of the broad range of disciplines with differing epistemological and methodological traditions which are deemed as being relevant or related to education. Added to this, is the often expansive approach to accepting what constitutes adequate and appropriate prior learning and the diverse routes to postgraduate programmes. Some undergraduate and even taught master's programmes do not have a strong research component which could have, in some ways, evened out the wide disparities which have been noted by facilitators across the three programmes considered here. While it is true that not all undergraduate programmes and taught, professional master's programmes have or should have a strong research orientation, it is equally true that the integration of research skills in its most elementary form in terms of the use of evidence to substantiate arguments and the critical use of literature and theories, remain generic undergraduate attributes across disciplines. Yet, classroom interactions and initial assignments submitted for both formative and summative purposes reveal a worrying cluster towards the lower end of the spectrum; a trend which appears to confirm itself across cohorts.

Students' understanding of the nature of postgraduate learning is strongly coloured by previous experiences of what passes as academic work. While it is common that students expect that more resources and effort will have to be put in on account of the higher level of cognitive demands, many struggle with the experienced gap between their current aptitudes and the minimum

expectations in terms of scholarly writing. Significant unlearning of previous practices is often also required although many tend to hold on to unscholarly practices which were successfully used, especially those related to paraphrasing, reporting and describing, rather than argument development. While there has been an initial response from tutors, supervisors and facilitators alike to leave much of this learning to the students to develop on their own, this process had to be somehow integrated within the formal curriculum. There is, nevertheless, a cost to this decision in terms of time and resources but the price of not attending early on to unproductive habits can be excessively high from a programmatic perspective.

## **6.2 *On Student Resilience***

University processes with respect to the administrative management of postgraduate studies, are conditioned by wider considerations of optimizing resources and performance, as well as the setting up of coherent procedures across faculty and departments. This can often translate into a heavy administrative load, as decisions need to be taken and validated at various instances. The ‘communication loop’ back to students takes longer if there are two institutions involved. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the process of obtaining ethical clearance required for field work. The process involves supervisors and students in the first instance, moving subsequently to an ethics committee, which could potentially sit outside the immediate faculty. A second feedback loop is triggered with the process taking, in the worst cases a few months. The consequences of this have been far-reaching and impacting detrimentally on student progress, delaying the data collection process and requiring students to creatively make adjustments. Some students have been compelled to interrupt/suspend their studies and in an extreme case one student has dropped out of the course because of the high levels of anxiety and stress the delay occasioned.

A noted issue has also been the harmonization of ethical clearance procedures and ethical considerations. The nature of what constitutes an ethical risk depends in a large measure on the legal provisions of the context within which the research is being carried out, as well as what the universities consider to be acceptable with respect to their own principles and values. These are embodied in the procedures, the criteria for what constitutes acceptable risk to organisations and individuals. While the values and principles related to respect,

responsibility, fairness and freedom cut across institutions in the main, it is in the specificities of each case as it unfolds in the context that divergence may occur. Current experience indicates how educational research outcomes are being politically read by authorities who exercise considerable gatekeeping power through the setting up of new procedures to assess not only the risk to participants, but also the risks to policymakers. Such layering of procedures makes the transition even more challenging for collaborating institutions, as students have to work within a triple layer of ethical parameters, one of which is located within the broader political discourse of the local context.

### ***6.3 Students' Response to Transition***

While each individual student is bound to respond differently on account of their own professional circumstances, as well as their own learning history and trajectory, we have noted two sets of contrasting responses to the exigencies of postgraduate work. At one end of the spectrum is the response of collective survival, based on the understanding that chances are considerably augmented if one is part of a group. It is premised on the effort which needs to be put in to meet the requirements, giving up on old patterns of thinking and habits. By finding a supportive critical support group, many students eventually overcome transition and progressively learning not only the performances, but also alternative modes of being and becoming a postgraduate learner.

The other response is to remain in the transition mode, in a kind of 'twilight zone' between undergraduate and postgraduate work. Because TNE is expensive and often privately financed, the pressure to meet the performance expectations could lead students to develop 'beat the system strategies', mimicking postgraduateness and perhaps even meeting the requirements but not really being transformed in terms of autonomy and criticality. A significant number of casualties result from not understanding the requirements in terms of *being* and *becoming*, and committing the time and the effort to engage with the complexity of postgraduate learning.

These responses are not unconnected to the purposes of postgraduate programmes in education and how they are considered in transnational contexts, where the intentions of the local partner, the home university and the expectations of the students could be pointing in different directions, all of which are arguably legitimate and sensible, but equally problematic in terms of the research capacity agenda of postgraduate education. For students, the

credentialing opportunity offered that would put them ahead of the competition for a promotion or any such career advancement opportunities, tends to be the dominating consideration; for the collaborating institutions, recruitment, soft power and prestige can be the expected benefits; for faculty, students' research functioning may be a more sought-after objective not unconnected though with faculty own professional agenda.

Our experience reveals that students who attend regularly and engage in spaces where expected academic behaviours are modelled, and become familiar with the way that student work is included, acknowledged and rewarded, develop a sharper and more focused sense, learning a 'way' of being that predisposes them to develop and perform postgraduateness. So, the seminar room and the classroom are resources in supporting these transitions into developing postgraduate identity, discourses, practices and knowledge which assist and are constituents of the cognitive processes involved. This is no less than a cultural knowledge transition embedded in the quality of the bond-nurturing collegial relationships.

Transnational provisions offer an opportunity for postgraduate students to expand these spaces beyond the limits of the local contexts, to accommodate peers with diverse worldviews and realities, and to hear alternative viewpoints which challenge their own. However, whether the creation of this community would materialize depends on the programmatic structures set up to develop an expanding network of relationships.

#### ***6.4 On Quality Supervision and Teaching at Postgraduate Level in Transnational Programmes***

The cognitive transition to be achieved remains perhaps the most exciting and yet poorly understood aspect of postgraduate transition. However, what is less uncertain is the role played by strong faculty to mediate and scaffold the process and understand how teaching/supervision at postgraduate level 'works'. Although the modes of pedagogy and educational activity are different in teaching and supervision, they coalesce to produce effective student outcomes. Subordination of teaching at postgraduate level to the research activities of faculty, or not understanding that postgraduate supervision is a form of teaching, could limit student learning. Supervisory conversations reveal how academic work is constructed, authorised and represented. Thus, the thought, thinking, and conversational patterns emerging out of supervision are academic

practices which cohere with other existing established spaces and forms of learning.

Ensuring that faculty across institutions understand how postgraduateness can be developed in a variety of academic forums/spaces, where these behaviours are modelled, is certainly a challenge within one institution and, more so, when partners from other organizations are involved. For one, finding local supervisors in the area of specialisation has not been without caveats. Facilitators have found it good practice to develop collegial ties among the supervisory groups, to ensure coherence as to how expectations about postgraduate work is understood and communicated. Sharing of experiences and ongoing discussions about each student's progression enables the articulation and internal discussion of how as a group, supervisors are interpreting the criteria for quality postgraduate work.

## **7 Managing Transition under Transnational Partnership Arrangements**

### ***7.1 Avoiding the Double Administration Load***

Recognising the added difficulty in managing information flow with two separate administrations working with different structures, time scales and sets of rules and regulations in place, more attention has been paid to how the administrative processes are cleared and adequate communication between the structures developed. This also includes the financial arrangements to be made and communicated to administrative sections of both institutions. While this synchrony worked well in the case of two of the programmes, a lack of clarity around procedures and high administrative staff turnover on account of organizational restructuring did generate a fair measure of confusion resulting in delays in registration and processing of students' request in the case of the third programme. Attention has to be paid to explicitly laying down the processes for staff and students alike, with a proviso for changes in rules and regulations to be immediately communicated and discussed with all parties concerned.

### ***7.2 Building in Transition Support in the Curriculum***

One of the issues indicated in the literature regarding international student transition relates to student acclimatisation to the expectations of learning and

approaches to teaching, a process which can be rendered more challenging if student previous experience is more frontal; didactic literature on transnational transitions reveal differences in the experience of domestic and foreign students. The latter, apart from the issue of language adaptation, sometimes struggle with academic writing while having to balance studies with external commitments emanating from personal and professional circumstances. A large proportion of students across all cohorts appear to find achieving this balance a challenge, which results in the inability to meet deadlines for submission of assignments or written work, interruption/suspension of studies and registration, extensions, and applications for mitigating circumstances, all of which are institutional mechanisms in place to assist students towards completion. Attrition rates for the doctoral programme, though comparable to international statistics have been a source of institutional concern and called for action on both provisions for the MIE-UoB partnership and the MIE-UKZN programme. These included foregrounding academic and critical writing workshops (at least four times a year) and the provision of academic enrichment sessions for those who require additional support. The fluctuating attendance on these workshops continues to baffle, despite the fact that students still demand support.

### ***7.3 Managing Neocolonialism***

Student learning appears to be particularly challenging in the context of the use of ‘Anglo pedagogy’ within what remains in the Mauritian setting, a largely Asian learning culture, alimented through a highly elitist and performance-oriented primary, secondary and undergraduate education culture. Despite the fact that students register on postgraduate TNE programmes, seeking a foreign learning credential and expertise, they still remain fully entrenched in all pervading local culture which Healey (2018), and Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) call ‘a “transient” bubble’ of foreign culture, which students experience for only part of each day, resulting in conflicts of identity and adjustments difficulties. We are conscious, in this analysis, of the power equation that may be operating at various levels in transnational provisions, which ‘sets up’ the foreign expertise and professionalism (Compton & Alsford 2022). This is an aspect of TNE work that local facilitators had to factor in the design of the curriculum itself.

Team planning, teaching and sustained conversations between teams of supervisors and facilitators did contribute to what we think was enhanced

coherence in programme delivery. Some students reported positive experience of the collaborative work of tutors (Mariaye *et al.* 2022) which was supported by a system of three-way communication among student and tutors from both institutions by means of email and online meetings. This, however, did not work in all cases, often where students chose to work exclusively with the foreign tutor for varied reasons, ranging from perceived superior professionalism, the belief that they are buying in an international and not a local service, or even personal affinities. On the other hand, some students liaised more frequently with the local tutor who is more accessible for face-to-face meetings and more knowledge of the context. In many cases, local tutors have brokered the challenges for students, translating the expectations more effectively on account of their knowledge of what the students had as local higher education experience and professional practice.

We argue the co-presence of local and international faculty works well in terms of foregrounding the importance of collaborative work in achieving desired outcomes. The postgraduate classroom, in TNE settings is thus a space that is essentially transcultural in nature. Students and tutors come to the TNE situation with agency derived from their own values, goals, motivation and educational experience, which are deployed and renegotiated (Djerasimovic 2014). Current literature reveals that TNE could be a space for collaboration and transformation if nurtured through trust, reciprocity and collegial relationships (Compton & Alsford 2022).

#### **7.4 *Changing Relationships***

Transitioning to postgraduate education involves shifts in relationships. From a knowledge perspective, students are encouraged to re-negotiate their own relationship with knowledge, knowing and learning, to reposition themselves as the ones who assign meaning and value to the ideas of others in relation to their own. Many find the process of developing their own ideas a challenge, having spent much of their previous studies ‘wearing the robes of other people’s thought’. The experienced vulnerability of having to grow their own intellectual skin can be destabilizing in the transition period. We have found that formative assessment tasks, coupled with the practices of encouraging students to work initially around an annotated bibliography, helps to give a sense of the scope of the field and what could potentially be their choice of focus. More importantly though, renegotiating the relationship with theory, has been the biggest stone in

the shoe of many students as they transition to postgraduateneess. Shifting from understanding of theory as a frame that is meant to be applied, to an understanding of theory as a cognitive lens and tool, often represents one of the biggest challenges. Strategies deployed across programmes have focused on encouraging students to expand their theoretical repertoire in early stages, as they consider competing theories and models from the perspective of their own experience. Reading critiques of well-established theories is also an additional avenue to take critical distance from preferred theoretical postures. The advantage of the transnational supervisory teams has been the overture afforded on account of supervisors' diverse international backgrounds and access to a range of literature.

From a pedagogical perspective, students are also encouraged to progressively move into a more equal relationship with their tutors on the strength of their reading and developing understanding of their field of study, as well as their more nuanced interpretation of practices. Activating voice in pedagogical relationship is possible if spaces are programmatically offered to exercise it. This is likely to be more successful if students exercise voice in a semi-public space like a critical support group, which consists of at most five students, before moving to the seminar room. Our experience of the most successful students are those who learn quickly to be an insider in such spaces.

## **8 On Forms of Transitions and Transnationality**

Looking back on our shared work in designing, teaching and assessing three transnational programmes, we recognize weak and strong versions of our experience based on our observations, discussions and interactions with staff and students.

We highlight possibilities of weak and strong transitions being dependent on a set of personal, institutional and programmatic factors. Personal factors relate to personal and professional motivations such as personal development, professional and career intentions, and credentials. The value the institution assigns to postgraduate students in terms of allocating resources and facilities is also key. Programmatic factors refer to the curriculum design, tutor input, support system in terms of specific and individualized support, availability of student-led spaces, communication, quality of feedback, and possibilities for contextualizing learning.

Transnational education could also be interpreted as weak or strong,

based on the nature of interactions between local and foreign facilitators; connectedness among tutors in terms of planning, implementation and assessment of programmes; collegiality, trust and reciprocity; intercultural competence; and contextual awareness.

Building an African scholarship is then constructed in dialogue with multiple partners from both the Global North and South. We posit that strong forms of TNE offers a space for modelling out expectations of collaboration, sustained dialogue, critique, shared understanding of epistemological and methodological rigour, and intercultural sensitivity, which cohere with the attributes expected of postgraduate education. For this to happen transnational higher education would need to strategically move away from a partnership posture focusing only on strategic development for institutions to expand provision, gain soft power and prestige, towards a more collaborative stance seeking to enhance professionalism through mutually beneficial capacity development, and intercultural understanding across the continent.

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# CHAPTER 11

## Why Core Values are the Way Forward in Doctoral Education

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### Abstract

Moving away from the concept of a globally converging doctoral education model, this chapter explains the context for and importance of proclaiming a global core value system as a way forward for doctoral education in both the Global North and Global South. The description of the process for developing this value-based concept, the enumeration of changes that occurred during the past two decades, and the convening of an international workshop and conference provide a foundation and model for future open communication and critical debate between generations within the doctoral education community. Moving beyond a discussion of disciplinary expertise within the academic system and across continents, the contribution of this chapter is to encourage early career researchers, their supervisors, university administrators, and funders of doctoral education to consider seven key recommendations for building, renewing, and reforming their local and national doctoral education systems.

**Keywords:** Doctoral education system, value-based postgraduate concepts, early career researchers, doctoral supervisors, ecology of knowledges, overcoming inequalities, social justice.

### 1 Introduction

While writing this chapter, I paid extra attention to finding the right voice. As a senior woman scholar from the Global North, I do not want to lecture or come

across as inappropriately authoritative, as has been the case with many voices from the Global North. Rather, I want to speak in a manner that respectfully conveys the many lessons that have been learned within the broad field of doctoral education – both the mistakes my colleagues and I have made, as well as the exhilarating moments of discovery, intended policy changes in graduate school operations, and positive outcomes obtained by mentoring doctoral students who are transitioning to the next professional stage after completion of their degree.

With 35 years of research experience in doctoral education around the world, including the Global South, I understand that the next generation of researchers and their supervisors need to forge their own way. However, I also believe they may be interested in the lessons my colleagues and I have learned and the value-driven framework we have proposed for an inclusive doctoral education process, successful training of researchers, and a research product that is of societal value. In the context of this chapter, when I speak of ‘we’, I am referring specifically to the five colleagues with whom I planned and coordinated an international workshop and conference on ‘the forces and forms of doctoral education worldwide’ in Hanover, Germany, in 2019<sup>1</sup>. We subsequently wrote and edited an open-source book on the subject (Nerad *et al.* 2022), in which we concluded that focusing on a set of global core values in doctoral education is a possible way forward. Although the Hannover recommendations did not specifically discuss transforming postgraduate research within Africa, they were developed with relevant input from and the perspective of experts and early career researchers from the Global South and may well offer a way for-ward for African educators.

After an overview of the background and context for this chapter, I will explain how we arrived at a set of global core values, rather than proposing a converging doctoral education model and best practices. Then I will present our major research findings and the seven Hannover recommendations for doctoral education worldwide that grew out of those findings as the result of an intergenerational, interdisciplinary, and integrative process. Finally, I will describe how a group of international early career researchers (ECRs; doctoral students, postdocs, and mid-career academic professionals), including three ECRs from Africa, who were involved in the creation of the core value recommendations, grappled with them, and how they see themselves moving forward using the core value set. I will conclude with warnings and hopes. On

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<sup>1</sup> Hannover (2019), <https://www.doctoral-education.info/documents.php>

the one hand, I warn of the threat to a transparent and clear quality-assurance process if governmental incentives are misused to increase the number of PhDs awarded. On the other hand, I feel hopeful that a sustainable, socially just future in diverse contexts and systems of higher education, including African doctoral education, can be encouraged by the energetic, thoughtful next generation of researchers and their committed mentors.

## 2 Overview of Background and Context

Much has changed since the turn of the 21st century, when the Center for Innovation and Research in Graduate Education (CIRGE) at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA, with a grant from the US National Science Foundation and the US Ford Foundation, organized an international workshop in 2005 that assessed the forces and forms of change in doctoral education worldwide for the first time. We foresaw the emergence of a unified set of standards for doctoral education worldwide; the book resulting from that first workshop was titled *Towards a Global PhD?* (2008)?<sup>2</sup>

Most governments view knowledge as a critical national resource for economic growth, innovation, prosperity, and international competitiveness (Carnoy *et al.* 2013; Dill & Van Vught 2010; Godin 2009; Kehm & Teichler 2016; Maheu *et al.* 2014; OECD 2013). As a result – albeit often in simplistic ways – governments use doctoral and postdoctoral education as a means to train innovators (Bunting *et al.* 2015; Chien & Chapman 2014). Some have provided substantial funding for efforts to build a national capacity for research and development, and quality assurance has become a major issue of concern in Europe (Byrne *et al.* 2013), in China (Yang 2012), and in Latin America (Acosta & Celis 2014). Governmental funding agencies often borrow policies from across national boundaries. Empirical research by Steiner-Khamsi (2016: 382) indicates that policy borrowing helps to mobilize financial resources, ‘especially when it is preceded by political talk of falling behind some interna-

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, CIRGE organized three additional international workshops: in 2008, in Melbourne, Australia (Nerad & Evans 2014); in 2009, in Kassel, Germany; and in 2010, in Penang, Malaysia (Nerad *et al.* 2011). At these events, a diverse group of senior experts in doctoral education (e.g., graduate deans, vice presidents for research, directors of research centers, and managers of graduate schools) explored the impact of globalization on doctoral education worldwide.

tional standards or best practices’<sup>3</sup>.

Policy borrowing has crossed national boundaries in the creation and funding of doctoral grant programs in order to better prepare versatile, highly trained professionals to address large-scale societal problems that cannot be solved through a single disciplinary focus or by a single researcher (Nerad 2020a). These multi-disciplinary, national flagship programs emphasize skill building, the learning environment, and international collaboration, in the form of visits by students to other universities. Moreover, geographical and intersectoral mobility has been achieved by internships in non-academic settings during doctoral and postdoctoral training. Over the years, the research community has noticed that although these governmental flagship programs were intended ‘to play a catalytic role at universities and at the doctoral education level by enticing other departments and their faculty to emulate their novel structures’, they have not generally functioned in that way. In fact, ‘governments often forget that other programs have neither the finances nor the necessary staff to offer such elaborate programs’ (p. 57). In our 2019 assessment of the changes made over the previous 20 years in doctoral education worldwide, we observed that these converging flagship programs covered 2% - or in some countries (e.g., Germany), up to 19% - of the PhDs trained in a country. This led us to conclude that the vast proportion of the structures and forms of doctoral education were not moving in the same direction (Cloete *et al.* 2015; Nerad & Evans 2014). These facts, the 2019 workshop, the subsequent public conference, and our post-event reflections made clear that the variety of different shapes and forms that doctoral systems take around the world will remain intact, and that the recent reforms will only produce a greater variety. This contrasts with what we previously maintained (Nerad & Heggelund 2008) – that the convergence to a global PhD would benefit the global doctoral education community.

A number of factors have moved us further away from a single global system of doctoral education. These include several major catastrophes that have accelerated world crises to such an extent that we have not been able to fully come to terms with them. First, there is the immediate health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Then there are various human-generated crises,

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<sup>3</sup> The key element of policy borrowing is the conscious adoption of a policy from one context to another, led by the belief that foreign educational policies and models might solve existing or emerging problems (Steiner-Khamsi 2016: 382).

including the long-looming environmental crisis and the continued wars and internal conflicts in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, Syria, and Sudan, as well as Russia's more recent invasion of Ukraine. The accelerating climate crisis continues to produce an increasing number of natural disasters, including severe monsoons and hurricanes, resulting in disastrous flooding, lack of drinking water, power outages, lost harvests, and more.

These crises have forced and will force us to reflect on our fundamental values. As scholars who create new knowledge in a complicated and complex world, we are confident that applying a global core value system in doctoral education is the way forward for our societies. Not by retreating into an academic ivory tower but rather by accepting leadership roles based on these global core values, the worldwide doctoral education community can set standards that will contribute to solving health, political, and environmental crises. This is the message I would like to convey to the African postgraduate community so that inequalities in the access to doctoral education and the provision of knowledge can be overcome.

### **3 How we Arrived at a Set of Core Values in Doctoral Education**

In 2018, five colleagues (David Bogle, Ulrike Kohl, Conor O'Carroll, Christian Peters and Beate Scholz) and I, all experts in doctoral education in various European countries and the USA, applied for a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation to assess changes and reforms in doctoral education worldwide since 2000. For the purposes of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the areas of specialisation of the colleagues.

David Bogle (I.D.L. Bogle) is pro-vice-provost of the doctoral school (graduate dean) at UCL. He is also professor of chemical engineering, with research interests in process systems engineering and systems biology. He chairs the Doctoral Studies Policy Group of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) and sits on several advisory boards for doctoral education across Europe.

Ulrike Kohl is director of *Erwuesse Bildung* Luxembourg, a non-profit association in the domain of personal and professional development and training. She worked as head of human resources in one of Luxembourg's research institutes and at the Luxembourg National Research Fund, where she

coordinated the activities on doctoral training and research careers for 17 years. She contributed to the set-up of the Luxembourg National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training in 2015. She is a part-time coach and research career consultant.

Conor O'Carroll is an independent consultant on higher education and research policy at SciPol. He is active in the development of European policy on research careers, with a focus on doctoral education and training, and led the development of the European innovative doctoral training principles.

Christian Peters is a political scientist and Managing Director of the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Science (University of Bremen/Jacobs University Bremen). Besides managing a research unit with more than 70 early-career researchers, he has interests in populism studies, the political impact of new media technology and the relationship of religion and politics.

Beate Scholz is founder and director of Scholz CTC GmbH. As strategy consultant, trainer, coach, reviewer, and researcher, she focuses on researchers' career development, with special attention to doctoral education and equal opportunity. She works internationally with individual researchers and research policymakers as well as with universities, research funders, and research institutions. Scholz was in charge of moderating the Herrenhausen Conference.

The Volkswagen Foundation, a private German foundation, has allocated substantial resources to doctoral education since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The awarded grant funded a 3-day international workshop and a 1.5-day conference on doctoral education in September 2019. The organizing team selected five topics after conducting a survey that asked 40 senior experts in doctoral education to identify key issues in their countries' doctoral education. The topics were as follows:

1. The forces, structure, and quality assurance of doctoral education since 2000 (an overview at a systemic level);
2. Supervision and funding (an institutional view);
3. Capacity building in doctoral education in the era of globalization;
4. Global labor market developments through doctoral education (through an economic lens); and

5. The ethical and political role of the researcher, and in particular, the doctoral graduate (systems view).

Recognizing the diversity of academic cultures and institutional systems worldwide, we invited experts and ECRs from both the Global South and Global North to collaborate on five interdisciplinary and intergenerational teams. We asked them to assess doctoral education during the last two decades, using their respective country lenses as well as their different disciplinary approaches. These groups presented their findings during the 3-day workshop<sup>4</sup>. In each group, the ECRs were given space and a voice to build camaraderie, to collaborate internationally, and to develop confidence in the process. In fact, during the afternoon of each workshop day, after a lively discussion of the prepared papers, the ECRs engaged with the senior experts in a collective thinking exercise, in the form of a world café. They generated policy recommendations that were then presented and discussed during the public conference. In addition, we asked the ECRs to design a creative presentation for each workshop day on their views, comments, and concerns relating to what they had heard and experienced on the previous day. These presentations were made during the first event of each workshop day, and the other workshop participants reported a deep appreciation for the ECRs' daily contributions.

For the public conference, we opted for a model that did away with the hierarchical system of social and structural inequalities typical of academic conferences, whereby a small group of experienced and self-confident, often senior participants tend to dominate the speakers' floor. Instead, we introduced special software that could easily be accessed online by the conference participants on their private digital devices. The software allowed the event team to solicit questions and input from the audience in real time during the presentations of the five working groups. In addition, the major points presented by the working groups were displayed on a large screen at the back of the conference hall stage. This process resulted in a real-time ranking of questions, based on the content raised by the questioner and not on their status or verbal competence. Using this interactive process, the core values were formulated at the end of the 1.5-day conference, creating what became known as the Hannover Recommendations 2019.

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<sup>4</sup> The workshop followed the format of the international workshop series developed by CIRGE at the University of Washington from 2005 until 2011.

## **4 Summary of the Findings Presented in Hannover**

Our research, which was presented at the workshops, found an increase in doctoral participation in a number of countries – particularly in China, but also in Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico, India, and South Africa – had occurred between 2000 and 2018. Our analyses showed that most of the reforms and changes of the two past decades reflected a response to problems as well as a drive for innovation and the wish for a highly educated and well-trained researcher labor force. In some countries, the growth in universal access to education had produced an educational path effect that increased doctoral education; for example, this was the case in South Africa. However, the wish of some governments and university leaders to achieve a high position in the international rankings of world-class universities steered doctoral education programs to increase such outputs as more PhDs awarded and more articles published, without considering the context in which a quality doctoral education and quality research results are possible. Some governments forgot and still forget that, for such a direct link between innovation, economic growth, and the training of more PhD students to occur, many additional factors (e.g., a high-quality research infrastructure, including well-qualified university teachers, a mentoring environment at universities, collaboration with wider sectors of society, and wider sectors of the labor market that hires PhD graduates) need to be in place.

The changes we observed have had a significant positive impact. The emphasis in growth of numbers increased the variety of students joining doctoral programs; these included more women, more older students, more people from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Indigenous and migrant peoples), and more international students. At the same time, the changes have had some unexpected negative side effects. The following sections detail the findings of our research, including these negative effects.

### ***4.1 The Traditional Purpose of the PhD has been Questioned***

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, doctoral education in the Global North has focused on preparing PhDs for a wider range of employment possibilities in business, government, non-profits, and academia. In contrast, the focus during much of the previous century was on preparing male scholars to teach and research with authority, and to do so independently within their disciplines. Whereas the past role of doctoral students was as ‘stewards of the discipline’, that role has shifted

to become one of thought leaders in knowledge-intensive sectors beyond academia (Golde & Walker 2006). While the Global North failed to create more academic positions to match the increase in doctorates awarded, most countries of the Global South still seek a sufficient number of qualified doctoral supervisors.

The expansion of the role and function of doctoral education has led to the development of doctoral training programs that include preparation for multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary research; cross-sectoral and international collaboration; professional and especially entrepreneurship skills; and internships in non-academic organizations. In addition to what we reported in 2019, a variety of doctoral education programs were subsequently developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, including more online and hybrid doctoral programs.

## ***4.2 A New Diversity of Forms has Emerged in Doctoral Education***

With the steady broadening of doctoral education to include new fields of knowledge, new varieties of doctoral degrees and doctoral outcomes have emerged over the past few decades. More applied doctorates in the arts have brought creative work into this field of practice. In the health sciences, professional associations (especially in the United States) lobbied successfully for applied doctorates in audiology, acupuncture, physical and occupational therapy). Similarly, engineering and other professional fields, such as social work and clinical psychology, created applied doctoral degrees that require a thesis, but not necessarily a research-based one. In the field of education, applied doctoral programs granting an EdD have existed since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zusman 2017).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the outcome of doctoral study was a sole-authored monograph that made an original contribution to one's discipline. Today, in some disciplines (e.g. economics, earth sciences), and increasingly in others, a collection (often three) of actual and possible journal peer-reviewed articles as well as co-authored papers are accepted (Kehm & Teichler 2016). However, the doctoral candidate needs to be the first author on these papers, or a substantial contribution must be made clear, and they need to produce single-authored journal articles as well. Other non-traditional formats exist, such as comic books, creative art forms, and use of an Indigenous language (e.g., in New Zealand). At the same time, we see the opposite trend,

with English-language dissertations now allowed in non-English speaking countries.

In addition to applied doctorates, we have seen recent changes in joint degrees and dual degrees. Joint degrees (also called / binational doctoral degrees) are awarded by doctoral programs and universities that cooperate in national and international networks. Dual degrees (also called *Cotutelle de Thèse*) require joint supervision and adherence to the dissertation requirements of both universities (Bamford 2020).

### ***4.3 Doctoral Programs Increasingly Focus on Dual Outcomes***

We observed a shift during recent decades away from a singular focus on the dissertation and its peer-reviewed research publication to a focus that includes the dissertation and the research product as well as the trained person. This development emphasizes skills training and employability, while also retaining the traditional emphasis on *Bildung* (i.e., a process of personal and cultural maturation). Most government-funded flagship doctoral programs (e.g., innovative training networks of the European Community, the US National Science Foundation National Training Program, and the German Excellence Initiative) pursue such a goal. My colleagues and I are strong supporters of this dual-outcome approach to doctoral education. We view doctoral education as both a process of training the researcher and of producing a socially valuable research outcome.

### ***4.4 Institutional Structures have been Reformed***

In conjunction with changes in the numbers, purposes, and forms of doctoral education, the institutional structures of doctoral education and doctoral supervision have experienced changes and reforms (Hasgall *et al.* 2019). The responsibility for doctoral education has extended beyond one single doctoral supervisor to a team or a committee of professors. Furthermore, training for new supervisors is offered and even mandated in some countries. Supervisors' performance has increasingly become part of the doctoral quality-assurance process in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Another institutional structural change has been the creation of doctoral schools. Governmental funding agencies and university leaders have come to understand that a centralized structure for doctoral education allows for

greater cross-campus innovation and institutional oversight. Such centralized structures can conduct research as a base for campus-wide improvement on doctoral education and can monitor quality and suggest base-line admission and completion requirements.

#### ***4.5 Workforce Preparation has been Steered by Government Funding***

The governmental focus on the knowledge economy (Nerad 2020a), especially in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, has steered funding toward science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. At the same time, it has resulted in a reduction of funding for the social sciences and humanities. With a shift toward greater workforce preparedness has come the offerings of diverse forms of professional development training, career advising workshops, and even career coaching for doctoral students by central university units, such as graduate schools.

#### ***4.6 Time-to-Degree has been Established as an Efficiency Measure***

Fixed time frames within which doctoral students have to complete their degree requirement are a common trend. This has largely been the result of governmental funding agencies wanting to see full-time, fully funded students complete their studies within a certain time. This trend is an efficiency measure, not a quality measure, and can result in the abuse of well-intended governmental monetary incentive systems by university administrators seeking to reap additional funding. In Europe, the expected completion time is 3 to 4 years for full-time students; in Northern America, Japan, and India, the target time is 5 years. We posit that adhering to a high-quality doctorate is more important than enforcing rigid time-to-degree rules.

#### ***4.7 Quality Assurance can Take Different Forms***

Quality assurance in doctoral education ranges from professors and committees assessing the work of doctoral candidates within and among universities to external units and organizations that assess the quality of the entire doctoral training process. Two main approaches to the quality assurance process exist:

the first emphasizes the value of regulatory assurance that focuses on compliance and sanctions; the second emphasizes the value of formative feedback to bring about students' improvement. National governments and supranational organization – among others the European Union, or UNESCO – are seeing academic research as a source of activities and discoveries that are indispensable to the achievement of vital national and supranational goals. Therefore, by 2020 many countries, national or supra-national organizations have developed documents with guidelines and standards for assuring the quality of their higher education systems, including doctoral education.

#### ***4.8 The Focus of Research on Doctoral Education has Evolved Over Time***

Lastly, we observed that doctoral education as a field of academic scholarship and research has expanded since the 1990s, and that the scholars investigating doctoral education have come increasingly from different disciplinary backgrounds. In the United States, for example, economists pursued research in the 1950s and 1960s for the purpose of labor market projections (Nerad 2020b). In the 1970s and 1980s, sociologists and economists scrutinized doctoral education so they could better understand the growth of US higher education and its international standing. In the 1990s, the accountability movement was concerned with the long time it took students to earn a degree and with high rates of attrition. Public policy researchers and private foundations that funded humanities and social science doctoral students undertook such studies because they wanted to understand the most effective way to allocate funding to doctoral education in order to reduce the length of time to degree and high attrition rates.

Today, a wide array of researchers (e.g., physicists, chemists, geography, and higher education scholars) study doctoral education through their respective professional organizations. Subsequently, specialized journals (e.g., *Studies in Postgraduate and Doctoral Education* and the online journal *International Journal of Doctoral Education*) as well as an international list-serve on doctoral education research (IDERN), have been established. Just since the 2019 conference, several books on doctoral education have highlighted the various trends, challenges, and institutional changes in doctoral education worldwide (e.g., Cardoso *et al.* 2020; Shin *et al.* 2018; Yudkevich *et al.* 2020). A few other books point not only to the challenges faced but also to the opportunities for doctoral education (e.g., Barnacle & Cuthbert 2021; Lee

& Bongaardt 2021). Yet, none have proposed a global core value system as the common denominator between countries amid their multiple differences.

## **5 The Core Values of the 2019 Hannover Policy Recommendations**

My brief description of the most prominent changes made during the last few decades provides a picture of the enormous variety of forms, forces, and structures in doctoral education around the globe. The Hannover conference revealed a common vision of what is most critical in the education of doctoral students across the globe, even as the processes and methods to achieve that vision may vary.

The following seven key policy recommendations are based on a set of global core values that were the result of the collective work across multiple borders described in this chapter. Each has a number of sub-recommendations that are not detailed here but that are available online<sup>5</sup>.

1. Establish a global joint value system for doctoral education based on an ecology of knowledges that recognizes and seeks to overcome existing inequalities in the access to doctoral education and the provision of knowledge.
2. Foster diverse ways of operating; embrace the diversity of cultures, people, and universities.
3. Encourage diverse forms of mobility to develop multiple careers and ensure a more balanced distribution of talent around the globe.
4. Ensure that the key contributions of the arts, humanities, and social science research and doctoral education get strong support.
5. Support more research on doctoral education for evidence-based decision-making on doctoral education around the globe.
6. Advance the institutional environment for doctoral education continuously.
7. The pivotal goal of doctoral education must be and remain the development of original, responsible, and ethical thinkers, and the generation of new and original ideas and knowledge.

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<sup>5</sup> See either the open-access publication by Nerad *et al.* (2022: 51 – 55) or the Volkswagen Foundation website.

<https://www.doctoral-education.info/hannover-recommendations.php>

The argument in these recommendations is that research training should be based on a joint value system rooted in the universal principles of the United Nations Human Rights Charter. This charter demands respect for the individual and aims for an equilibrium of knowledge from the South, North, East, and West that includes Indigenous knowledge systems in an ecology of knowledges.

## **6 ECR's Assessment of the Set of Core Values**

The ECRs who participated in the workshop and conference came from a diversity of cultural, racial, ethnic, professional, and educational backgrounds, with representation from all continents. Their countries of origin were Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Romania, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zambia. Diversity also existed across their initial starting points, assumptions, and experiences in doctoral education. Some were early in their doctoral studies, while others had just completed their studies. Some were based in their home countries, while others studied and worked abroad; collectively, they represented both established and younger higher education systems. The majority of the group were not native speakers of English. Some focused their field of inquiry directly on higher and doctoral education, while others studied unrelated disciplines; however, all were devoted to improving the state of doctoral education and to ensuring the success of future doctoral researchers.

The ERCs wrote a chapter titled 'Reflections from Early-Career Researchers on the Past, Present and Future of Doctoral Education' (Mason *et al.* 2022) in the book that grew out of the conference. In it, they narrated five major lessons learned during the workshop and conference and explained their acceptance of the Hannover policy recommendations, thereby allowing us as senior people to hope for a sustainable future that is based on and incorporates the principles of social justice (see also Nerad & Peters 2022).

*First*, the ERCs were impressed by the sheer depth and diversity of the practices, norms, policies, and debates surrounding doctoral education and the challenges to be faced in coming to terms with this reality. For example, they commented on the variation even in the terminology used to refer to doctoral students: PhD student, graduate student, doctoral researcher, doctoral scholar, doctoral candidate, junior researcher, and early career researcher.

*Second*, they noted that many of the challenges confronting doctoral

education are shared across a diversity of contexts, albeit in different ways and to different extents. They also noted that some countries require special training for doctoral supervisors, while others do not, and that the forms of funding for doctoral education were more varied than they had expected.

*Third*, they reported the discussions among them were characterized by both an unease about the broad nature of the recommendations and a desire for the development of concrete and actionable policies. In the end, the ECRs acknowledged that the recommendations provided a useful and effective set of guiding principles that can be applied to diverse contexts. They agreed that, ultimately, the goal of education, including doctoral education ‘is for the individual, the local community and for society in general’ (Mason *et al.* 2022: 248).

*Fourth*, they reflected on the dedicated space they were given during the preparation for the workshop, the workshop, the conference, the writing of their chapter, and their experiences engaging in the doctoral education community. Notably, they emphasized engaging *in* the doctoral education community, as opposed to engaging *with* the community:

It was not merely being in the presence of well-known and established scholars that we valued, but the fact that we were welcomed into the community and were part of the conversations with experts in the field of doctoral education. (Mason *et al.* 2022: 249)

*Fifth*, the ECRs understood that, in looking toward the future, they will need to play a role in translating the recommendations into practical application and real change in their local contexts. They stated, ‘The importance of collaborating beyond your institution and country was clearly evident, and we realized that each of us was not alone’ (Mason *et al.* 2022: 250). Moreover, they recognized that, after needing to move more of their lives online as a result of the lockdowns during the pandemic, they could now continue to be ‘very well connected and collaborate across the globe without blowing the budget’ (p. 250). They learned that they could practice doctoral education in a manner which ‘is context-based and historical, but we need to cross borders, and so does our understanding of it’ (p. 251).

These reflections filled my colleagues and myself, as seniors, with hope for a future in which social justice and research for the benefit of society will prevail.

## **7 Toward a Hopeful, Sustainable, and Just Future**

In the concluding chapter of the book (Bogle *et al.* 2022), that grew out of the conference we explained our hopes for a sustainable and socially just future and why we thought doctoral education needs to be based on a set of core values if it is to succeed in training our doctoral students and young researchers to be future leaders who can tackle societal problems in their communities, neighborhoods, and countries. Doctoral students, including in Africa, must be trained to undertake research that is rooted in the universal principles of the United Nations Human Rights Charter. On the one hand, we are aware that the current divisions in society and the uncertain future have caused many people to lose faith in political and scientific expertise and made them turn to nationalist or other extremist belief systems based on prejudice and not on evidence. On the other hand, we recognize that the health crisis and the sustainability crisis have made society more aware of the role of research and researchers in tackling these existential challenges. South Africa, for example, produced a version of the Moderna vaccine in February 2022, which brought protection to the African people, without requiring that the vaccine be imported. Well-trained researchers who can work together across disciplines are more important than ever in all parts of the world, and Africa is no exception.

Our keynote speaker from South African, Professor Jonathan Jansen,<sup>6</sup> who was also co-author of the prologue with Cyrill Walters, urged us to ensure the training of a ‘thinking doctorate’ – a training that enables doctoral candidates to articulate the significance of their work and to give a convincing account of its conceptual framework. We believe that doctoral graduates should be able to see their work in the societal context and to make a clear case for the relevance of their work to the public, going beyond the traditional peer group. In short, they must be prepared to work closely with society. This also means doctoral candidates should be required to reflect on the ethical dimension of their work, the impact it may have, and how their work fits into the ecology of knowledges. In this way, doctoral graduates can engage

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Jansen is a distinguished professor of education at the University of Stellenbosch and president of the Academy of Science of South Africa. He was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, before serving as vice chancellor and rector of the University of the Free State for 7 years.

uprightly with society, make a case for knowledge that is evidence-based, and articulate how to handle the uncertainty inherent in research results.

I want to remind current and future doctoral candidates and researchers that undertaking research and producing new knowledge has always – ideally, if not in practice – been a global collaborative activity. Thus, we are excited about the open science movement because it provides us with access to data and results, without the old barriers, and can enhance global efforts to address major problems, such as pandemics and climate change. With these new tools for accessing information, we can bring the intellectual community into closer contact with the users of their research, so we can jointly develop ways forward to tackle the existential challenges that confront society.

We understand and accept that change is occurring at every level in societies globally, and that this necessitates new research and new systems, rather than simply relying upon and adopting best practices from elsewhere. Emerging and established doctoral systems in Africa, as elsewhere, have a chance to undertake research locally at their own universities and to collect evidence for making policy decisions pertaining to doctoral education. For example, the following questions could be asked: What is the average time-to-degree? How low or high are attrition rates across programs? What do student surveys say about doctoral graduates' satisfaction with their training and education? What do universities know about the career paths of their doctoral recipients?

In advancing the institutional environment for doctoral education, my colleagues and I have learned that the introduction of a supervisor prize, selected based on a survey of doctoral students, is much welcomed by professors and students alike – not only in the Global North but also in the Global South. More broadly speaking, an environment of openness and constructive debate is fundamental to research and is the bedrock of democracy. These values must be sustained and built into doctoral education worldwide.

My colleagues and I are aware, however, that the opposite of these developments is evident through an increase in research misconduct, a lack of reciprocity in some countries that are less open, and threats to research themes that do not fit with official government policy. We recognize that 21st-century doctoral candidates and doctoral recipients must deal with these new issues. In particular, our younger colleagues need to know that, when monetary incentives are provided by the government to universities for each completed PhD, with the overall goal of increasing PhD production, the quality of the thesis can

suffer due to a rushed external review process, as has been the case in some South African universities. In addition, an inefficient school system and a shortfall of revenue to universities has resulted in poorer quality doctoral work (Jansen & Walters 2022). In China, governmental pressure to increase doctoral enrollment has led to a decreased quality in doctoral training, possibly in part related to difficulty managing the expansion needed to accommodate more students (Yang 2012). Furthermore, the requirement by Chinese universities that candidates must have several publications before they can receive a doctoral degree has done little to improve the quality of dissertations and resulted in an increase in the number of dubious new journals. Quality in doctoral education and a transparent quality assurance system are key issues doctoral programs must address, as they seek solutions that will improve the system and deter corruption (Jansen 2023).

For these reasons, we stress the need for good education and training, and especially for mentorship to support students. African university administrators must recognize, make visible, and reward committed mentorship by supervisors who go beyond mere advising and consider the full person and their development, in the classical sense of *Bildung* (Jansen & Walters 2022).

ECRs around the world currently face a number of pressing challenges for which we must collectively come up with creative solutions. High on this list is the challenge of employment for PhD recipients. The majority of PhD students are still trained using the 19th-century model of an academic apprentice. In many countries, the number of available jobs for PhD graduates does not match the number of graduates seeking employment. In other places, such as India and Africa, there is a need for quality academic researchers, but the university lacks funding sources, an adequate research infrastructure, and professional development opportunities. The precarity of employment for PhD graduates (as researchers) is a global issue, and our academic research systems must confront this issue and must broaden employment opportunities through training and career development support.

Another value I would like to emphasize for ECRs everywhere, including in Africa, is the importance of mobility for personal development as well as for future employability. Four types of mobility can be built into doctoral education without much additional cost. Intersectoral mobility gives students experience with a more diverse working environment. Interdisciplinary mobility takes students out of their disciplinary and thematic silos and brings different disciplinary approaches to research challenges. International mobility

can broaden research across national borders, and perhaps more importantly, across cultural horizons. Lastly, virtual mobility via new technological tool enables those in disadvantaged regions to collaborate internationally.

As I continue to meet with the group of ECRs from the Hannover conference, I am impressed by the persistence and commitment of this peer-mentoring group. In monthly Zoom meetings, we discuss what is not usually said openly between doctoral students and supervisors, among doctoral students, and among new doctoral supervisors. This ongoing work gives me hope that more leaders will emerge from doctoral programs worldwide who are critical, creative, autonomous, and responsible risk-takers as they work in open communication across international contexts.

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