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The Supervisory Relationship: A Master-Servant Relationship ?

In this issue of *Graduate Times*, we focus on that most crucial relationship in a postgraduate student's life, the supervisor-supervisee relationship. As any relationship, it is one that can be fraught with tension, misunderstandings, and conflict. On the other hand, it can turn out to be the most rewarding relationship in an academic's life. As with any important relationship in our lives, most students enter this relationship with apprehension. There is also that nervous anticipation that this person is going to be one of the most important people in your life at least for the next couple of years.

*In the master there is a servant,
in the servant a master.*

Marcus T. Cicero

I would like to use the metaphor of master and servant to talk about this relationship, which may seem obvious, with the supervisor being the master, as s/he is the one who holds the power to enable the student to gain entry into academia

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As someone who has been a supervisor now for more than ten years, it is sometimes easy to forget that I was once a supervisee too. It is also easy to get carried away with the ‘master’ role, and expect the ‘servant’ supervisee to do as s/he is told and to fulfill my expectations.

Plato once said that “he who is not a good servant will not be a good master”. The opportunity to write about the supervisor-supervisee relationship takes me back to my own ‘supervisee’ days. I hope my supervisees will realize and appreciate that I was once also in their shoes. I hope they understand that I empathize and understand what they are going through because I have been through the same journey.

I believe that all supervisees and supervisors come into a supervisory relationship with great expectations, and with good intentions to make it succeed. The supervisory relationship begins as an uneven one, the supervisor as ‘master’, being the one in a more powerful position than the supervisee—having more knowledge, the qualification, and the experience in academia. Therefore, the first lesson for a supervisee is humility, that of putting aside all pride and arrogance to accept this ‘servant’ role at the start of this journey.

I am reminded of Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. In the play, the spirit, Ariel, is a servant who serves his master, Prospero, devotedly, having been freed by Prospero from the shackles of an evil witch when they first met. Having performed all the tasks set by his master successfully, Ariel finally gains his independence, and is set free by Prospero. The uniqueness of this master and servant relationship is in the continuous dialogue they have with each other, and the trust that is built between them. Ariel, who is a powerful being in his own right, accepts his role as the servant out of respect for Prospero.

In this sense, the master-servant relationship between Prospero and Ariel is one that is comparable to the supervisory relationship. A successful supervisory relationship is one in which the supervisee is set free by the end of it, having gained his/her own independence as a researcher. Throughout the journey, there must be continuous dialogue and trust, and by the end of it, the supervisee will have become his/her own master.

Then again, perhaps the metaphor of master and servant is a flawed one in defining a supervisory relationship.

After all, as scholars, we are all servants of knowledge, and seekers of truth.

With Knowledge We Serve

Noritah Omar

* This editorial is dedicated to my supervisor, Dr. Sharon Pugh, and to all my supervisee

FOCUS ON

Supervision is a 2-way street

The intricacies of postgraduate supervision are fascinating. The co-dependence of the supervisor and the postgraduate student is crucial and often underdeveloped. As a matter of fact, in many ways, supervision is driven more by the student than the supervisor. As a research student, the academic relationship you will have with your supervisor typically lasts between three to five years, during which even the noblest supervisor may lose stamina. Supervisors are academicians, and their responsibilities go beyond the supervision of an individual student's project. Make no mistake—it is the student who must champion the candidature. In this article, I would like to share my thoughts on how the student can steer their project during the track of their postgraduate candidature.

Staking out a supervisor

The essence of a supervisory relationship is symbiotic, and begins from the search for a potential supervisor. Often candidates are so desperate to impress and secure a supervisor that they miss the essential step of evaluating their own needs and wants. The wants of the supervisor are obvious—a candidate with a relatively good academic performance, an educational background relevant to research area, and one that communicates effectively, with, ideally, a good disposition.

The students, on the other hand, must be acutely aware of their own needs. If you are keen to chart out a career in research or academia, then investigation into matters such as the supervision style, scope of the study, number of students supervised by the researcher, availability of research funds, and expertise of the supervisor must be undertaken seriously. You are about to enter into a working relationship with your supervisor for the next three years or so, and you would want to make an informed decision.

Success of the candidature

Success of your candidature can be measured in different ways. Your measure of success may be to complete whatever you set out to do for your postgraduate degree. Your supervisor, on the other hand, may consider publication of your data as the mark of a good candidature. The postgraduate student will also have personal goals in terms of completion time, depth of study and amount of data to be collected.



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The supervisor is the person who understands the time frame and scope of the research better, and has a finger on the pulse of the research project. Both parties' expectations must be managed, and continuous tracking of progress and milestones are crucial to ensure the success of the candidature. Although the supervisor can visualise the long-term scope of the research project, ideally they should manage research goals together throughout the student's candidature. A student who does not seek out the supervisor throughout his/her candidature to discuss these matters at regular intervals is playing a very dangerous game.



Study design

As a supervisor, I am constantly reviewing the progress of a study and picturing how it can be amalgamated into a thesis. Decisions on the number of replicates, types of controls, sample size, technique to use, technique to confirm, and number of experimental repeats are not cookie-cutter decisions. Your supervisor is involved in study design for this reason. Work it out together—for example, I may request for 20 samples to be analysed simultaneously within an experiment, and my student may remind me that it is technically challenging to perform that many samples, and may affect reliability of the data. We then strategise, weighing the need of analysing all samples within an experiment (it may allow direct comparisons to be made between samples), which may then lead to downsizing the experiments into smaller, repeated experiments (that may be more practical and still offer rigorous data for the research question at hand).

Interpretation of data

Interpretation of data must be mutual and consensual. As the supervisor and principal investigator, I absolutely insist on being involved in data interpretation. Too often candidates confuse the difference between working independently and co-dependently. By all means, work independently by keying in your data and preparing the graphs and tables, but we must arrive at a mutual conclusion co-dependently—tell me your thoughts, justify to me why you removed outliers, and then let's argue each point of interpretation.

Trite as it may sound, *'two heads are better than one'* remains an adage true to postgraduate supervision. Take charge, meet your supervisor. Get in the driver's seat and drive home your postgraduate degree.

FOCUS ON

BY:

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Of The Need To Balance All Acts

That one needs to manage the balancing act well is no truer than when one has been tasked to become a supervisor. Be it supervising a Master's student's project paper or thesis, or even a doctoral candidate's thesis, graduate supervision, I have to say, is no walk in the park.

I began my first supervision with an overseas doctoral candidate, who I will call Lisa, within one year of obtaining my own PhD degree, and the first thing I realised then was that we both had expectations of our own which did not turn out to be realistic or even practicable. What I first discovered was that a student's level of expectations should ideally be measured with her own actual capabilities while the supervisor's must be measured with the actual scenario faced at any moment in time.

While there are many handbooks on supervisions out there, including the School of Graduate Studies's own efforts in assisting UPM's academics with managing supervisions through workshops, seminars and talks, nothing beats the cliché that 'Experience is the teacher of all things' (Julius Caesar). My own indispensable reference, *The Postgraduate Research Handbook* (2001) by Gina Wisker, whose wisdom I have mastered by heart, did not prepare me for the actual responsibilities supervising entails – that it is just not about the academe that a supervisor has to be prepared for, but for the unexpected things life has to offer such as a marriage, an illness or a broken friendship between friends. These are really the challenges which a supervisor is not able to wield control over, and therefore, it is wiser for us to step down from the high podium of academia and put on the hat of a fellow human being.

As a supervisor, we learn to become a confidante, a counsellor, a human sponge. We also most of all need to listen, not to solve our students' problems necessarily. We just need to comfort them, offer them words of solace and then we tell them to take time out to smell the roses. However, the supervisor is also human, and there is only so much one can do. To me, the greatest challenge is

to continue to support the student intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually throughout the ups and downs of this academic journey.

Indeed, our role as supervisors should not be only to ensure that they succeed academically but that along the way, they learn the important virtues of 'scholarly attitude': ethics, time management, commitment, discipline, independence, broad-mindedness, communication, and most importantly, *adab* (good manners or behaviour) – that most integral foundation of a *guru*–student relationship.

Bearing in mind such things as cultural differences, the explicit and immediate job of a supervisor, which I myself have experienced, is the need to clearly outline the dos and don'ts not only to be observed by the student but also the Supervisor. Both student and supervisor must make conscious effort to adopt the right scholarly attitude in their supervisory meetings and throughout the research period.

Technology has made it much easier for us to communicate with each other – emails, smart phones, short messaging services (SMS), WhatsApp and social media among others—but the irony here is that it has also inadvertently allowed professional boundaries to be blurred and crossed. Some research students have, in some instances, become so emboldened by the convenience of advances in communication that they cross the boundary of the supervisor–student relationship. Calls to supervisors are hence made at 11 pm on a Saturday, SMSes are sent at 6.30 am on a Sunday morning with a demand for immediate response, and responses to such demands and requests for meetings are expected NOW, without thought of making prior appointments.

Yet, as a supervisor who was not so long ago a research student, I try not to become too jaded too soon. I held myself from becoming ballistic over small matters, and learned from my oversights, of not informing my students that weekends are really my time for my family. I had to ensure that my students know that meetings must be arranged in a professional manner, through email, at least three days in advance, and that the personal–professional boundary must be respected at all times.

This is what we can refer to as the inculcation of a holistic scholarly attitude, OF THE NEED TO BALANCE ALL ACTS. This piece, I hope, does not read as only a reminder to research students, but it is more importantly a reminder to myself: that in our quest for academic success, the end must not justify the means. The path to a research degree is not an easy one, and we all should grow not only as a scholar, but as a person. The rest, then, is *que sera sera*.

By **Haslina Omar**, PhD English Literature
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Highlights

My Supervisory Experience At Upm

In the early stages of a PhD programme, a scholar may be faced with so much that she has to learn and accomplish, that it can overwhelm her and make her feel lost and alone. Several times, in the early stages of my journey as a PhD candidate, I found myself on the verge of being really lost and alone. As the PhD involves a lot of independent work most of the time, it is understandably easy for a new scholar to feel this way.

Thanks to my supervisor's motivation and the good working relationship we developed, I was able to persevere in developing my ability in independent thought and work, and eventually, to complete my PhD within the required time period. Thus, the role of the supervisor is significant in a new scholar's journey to becoming an independent researcher.

Highlights

Of course, like any relationship, a good supervisor-supervisee relationship is not one that can develop within one day. Hence, in a relationship that may stretch over a period of four to five years, there should be a willingness to learn and understand each other's personalities, including each other's strengths and weaknesses. This will lead to a relationship built on a sturdy foundation of trust, confidence and respect for each other. Based on my own experience with my supervisor, I believe that only when this comfortable bond has been established can the relationship withstand the ups and downs that colour the path of a PhD journey.

In the course of my research, I found that the ability to grasp concepts and reason analytically is not an easy task. This is where the unfailing support and motivation from my supervisor and peers were crucial in helping me throughout my research. A supervisor has to instill values that will lead towards self-confidence, independent thought, and good organizational skills on the part of her students. When my supervisor introduced me to these values at the beginning of my candidature, they appeared to me as a variety of challenges which needed to be overcome over time as I mature as a scholar.

The frequency and pattern of the supervisory meetings between me and my supervisor were at times flexible and at other times, strictly scheduled, as they depended on the particular stage of my research. Although most students are able to have access to their supervisors when advice is needed, it is recommended that supervisors and students agree on a minimum number of meetings each semester, including semester breaks. Of course, both supervisors and students should both agree on when to meet in advance

and meetings can always be cancelled if not needed. Maintaining contact at appropriate times and through regular meetings, particularly at the final stages of my candidature really helped me maintain consistent progress in my work.

Speakers at graduate seminars often remind scholars that they have to make an original contribution to knowledge and I used to worry that my work would fall short where this is concerned. However, discussions I had with my supervisor on what originality might mean in the context of my research helped me understand how I could make an original contribution to knowledge. She encouraged me to read recent theses, and we then discussed the strengths of these theses as well as areas where they could have been improved. This helped me appreciate and understand what I should be aiming for. Besides that, I was encouraged to attend academic conferences and participate in faculty and graduate seminars, as well as be involved in research group discussions. I remember how I would always leave my supervisory meetings feeling highly enlightened after the way my supervisor led our discussions, for instance, by reinterpreting an existing theory in a new context or bringing in new evidence to an old issue, or testing an existing idea in a new way. It is best for students to remember that whenever discussions are based on any written input, they should not only be expecting positive feedback but also constructive criticism. It was the constructive criticisms from my supervisor which spurred me to return to my books and notes on many occasions, in order to re-write or re-draft my work.

I was fortunate that in my PhD experience, meetings with my supervisor were not necessarily only for the sole purpose of work. On a number of occasions, my supervisor also allowed time and room for me and my peers to discuss matters other than those related to our research which also included having refreshing or eye-opening intellectual discussions. She encouraged us to take part in relevant social activities and she understood that all of us needed to take proper breaks and holidays. On several occasions, she even invited us to her house for get-togethers. I found these occasions to be a great way to foster friendships and scholarly bonds which will last beyond the years spent at the university.

Besides giving advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of my research such as the faculty's graduate seminar, the comprehensive examination which was done in my fifth semester, and completing the progress report every semester, my supervisor also advised me on publication as a way to establish a niche in my field of specialisation. Seeing that my research focused on narratives involving women's life stories, she also appropriately advised me to widen my horizon by conducting personal interviews with writers, and networking with international scholars in similar fields.

In a working relationship that stretched over a period of about four years, it became obvious that it was not just I who needed to adapt to my supervisor's personal style. She too was doing the same to suit my personality, as her experience working with both local and international scholars has made her quite aware of the necessity to help foster a successful supervisor-supervisee relationship. Before long, we were able to find an appropriate style or approach to work which we were both comfortable with. My supervisor allowed me the freedom to learn from my own mistakes. At the same time, she never neglected to guide me throughout the process. She gave her views, but did

not push them. The occasional friendly checks on me via brief phone calls, emails or text messages helped me to work towards submitting my thesis within the scheduled time. When my thesis was eventually submitted, brief discussions were dedicated to preparing me for my viva, and subsequently, on the corrections which I needed to make. Only when the final submission of my thesis was made did it dawn on me that I had become an independent researcher.

It is unlikely that a supervisor-supervisee relationship can survive just on scholarly meetings and advice. Mutual trust, respect and understanding are vital components to a successful working relationship, along with the sincere care and concern for each other. For those just beginning their scholarly journey at UPM, I will not lie and say that your journey will be a bed of roses. With a willingness to learn, adapt, compromise and sometimes even forgive, God willing, it will be possible for you to successfully complete your studies and achieve a strong and rewarding bond with your supervisor and peers that may last beyond the walls of UPM.

Point of View

By Iraj Monteshery,
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Lecturer at Open University, Iran

How I Survived My PhD

To be perfectly honest with you, writing a PhD thesis for me was like getting lost in a labyrinth, before finding my own way and realizing where I was standing after a long time. To me, this was only made possible by having the right supervisor. I strongly believe that having the right supervisor is vital to your PhD.

I have created this piece of writing to assist graduate students in thinking through the many aspects of crafting and drafting a thesis. It is an attempt to share some of the many ideas and experiences that I came across over the past few years which may help make the task of finishing a graduate degree so much easier. In what follows, I will try to recapitulate very briefly the complicated processes involved in writing a PhD thesis, and the lessons I learned from my supervisory experience.



The first simple lesson is this: satisfy your reader.

I remember my supervisor telling me that she was my first reader, and that I needed to satisfy her first. She explained that if she was satisfied, then chances are so would my other readers be. On the other hand, if she was not satisfied, then most probably I would not be able to satisfy my other reader. This was how I learned to write always with my potential readers in mind.

The second lesson: always write down all your ideas.

This was one of the most important lessons I learned from my supervisor. I remember telling her my ideas for my proposal eagerly and enthusiastically in one of my initial meetings with her, confident that I had come up with an original and intelligent argument. Her response was simply to tell me to write it all down. She argued that talking without writing was not going to help crystallize my ideas. "Enough talking," she said, "it's time to write."

The third lesson: set realistic goals for your research.

This lesson I learned when I was trying to piece together some issues I found which I thought were interesting, but which were not particularly relevant to my research. My ideas were not really logical in relation to my thesis. My supervisor bluntly told me not to romanticize my research. She taught me the valuable lesson of how to control my research by setting realistic goals and objectives and sticking to them.

The Proposal

So, what is a proposal anyway? And what makes a good proposal?

A good proposal is mainly the first three chapters of the thesis. It should contain the following:

- A clear statement of the problem and background to the study (typically Chapter 1 of the thesis)
- A review of key/relevant literature for the research (Chapter 2)
- An outline of the research methodology (Chapter 3)

Of course, there is always room for variation in the organization of these three chapters. In my case, for example, my methodology was described in the first part of the proposal, that is, in the first chapter.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for a PhD thesis is vital to the success of the PhD. The methodology should be an informed decision made upon consideration of the best approach with which to achieve your objectives. Do not be too hasty in choosing a certain methodology and trying to fit your research into it. Do not close your mind from considering different methodologies. Students in the humanities, for example, tend to be wary of using a quantitative approach out of the fear of using statistics. The choice of a qualitative approach must be made with a clear understanding of how it can best help yield new findings to the thesis, and not because you want to avoid doing quantitative research.

I was fortunate that my supervisor never pushed me to use any specific methodology, but made suggestions for me to consider and to make my own judgement. She

allowed me to think over her suggestions and to then decide on which methodology best suited my study. In the end, I found her suggestion of exploring narrative theory worked to be the most useful and the most viable methodology for what I was trying to achieve.

Research map

While working on my proposal, I also learned to map my research. This came about after I was persistently asked the same question by my supervisor. The question was simply, “why”? It took me a while before I realized the value of this question. Answering “why?” helped pave the way to a strong rationale for my research. It also helped me be conscious of the bigger picture, and thus I was able to piece together the different parts of my research like the different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

The “why?” question was crucial in enabling me to revise my aims and objectives, to narrow down my research questions, and to identify priorities. It also eventually led me to two other important questions. Therefore, the three questions which guided me in the writing of my thesis were:

- the “why?” question at the proposal writing stage
- the “what?” question at the literature review stage
- the “how?” question at the methodology stage

In answering the above three questions, I needed to clarify my study’s key concepts and terms. I was reminded not to take for granted concepts or terms I believed to be already transparent. I found myself having to define each term carefully.

To answer the “what?” question, you must rigorously explore previous research in the area, in order to avoid replication of a previous study. A comprehensive literature review in your proposal will make the writing up of your thesis later so much easier.

To answer the “how?” question, you need to know your methodology well, so that you can apply it your study appropriately. This will lead to a clear description of the research procedure, which will lead to sound analysis and interpretation, essential to the success of any study.

Setting target deadlines

Goals without timelines are only wishes. All research projects must have a timeline within which to achieve their objectives, and so must a PhD. Setting your own target deadlines for every part of your research will help you to make realistic short term goals and will help you to commit to your research.

Structure of the thesis

It is essential that you sketch a structure of your thesis. This involves dividing the work into suitable headings and sub-headings, which will create a logical flow to the thesis.

Every PhD student will find that writing the PhD thesis does not mean writing each chapter in sequential order from Chapter One to Chapter Five. In actuality, the most productive approach to writing a thesis is to begin writing those parts of the thesis that you are most comfortable with. You can build your thesis by writing various sections which interest you most at a particular time. You then fill in the gaps in your writing until you have all parts of your thesis as you have outlined in the structure of the thesis.

You may find that the last chapter you write is not necessarily the last chapter of the thesis. In fact, in my experience, my first chapter was the last chapter I completed. This is important as the first chapter is the map of the research, and the map must not mislead the reader.

The central argument and the personal voice

My supervisor told me that argument was the most important part of every research. I was told to always keep my central argument in mind when writing. This also helped me develop my own personal voice.

I learned that an academic voice is not necessarily an impersonal one. Achieving this was no easy feat. I found this to be the most difficult challenge in writing my thesis, but was inspired by my supervisor's words. She said that I had to live and breathe my research. She cited her own experience, whereby she cried when writing some parts of her own thesis. These parts, to her, were the manifestation of her personal voice, and this manifestation is what makes the research more meaningful. What she said did not make much sense to me at that time, but I have since learned to appreciate its importance.

Indeed, I hope what I have shared with you has shown you clearly that my supervisor (having the right supervisor) was instrumental to how I survived my PhD.

Point of View

By **Tan Shi Wei**

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Postgraduate life and a box of chocolates

“Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get.”

Forrest Gump

Yes, I’m pretty sure that ‘postgrad life’ is definitely a piece of 80% dark chocolate, tasting especially bitter sweet towards the end. In fact, it actually took me more than two years to ‘digest’ it.

So, what made me pick up Like the usual freshly the junction of life and do, I decided to upgrade degree in my life. Of searching-stage, I principal investigators (PI) student. Some PIs tested my some questioned which during my undergraduate turned down a few times some lab techniques and email address that I used littlebee@).



this ‘chocolate’ in the first place? graduated student, standing at thinking of where to go, what to myself by pursuing another course, in the initial supervisor-approached at least five different who needed a postgraduate knowledge about their field, and laboratory technique I had learnt final year project. In fact, I was due to my lack of experience in even because of an inappropriate (my email address used to be

This was until one day when I met a PI who told me that “technique is definitely not a problem; we can always train you to master a technique.” The kind PI also gave me some precious advice on how to improve my CV (especially about the email address). However, I left her room uncertain of my chances as she could not promise me anything regarding the candidature. Happily, after a few days I received a call from her, and she said that she was able to offer me a candidature and that we could work out something together to solve my financial problem during the initial stage of candidature. Yay! I shouted out loud from the bottom of my heart and it was not long before the whole journey that was to change my life began, with my lovely, kind and caring supervisor.

TOGETHER is a keyword throughout my whole candidature. Together, both my supervisor and I worked out almost everything for the candidature: starting from writing the project’s proposal, experimental design, proposal presentation, every single progress report to troubleshooting each essay. The journey involved a lot of two-way interaction and open communication between us. I found that it was only through such communication that we were able to learn and understand each other’s ideas and feelings. As the cells in the body communicate through secreted signalling molecules

such as cytokines and chemokines to decide on what to do next, so must complex multicellular organisms like us.

Along with this two-way-interaction, to me, the bitter part of the whole 'postgraduate chocolate' is the thesis writing stage. Figure 1 shows the schematic diagram of thesis writing stages (scientific writing skills which I learnt). It shows that thesis writing can start bit by bit. I started my thesis with the Materials and Methods chapter which is the most common way of starting a thesis. Then, slowly I moved to Introduction, Results, and Discussions.

For me, the procrastination period started at the Literature Review part! Despite the hard work and encouragement put in by my supervisor, I couldn't meet the targeted deadline. I had to admit that it was my fault, for not rising out of the procrastination stage faster. The moral of the story is: Do not procrastinate in thesis writing stage. More importantly, start writing from the beginning of the candidature. Nonetheless, I somehow managed to complete the writing, and my thesis was born and submitted at last. At that moment, the feeling I had was perhaps similar to that of a mother who had just given birth, relieved.

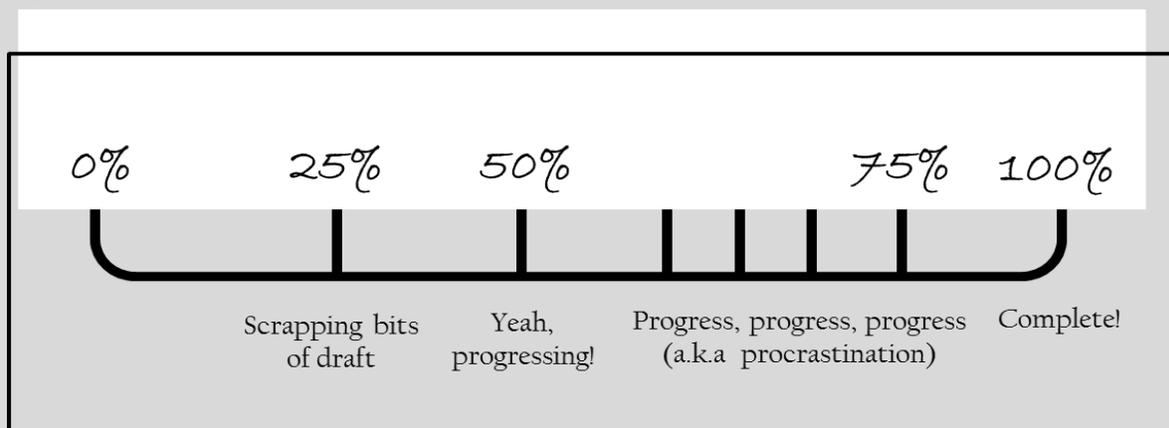


Fig 1. Thesis writing stages. Advice from experience: skip the procrastination part, if you want to graduate ASAP.

The end of the tunnel is the sweet part: the graduation ceremony! The moment I received the scroll on stage, I truly felt that I had made the right choice in choosing this piece of 'chocolate'. The bitter chocolate must be addictive, as I decided to continue improve myself and pursue an even bigger and more bitter piece of the 'chocolate'. Heraclitus said that "no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man". I have learnt that the more bitter chocolate promises a sweeter taste for me to look forward to at the end of my journey.

Point of View

By Vijay Kumar Mallan

Supervising postgraduate students: Reflections from

Malaysia

Overview



In this paper, I share my experiences as a supervisor in Malaysia and how my experiences in New Zealand as a doctoral student shaped my supervisory practices. First I provide a brief background of doctoral education in Malaysia and consider the implications of the government targets to increase the number of postgraduate students eight-fold in fifteen years. Following this, I reflect on doctoral education in one Malaysian institution and in particular focus on the strategies used to support student's development of academic writing through the formation of a Writer Response Group. I then present a case study of successfully supervising my first thesis student and how I emphasized regular writing, a peer-to-peer model of supervision and played an active role in her career development. In particular, I highlight issues surrounding co-supervision, and my experiences in a viva which shed light on the disjuncture between assessment and feedback. Finally, I discuss my aspirations for postgraduate education in Malaysia.

Higher education in Malaysia: National context

In order to understand the context of higher education in Malaysia, it is essential to know that in Malaysia, public universities are fully funded by the government. All universities come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and this jurisdiction includes policy matters such as appointments of top management officials, internationalisation and massification of postgraduate numbers.

The Malaysian government has a long-term goal of putting Malaysia among the education leaders of the world and, regionally, becoming a hub for the delivery of quality education. This entails raising the standard of education in the country to international levels and the attainment of that goal hinges on the existence of a critical mass of researchers. Given that the current number of 8000 PhD holders is considered insufficient to drive innovation and promote economic growth, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia launched a program called MyBrain 15 in 2008. The aim of this programme is to increase the number of PhD holders eight-fold, and to produce 60,000 Malaysian PhD holders in 15 years. 40% of government-sponsored students pursue their doctoral education locally, another 30% in Britain and the rest in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States. Besides traditional PhDs, the government is also targeting industry-based applied research PhDs to achieve the goals of MyBrain 15.

Doctoral education: Local setting

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), a research intensive university, enrolls a large number of postgraduate students. In 2010, there were more than 9700 postgraduate students comprising 2800 doctoral candidates and the remaining undertaking Master's level postgraduate studies either in the coursework or thesis mode. The majority of doctoral candidates are international students from the Middle East. Students who wish to pursue their PhD have to complete their Master's degree with a minimum CGPA of 3.0 to be admitted to a doctoral programme.

Doctoral candidates have to complete a range of courses which includes research methodology and discipline specific courses. Candidates are supervised by three academic staff. Progress reports are expected at the end of every semester. At the end of the first year, students have to defend their proposal. They also have to sit for a comprehensive examination at the end of the second year. An oral examination is compulsory not only for PhD candidates, but also for students pursuing their Masters by thesis. Doctoral candidates are given two options in pursuing their studies. First, they can work on a traditional format – which encompasses research and a submission of thesis. The majority of doctoral candidates follow the traditional format and are required to have submitted two papers in peer-reviewed journals before submitting their doctoral thesis for examination. One of these papers should have been accepted for publication and the other submitted for review.

The second option is PhD by publication. PhD students who choose this type of PhD have to publish at least four articles in citation-indexed journals. It is an expectation that the articles be published in ISI-ranked journals. The publications must be derived from the research that the doctoral candidate undertakes for the degree. The university provides funding for publication fees. Monetary incentives are also given to supervisors and candidates for publications in ISI-ranked impact factor journals. While this option of thesis by publication is relatively new, it seems to be one initiative that needs rigorous support and pedagogical intervention in areas of writing for scholarly publication. The examples drawn from established “prospective route” programmes (Davies & Rolfe, 2009) from Scandinavia, Holland and Australia, where each phase of the research lends itself to publication and is subject to a viva is something that can be considered by UPM.

The requirement to have published before submission is demanding both for the student and the supervisor and raises a number of issues, most of which relate to authorship issues (Morris, 2011) and concerns about “premature publication” (Pare, 2010). Even though this is the case, the requirement to publish in quality ISI-ranked journals has been fruitful in the sense that both supervisors and candidates benefit from the high quality peer review process, thus shielding the thesis from unwarranted critical comments from the examiners. Besides this advantage, the postgraduate students are inducted into publishing during

candidature; this indeed adds value to their postgraduate qualification.

Language concerns

One main concern faced by supervisors is the proficiency level of international doctoral students (mostly from Middle Eastern countries) who are all non-native speakers of English. International students, besides having a recognised postgraduate qualification, need to have IELTS (Band 6) or TOEFL (550 or 79/80 – Internet based) as entry qualifications. If they do not have the minimum English language requirements, but fall short of a few points (e.g. 500 – 540 for paper based TOEFL or 61-78, Internet based TOEFL or Band 5.5 for IELTS) they can be admitted, on the condition that they enrol in a fee-paying programme called the Tertiary English Programme (TEP). This is an 8 hours-per-week non-discipline specific English course that encompasses academic writing, academic reading and academic presentation skills. This is in fact the only postgraduate level English course that is available to doctoral students in the university. Malaysian students, however, do not have to meet IELTS/TOEFL requirements. They are also not required to enrol in the TEP. Unlike the TEP students, local students and international students who are not required to enrol in the TEP, do not have any exposure to the genres of scholarly writing, reading and presentation – this certainly raises some concerns.

For instance, cases of plagiarism are something that I have to deal with on a regular basis both from international and local students. As a supervisor, I realise that students have to be taught about plagiarism and also make an attempt to understand the academic culture that they come from. Students need to be inducted into academic writing, as the majority of them do not have sufficient exposure to the intricacies of discipline specific scholarly writing. To my knowledge, faculties hardly assume responsibilities for conducting discipline specific academic writing courses or exposing students to the skills of process writing which includes writing for a specific audience, rewriting and revising as a process of discovery. Based on my conversations with supervisors, many of them are unaware of doctoral writing pedagogies and thus struggle in providing effective feedback. Both local and international students seem to be of the idea that it is the supervisor's responsibility to 'fix their language' while the supervisors expect the students to have mastery of academic

writing skills at the postgraduate levels.

One strategy I used to overcome this language concern was to form Writer Response Groups (WRG). These groups, comprising the students I supervise, have been called collaborative writing groups or even peer support groups by researchers in the field of writing. Initially, I trained these groups in academic writing skills which I felt were lacking among the group members. These trainings included reading student drafts together and to give positive feedback before highlighting concerns and making suggestions (Hyland, & Hyland, 2001). Besides this, discussions on issues such as paraphrasing, quoting, logic, cohesion, critical argument, referencing, structuring and paragraph development were incorporated. The groups were also exposed to studies on examiners' reports (for example, Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat & Dallyl, 2004, Mullin, & Kiley, 2002, & Johnston, 1997) so that the WRG members were able to model their responses based on what examiners looked for in a thesis. Once the group members were familiar with these aspects, I insisted that drafts of chapters be reviewed by the WRG before these were submitted to me for my feedback. The WRG considerably reduced my necessity to address surface level concerns and to focus on the scholarly development of the thesis. The students too benefited in the sense that they took notice of the concerns and issues that were highlighted by the WRG and attended to the feedback that was given resulting in better quality drafts.

Supervision experiences

Given the national aspiration to increase the number of PhDs and the quest for publications in high quality journals during the period of candidature, the life of a supervisor is challenging. My experiences of being supervised in New Zealand and an exposure to a system that advocated supervisory agreements shaped my supervisory practices.

I had two supervisors, one focused purely on my academic and intellectual development, constantly reminding me of the end product. The other supervisor emphasised that the process and journey is more important than the product. She not only concentrated on academic development but also ensured that I was exposed to generic skills training, which included lecturing, reviewing journal articles, applying for grants and presenting research at conferences. She ensured that I networked with appropriate people in campus, namely,

academic trainers, postgraduate liaison committees, funding experts and, most importantly, student support. It was through these networks and collaborating with her on research projects that my interest in postgraduate development, in particular postgraduate supervision, surfaced.

In the following section, I share my experiences in successfully supervising my first thesis student, working with a senior colleague as part of a supervisory team and the “mysterious” oral examination. This discussion will highlight how my model of supervision does not work for students from different background and with different career aspirations.

Upon completion of my PhD and returning to UPM, I acquired my first Master’s thesis student within four months. In UPM, two modes of Masters degrees are offered. In the first mode, a Masters student has to take courses and work on a mini project – this is called the Masters by coursework. In the second mode, the student has to complete courses and also a thesis. The thesis mode entails team supervision, external examination and a viva (oral examination). It was a little shocking when I acquired my first thesis student, as I had expected to be trained as a supervisor before taking on that role. I was of the opinion that there would be some form of university-level or faculty-level supervision development programme. The notion of formal training of supervisors and providing structured support (Brew and Peseta, 2004) was non-existent. I advocated a contractual form of supervision to mirror my New Zealand experience. I drew up the agreement and attempted to negotiate with the student. Being in an environment where a student hardly questions a teacher, it was relatively easy for me to get the student to sign below the dotted line!! In fact, my first thesis student was more than happy to be involved in such a structured and transparent form of supervision as goals were clearly identified and specified. The supervision agreement included aspects of frequency of meetings, submission of drafts, conference presentations, participation in developmental workshops, when feedback would be provided, expectations of supervisor and supervisee and also on publications. Having supervised this student successfully to completion by adhering closely to the supervisory agreement, I am of the opinion that written supervisory agreements, with clearly articulated goals, may pave the way for timely completion rates.

Some strategies that worked were asking the student to write regularly, advocating a peer-to-peer model of supervision and mentoring in her career development.

Being a researcher in the field of academic writing, I insisted that the student do a weekly plan of her writing. I required the student to write at least 500 words a day (Murray, 2003). These writing were not necessarily on the research but could be on anything that she wanted to write about – this included her frustrations as a research student, difficulty in finding journal articles, being lonely etc. The requirement to write daily was to ensure that she developed a regular writing habit. Early in the week, we would meet to discuss her plan for the week and at the end of the week to report what has been done and to discuss any concerns. Due to this stringent insistence on regular writing in the early stages of the research, she became a habitual writer. My maxim: *do not find time to write but allocate time* worked well. In other words, writing did not take place when she felt like it but she planned to write regularly until it became a habit.

A second successful strategy that I used was to advocate a peer-to-peer form of relationship. In my conversations with other postgraduate students and comparing these conversations with the literature on supervisory styles, I realised there exists a range of supervisory styles which ranged from the expert-novice, 'master-slave' (Grant, 2008) and to a peer-to-peer collegial forms of supervision. In the expert-novice model, the supervisor, who is considered an expert, guides the supervisee. However, in the master-slave model, the supervisor plays a dominant role in hierarchical bond with the supervisee. In the peer-to-peer model, both supervisor and supervisee advocate co-construction of learning. I advocated a peer-to-peer model, as I believe that once a personal relationship has been well established, all else will fall into place. I did this through the provision of dialogical feedback (Kumar and Stracke, 2007) which often included expressive feedback, that is, praise for what has been achieved and politely structuring suggestions for improvement. Besides feedback, I treated her as a future colleague who needed to be inducted into a community of practice with mentoring, coaching and guidance. Waghid (2006) supports this notion of peer-to-peer model of supervision by arguing that higher levels of freedom and friendship should be prevalent in postgraduate supervision. Having said this, there are

also cases where supervisory styles may have to be negotiated, as some students may not wish to view their supervisors as their peers.

A third successful strategy that I used was to take a keen interest in her career development. As she wanted to pursue her doctoral education and become an academic, I ensured that she was exposed to the necessary career related skills such as lecturing, leadership, publishing, writing research grants, research management, reviewing papers, networking and presenting at conferences. All these mirrored the experiences that my own supervisor in New Zealand exposed me to. I gave her the opportunity to lecture in some of my classes and provided feedback based on the comments received from the students. Whenever I received a journal article to review, I asked her to review and the both of us compared notes. We attended conferences together and that provided plenty of teaching/learning opportunities for the both of us. She co-facilitated postgraduate developmental workshops such as publishing, presenting at conferences and managing postgraduate studies with me and that gave her the confidence to present, interact and network in an academic environment. I guided her with her publishing and she managed to have two articles published in international refereed journals before submitting her Master's research for examination. She had also presented at five international conferences (3 locally and 2 abroad) before her examination. My ultimate goal was to guide her to develop competent autonomy, in the sense that she was able to function productively, in terms of teaching, research and providing service in an academic environment. I ensured that she was able to compete in any doctoral scholarship application.

The ultimate prize for this successful supervision, which incorporated a negotiated writing regime, peer-to-peer model of supervision and taking an interest in career development, was that this student received a prestigious international scholarship to pursue her doctoral studies at my own alma matte, the University of Otago, New Zealand.

Co-supervision

Acquiring my first thesis student (M.A by research) entailed co-supervising with a senior colleague. While there were no official policies on joint supervision (i.e. regularity of joint meetings, job specifications, role of supervisory committee members), the joint supervision entailed the candidate meeting the supervisors individually. The student usually wrote chapters and submitted drafts to both of us for individual comments. Once my colleagues had commented on the draft, I met the student to compare the written feedback and to negotiate how specific goals can be met. When there was conflicting feedback, I discussed with my colleague to resolve issues. The feedback that my colleague gave to the candidate assisted me in my own conceptualisation of supervision practices. It was in fact the only supervision training to that point.

Upon reflection, one of the reasons why co-supervision was done this way, that is, the student meeting supervisors individually, and not “both supervisors meeting the student on each occasion of a supervisory session” (Pole, 1998: 264) was because of hierarchical issues. I was in fact happy that I was not meeting the student with my senior colleague. Culturally, it would have been inappropriate for me to confront or disagree during a face-to-face meeting with the senior colleague in the presence of the student. It was easier for me to discuss with my senior colleague in private but most of the time, I was not comfortable to confront on any issues. It is a rule that the senior member of the supervisory team (the mentor) has to endorse the thesis before it can be submitted for examination.

Thesis examination

Masters by thesis students and doctoral candidates in Malaysian universities have to undergo a compulsory viva (oral examination). The examination committee comprises two colleagues from the same department and an external examiner. The Chair is appointed from the same department. My experiences in the viva have been an eye-opener. Examiner reports are made available to the candidate and the supervisor only after the viva. There is no opportunity for the student to prepare a defence for the viva. Personally, I think this is not a healthy practice as in normal circumstances when one submits a paper to a journal,

one is given plenty of time to research, prepare and defend. Since a postgraduate student is inducted into a scholarly academic community, one needs to consider if this venture into a “mysterious” journey is a humane form of induction into a community of practice. At the university of Otago, for example, examiner reports are given to the candidate weeks before the viva, to enable the student to prepare for a defence. Any substantive issues in the examiner reports are disclosed to the candidate prior to the oral examination. The viva too is less formal and threatening in the sense that it is conducted as a discussion with the examiners.

I held numerous mock-viva sessions to prepare my student for a developmental experience which included possible publication, career development and collaborative research. However, during the viva, it was more often than not a pure examination with a focus on responding to criticisms without being given prior opportunity to prepare for a defence. The examiners’ reports too were more inclined to summative assessment than formative feedback in the sense that the focus was on the negative aspects of the thesis rather than praising or providing guidance to revise. (For a discussion on the disjuncture between assessment and feedback in doctoral examination reports, see Kumar, V and Stracke, E., 2011).

Furthermore, in an environment, which predominantly consists of quantitative researchers, examination procedures, in particular the viva, can become a nightmare when the thesis is purely qualitative. It becomes an agony when there is this unwritten rule that says that one cannot be conferred a postgraduate degree without having statistical analysis! The power relations among examiners, supervisors and the candidate are problematic when research orientations differ.

Reflections

Upon reflection, my peer to peer model of supervisory style was not as successful with other students, as some of them were not keen on pursuing an academic career. In these circumstances, most of them wanted to return to schools to teach and as such I had to vary my goals for them. They were more interested in doing a Masters by coursework, which is less time consuming. There was no necessity for Masters by coursework students to publish or to present at conferences. I am of the opinion that research is not complete if it is not disseminated and this position that I took was not favourably received by some students. When I insisted that they publish and present at a conference, one student re-composed his supervisory committee and excluded me! This was a learning experience and I realise that what is important in supervision is for the supervisor to understand the aspirations of the student and to work with the student to help him/her realise these aspirations. My first student, a full time student with a scholarship, wanted to be university lecturer; that motivated me to help her reach for her dreams. However, with subsequent students, the goals had to be negotiated with most of them just wanting to complete the “product”.

Pleasures, accomplishments, aspirations

Since returning to Malaysia after completing my own PhD in Otago, New Zealand, I have started conducting seminars for supervisors and students. It is good to know that many supervisors both here in UPM and other Malaysian universities are making use of supervisory agreements to make their expectations clearer and also to understand the expectations of their own students. They are becoming aware that postgraduate study is a journey and that it also entails generic skills training. In other words, supervisors are becoming aware that the value of the postgraduate degree lies after the student graduates – thus preparing the students for life beyond the PhD is part of the process. I have also started numerous workshops and training programmes to demystify the doctoral process. For example, students who attend my viva workshop feel more confident going for the oral examination as they are exposed to different types of scenarios including difficult examiners. A large number of students too have published in high impact journals as a

result of attending my workshops on publishing during candidature.

Bringing IDERN to Malaysia and exposing my colleagues in Malaysia to current practices in doctoral education has been the biggest joy and accomplishment for me. It meant that I have been able to showcase that doctoral education is a research entity on its own. IDERN has had an impact in UPM in the sense that more supervisors are aware of contemporary practices in supervision which focus not only on the thesis but the processes involved. Students have become more aware of their rights in publishing (Vancouver Protocols) and are better able to negotiate authorship issues with their supervisors. The emergence of a large number of peer support groups as a result of the exposure during IDERN is indeed a notable achievement.

It is my wish that the UPM and other Malaysian universities will place more emphasis on the students' learning process, rather than considering the doctoral journey as just an end product. Most importantly, the master-slave notion needs to be moderated and replaced by more egalitarian and negotiated forms of relationship when it comes to authorship issues in publications. More generic skills and competency training need to be incorporated to ensure the marketability and employability of doctoral candidates. Students need to be provided both intellectual and social networking support. An additional suggestion is that Malaysian universities consider supervision as a form of teaching and include this portion in the work load of supervisor. Unlike some universities in New Zealand and Australia, supervision is not taken into consideration in the workload. It is my strong view that supervision is indeed a form of teaching (Shannon, 1995) and it should be considered in the workload, as it entails a great deal of time and expertise.

Supervisors need to be exposed to contemporary research-informed practices in supervision; unfortunately structured supervision training based on best practices is not offered. Many supervisors I meet are eager to learn from the experiences of others, to know best practices based on empirical research. Many lament that when supervision trainings are conducted, these are too theoretical in nature. More sharing of experiences and, more research informed policies are certainly required to ensure that Malaysia's vision of becoming an education hub in this region becomes a reality.

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PhD Students' Experiences of Thesis Supervision in Malaysia: Managing Relationships in the Midst of Institutional Change

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Despite the plethora of studies that have been conducted on PhD supervision, little qualitative investigation has been conducted with a diverse, non-Western sample of doctoral students in an attempt to understand how the supervisory relationship is experienced. In response, eighteen students from diverse, non-Western backgrounds studying at one Malaysian research university were interviewed. Results illuminated the theme of "management" of the supervisory experience and included two streams:(a) acceptance of the situation, and (b) response to the situation so as to optimize their experience. The two major themes further included four sub-themes that included managing personal relations, time and accessibility constraints, academic compatibility, and expectations. Implications for the development of international research universities where PhD supervision of a diverse student body is a critical factor for university success and development are discussed. Key Words: Supervision, Doctoral Students, In-Depth Interviews, Supervisory Relationships, and Management

Introduction

From this last year, I now know what I don't want to be when I become a supervisor later on. I know I don't want to be like her.... (Allison, PhD student)

For students of the PhD process, achieving one's goal can feel like a lifetime's worth of education in just three or four years. For those that do not experience the joy of reaching their goal, the failure to do so can result in a lifetime's worth of regret and self-doubt. The "failure" of not getting through a PhD program can be devastating. In quoting her non-completer interview respondents, Lovitts (2001, p. 6) describes the experience as "gut-wrenching," "horrible," "disappointing," and even cites a small number that have resorted to suicide as a result of not being able to complete their programs.

Concern about the level of non- or late-completion of graduate studies is well documented internationally (Grant & Graham, 1999; Lovitts, 2001; Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009). Armstrong (2004) reports that in the UK, between 40% and 50% of students fail to successfully complete dissertations in the social sciences. Similar figures were reported in a later study where it was found that out of 1,969 candidates, 46% withdrew. In North America, failure and completion rates are very similar to those reported in the UK, with as many as 50% of students entering graduate programs dropping out before finishing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; Smallwood, 2004).

A variety of reasons for the increase in attrition rates have been advanced. In her well-reviewed book on the subject, Lovitts (2001) puts forth several arguments regarding factors that affect persistence outcomes and high rates of attrition among graduate students across disciplines. One of her main points is that the background characteristics that students bring with them to the graduate experience are not what matters, but rather what happens after they arrive that affects the overall outcome of their experience. To strengthen her argument, she refers to data that show that those who leave doctoral programs and those who stay are equally capable academically. She says,

Their background characteristics, their external commitments and responsibilities, their socialization as undergraduates, and the clarity of their understanding of the system of graduate education in general and their own program in particular, as well as their adaptive capacities, interact with the structures they confront in their programs to determine their persistence outcomes. (p. 41)

In her review of the literature from Australia, New Zealand and Britain, Moses (1984) identified three categories of student discontent: *personality factors* which include interpersonal differences in language, work style and also personality clash; *professional factors* which include a supervisor who is ignorant, misinformed or who has few or different research interests; and *organizational factors* which include the supervisor having too many students or too many competing responsibilities, and inadequate departmental provisions (Grant & Graham, 1999). Lovitts (2001) broadened the factors influencing degree completion and creative performance to include individual resources (e.g., intelligence, motivation, learning styles and personality), the microenvironment (e.g., location, department, peers and other faculty, and advisor) and the macroenvironment (e.g., culture of graduate education and culture of the discipline).

Although a number of factors have been identified relating to the phenomenon of attrition among PhD students, most researchers on the subject agree that completing the PhD is a process that depends on a close, working relationship between students and supervisors (Grant & Graham, 1999; Grevholm, Persson, & Wall, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Styles & Radloff, 2001; Zainal Abiddin, 2007). Unlike other professional or educational relationships, the PhD supervisory relationship can often make or break one's success. More recently, this relationship has also been linked to the notion of "connectivity" between supervisors and their graduate students (Terrell et al., 2009). Terrell et al. pointed to the importance of students' sense of connectedness in the context of the overall graduate experience, supported by their findings that low feelings of student-to-student and student-to-faculty connectedness in the learning environment may be predictive of PhD attrition.

From what students and other researchers claim, the heart of a successful supervision process is the quality of the relationship between student and supervisor (Acker, 1999; Dinham & Scott, 1999; Eggleston & Delamont, 1983; Grant & Graham, 1999; Knowles, 1999; Neumann, 2003; Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998). Poor interpersonal relationships and lack of rapport between student and supervisor are the reasons most often cited for problems encountered in the PhD supervisory process (Hill, Acker, & Black, 1994; McAleese & Welsh, 1983). According to Armstrong (2004):

...relationships with supervisors are also known to be related to the satisfaction and productivity that students find in their supervision, are known to be critical for successful completion, and are regarded by most graduate students as the single most important aspect of the quality of their research experience. (p. 600)

Blumberg (1978) further suggested that trust, warmth and honest collaboration are key elements in successful supervision. One study in particular indicated that satisfaction with supervision correlated higher with the students' perceptions of the supervisory relationships than with perceived expertise (Heppner & Handley, 1981).

The evidence pointing to the importance of the interpersonal aspects of PhD supervision is undeniable. Despite the number of studies that have been conducted, however, important gaps still remain in relation to our understanding of the nature of these interpersonal relationships and supervisory styles, particularly among PhD students from diverse, non-Western backgrounds (Lovitts, 2001). Much of the research in this area to date has been limited to identifying the elements of successful supervisory relationships (e.g., Moses, 1984), while others have developed theoretical models in relation to different aspects of the process (e.g., Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001; Styles and Radloff, 2001). Few, however, have examined the issue using an approach capable of understanding the experiences of students from their own subjective viewpoints.

One exception is a study by McClure (2005), who conducted qualitative interviews with newly enrolled Chinese postgraduate students studying in Singapore. In his study, the author stated that many of the unique challenges in supervising foreign students stem from cultural-based differences in expectations of the supervisory experience (see also Ali & Kohun, 2009). The author discussed the adjustment challenges faced by the students in light of these differences and how it impacts on the experience such students undergo in pursuit of their PhDs. The findings from McClure's study highlighted the fact that different students require different supervisory styles, ranging from a high level of dependency to a high level of autonomy.

The current study

McClure (2005) employed a qualitative approach to study the experiences of newly enrolled students from China. The current study builds on McClure's work by exploring in-depth the experiences of a diverse group of PhD students at the other end of the spectrum; or, those already having several semesters of experience with their supervisors. Using prior studies on PhD supervision to guide the process of conceptualizing, we attempted to shed light on this issue by focusing on several areas related to interpersonal relations between supervisors and their PhD students to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of the PhD supervisory relationship from the perspective of students.

In light of the wealth of literature on PhD supervision, the study considered several key issues in order to query how the supervisory relationship is experienced by the students including personality/personal characteristics, work style, academic compatibility, professionalism and accountability, and expectations. The main research question guiding the study was "how do PhD students perceive the nature of their

supervisory relationships?” The broadness of the main question allowed for students to respond on their own terms by making use of personal stories and reflection to describe their experiences. Thus, we set out to provide depth and voice to the supervisory experiences of PhD students studying in Malaysia.

Methods

The findings reported in this paper are based on a small-scale study at one major public university in Malaysia. This university was recently granted official status as a “Research University (RU)” by the Malaysian government, which has afforded it certain privileges as well as challenges, one of which being the intensification of research and publications expected from academic staff. This newly appointed status has focused on graduate students as an important vehicle for boosting research and publications output. At the same time, however, the increased workload associated with the increase in the number of new graduate students to both supervise and teach has put additional strain on supervisors’ time. As such, the newly granted “RU” status has contributed to a changing university culture that has required major adjustments from all parties in terms of how the university goes about its daily business, including how supervision is conducted.

The changes include more students to supervise, more research to conduct, more writing, more administrative work as a result of accreditation and quality assurance programs such as ISO, and little or no reduction in the teaching workload. These factors made conducting the current study all the more relevant, particularly to universities in the developing world who are choosing an aggressive pathway to international recognition.

As lecturers and PhD supervisors at the university under study, we were spurred on by our direct experiences working with PhD students in the context of graduate courses and supervision. As recent graduates of PhD programs ourselves (i.e., 2005), we were struck by some of the experiences shared by students, specifically around the challenges they were having in working with their supervisors. As supervisors not too far removed from being on the other side of the student-supervisor relationship, we were determined to learn more about what was happening and why.

In our discussions with students in both formal and informal settings, we became increasingly intrigued by the variety of experiences they were having. In addition, we were also hearing from colleagues in our department and others about the struggles they were facing working with their students in light of the changing work environment created by the new Research University-related policies. For example, there was a major shift in emphasis by the University toward more quantitative measures of success and productivity among the academic staff. In both formal and informal forums, fellow supervisors shared with us the difficulties of not being able to devote enough time to their students due to heavy workloads, difficulties with the number of new foreign students who had deficiencies in English, the administrative burden in complying with the university’s quality assurance system (i.e., ISO), and coping with the newly added pressures of having to fulfill key performance indicators.

Although the study could have included “both sides of the story” by formally studying the experiences of both parties, we chose to begin with the stories of the students, in an attempt to understand their experiences in a more structured manner using a contextual and descriptive approach. We chose to use a generic, descriptive method not

based on any formal qualitative research tradition in order to “discover and understand... the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). We found that although much research has been conducted on PhD supervision, certain gaps remained related to understanding the qualitative nature of these interpersonal relationships and supervisory styles (Armstrong, 2004), particularly in non-Western contexts.

Participants

We combined our purposive sampling methods. All respondents were selected using a criterion-based approach, while snowball sampling was used in addition to obtain focus group participants (Creswell, 1998). The criteria for inclusion in the study were four: (a) respondents had to be full-time PhD students; (b) they had to be in their fifth semester or later as it was assumed that those who had more established relationships with their supervisors would be able to provide more in-depth data. However, a small number ($n = 4$) of the participants selected were only in their second or third semester, for the sake of exploring if there were any major differences in their experiences with the others while one participant was a recent graduate (less than six months); (c) they had to come from diverse fields of study; and (d) the overall sample had to include those having both positive and negative experiences with supervisors. This final criterion reflected a maximum-variation approach, which is used to “document diverse variations and identify important common patterns (Creswell, p. 119).

Participants came from a variety of faculties including Engineering, Modern Language and Communications, Human Ecology, Medicine, Agriculture and Science. Half of the students involved in the study ($n = 9$) were international students, while the other half comprised local Malaysians. Of the international students, four were from Iran, three were from Sudan, one was from Sri Lanka and one was from Yemen. Eight of the students were males and ten were females. The majority of the students were full-time students. The age range of the participants was between 32 and 48 years.

Pseudonyms were used in the report out of findings to preserve the identity of the respondents. Prior to each focus group and interview a consent form was prepared and signed by each of the participants, along with an assurance that all data would remain anonymous and confidential and would be used for research purposes only. The university under study did not require any form of review board approval to conduct the study. As the funder of the project was the same university, no additional consent was required to collect data.

Data collection

Fifteen students participated in three focus group discussions (Toner, 2009; five in each group), while three semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews followed to triangulate the focus group data. Focus group participants were selected one group at a time using snowball sampling, meaning that new respondents were selected only after completion of the previous focus group. We added in-depth interviews following the three focus groups to ensure an adequate level of depth from the respondents and to provide an opportunity for sharing information or insights that students may have not

been willing to share in a group setting. We kept field notes that addressed both the content and the process of the sessions, which were immediately written following each session. Throughout the project we relied on memo writing to stay current with insights, hunches, and perceived relationships that presented as the work developed (Toner).

Half of the participants were students in our faculty, while the others were friends or colleagues of students we knew. Thus, when students were approached to participate in the focus groups or in-depth interviews most expressed a willingness to provide information about their experiences. If they did not show an explicit interest in sharing their experiences, we did not include them in the study as we viewed this as an important criterion for participation.

An interview guide consisting of a series of eight open-ended questions was used (Appendix), which was designed to help the students describe the nature of their relationship with their supervisors. Each interview lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Both focus groups and interviews were conducted by one researcher, while the other team member was used for peer review purposes, reading over the data and results for possible bias and other threats to validity. The interviews followed the flow dictated by the student(s), which resulted in some difficulties early on solidifying the protocol questions. In response, we kept the questions general and probed according to the flow and content of the conversation. In this way, the interviews were very much informant-directed.

Probes and prompts were used judiciously providing a more open-ended interview feel at times. This was deemed necessary as the topic proved very personal and even emotional at times, and we wanted to allow the students flexibility and freedom in how they responded. In addition, particularly during the focus groups, the respondents were highly engaged, which resulted in lively discussion that we attempted to preserve and encourage, as it resulted in rich data. To ensure accurate transcription of the data, all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with the written permission of each participant.

The combination of focus groups and individual interviews was employed to enhance the quality of the data obtained given the nature and goals of the study. According to Morgan (2002), one drawback of focus groups is based on the argument that people are easily influenced around others and are not as likely to say what they really think, as opposed to that which occurs in the context of individual interviews. In researching sensitive topics, there is a greater likelihood for this to be the case. As PhD supervision might be sensitive to some students, we chose to triangulate our focus group data with individual interviews in an attempt to account for possible threats to validity from relying on focus groups alone.

Data analysis

During data collection, we read the transcripts carefully, trying to “immerse” ourselves in the data (D’Cruz, 2002). Although observation was not a formal method used in the current study, we found that working in the research setting of the university helped to better understand the issues at play. Interacting with and supervising students, discussing relevant issues with colleagues and being involved in and witness to policy and other structural changes allowed us to feel highly immersed in the research setting. In

this manner, methodological rigor was enhanced through what could be considered as prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Such immersion helped us to identify themes, categories and patterns emerging from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Research questions were used as the focus for forming the categories. The transcripts from the interviews were coded, and used to analyze and generate themes as well as conclusions. We employed open coding followed by axial and selective coding to arrive at our themes. NVIVO 8 was used to manage and analyze the interview data (Krauss et al., 2009).

Data analysis of the current study was a highly evolving process that underwent several iterations. In the early stages of data collection and analysis there were concerns that the research question was too broad. Thus, as with most qualitative studies, the research as well as interview questions evolved during the process of data collection and analysis. All of the open codes were first examined to find whether individual codes could be combined into higher conceptual categories. Once these categories were developed, they were examined for their properties and dimensions (Rausch & Hamilton, 2006). Through the process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the categories were then analyzed to investigate their relationships to each other across the student interviews. After repeated reflection and inspection of our codes and categories it became clear that the concept of "management" was sufficiently broad to become an overarching theme encompassing the preponderance of the statements voiced by the students. "Management" identifies what emerged as the dominant experience for students in this study (McClure, 2005).

Trustworthiness

As the study was conducted "close to home," both in terms of physical space and our pre-existing relationships with some of the students, issues of bias had to be explicitly dealt with and disclosed to ensure trustworthiness of the results (Flick, 2007). To start, bias was initially addressed through our position as young supervisors engaged in an attempt to better understand the experiences of students for the enhancement of our own practice as supervisors. Biased results would certainly not benefit us in this regard, as we needed as clear a picture as possible of what the students were experiencing in order to be able to maximize our work as supervisors, as well as to provide inputs to fellow supervisors and university decision-makers. Therefore, bias was checked against our strong desire to "objectively study the subjective states of our subjects" (Bogden & Biklen, 2003, p. 33), for we felt strongly that the data could significantly contribute to our own supervisory practices and those of our colleagues. With this in mind, we maintained a high level of sensitivity through the use of detailed transcripts, field notes and by using a team approach, which allowed us to check our data and findings for possible bias (Bogden & Biklen). Having two researchers allowed us to check in with one another as the study progressed. One researcher took the lead on data collection and analysis while the other was used primarily for feedback and review purposes.

Trustworthiness was further established through our relationships with several of the respondents, as either former students from our Faculty or students that we knew from other Faculties. From this initial group, snowball sampling was then used to access the remaining respondents. Potential bias was addressed by avoiding selecting students

that we were currently supervising (with the exception of one student – Allison). The choice of respondents was critical in guarding against bias, to ensure that respondents would not “hold back” due to the fact that the researchers themselves were supervisors from the same university. Thus, we carefully selected students that were aware of this and willing to share openly.

In addition to triangulating our data collection methods by using interviews and focus groups, prolonged engagement in the setting, member checking with respondents and peer reviewing with colleagues were used to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Peer review, in particular, was employed for two reasons: (a) colleagues at our workplace were familiar with the students participating in the study as well as the issues being explored; and (b) several colleagues in the same department were qualitative researchers allowing us to use them as a sounding board to get feedback.

As mentioned earlier, we chose students as respondents with whom we did not have any direct working relationship with the exception of one student named Allison. Allison was being co-supervised by one of us during the time of the study and was only included in the study due to her very negative experience with her first supervisor. For the sake of attempting to include both negative and positive cases, Allison was selected to offset the inclusion of students who had positive supervisory experiences. Thus, on the one hand, Allison having a working relationship with one of us – a potential threat to trustworthiness – was offset by her inclusion as a negative case in an attempt to offset potential bias in another form (Creswell, 1998; Flick, 2007).

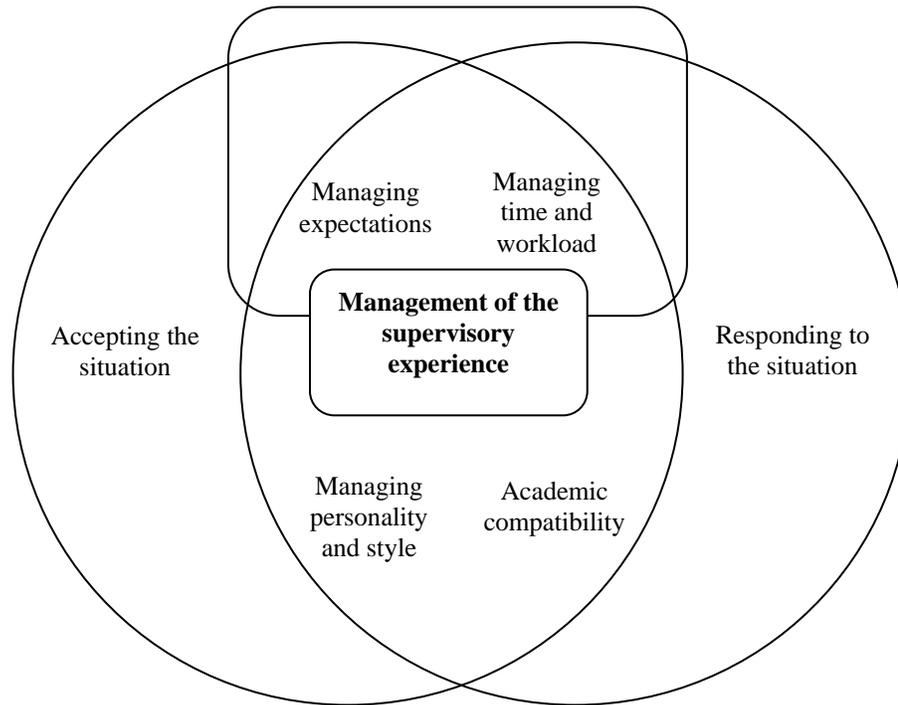
Reflexivity was ensured through detailed notes taken following interviews and recorded using NVIVO 8. The study results were reported to colleagues and other graduate students in two seminars. In addition, the findings were used as a basis of support for the development of a “virtual supervision” program and accompanying study at our department aimed at enhancing the supervisory experiences for both supervisors and students.

Results

The results are presented in response to the main research question, “how do PhD students perceive the nature of their supervisory relationships?” Two main themes and four sub-themes resulted from the analysis relating to the nature of PhD supervision. In general, the resulting themes illuminated the experience for the students as one of “managing” one’s PhD supervisory relationship experience. Managing their experience with supervisors could be understood according to two general streams: (a) accepting the situation presented to them; and (b) responding to the situation in order to optimize the experience and complete the process (Figure 1).

On a more specific level, management of the relationship experience also included the following four sub-themes: (a) managing expectations about the supervisory relationship; (b) managing time and workload constraints; (c) managing personality and supervisory style; and (d) managing academic compatibility. The two main themes and four sub-themes are presented and discussed below. Results are reported according to theme and sub-theme.

Figure 1. Diagram of themes and sub-themes



"Management" as a two-part process

The choice of the word "management" to describe the nature of the relationship from the eyes of the students implies a simultaneously occurring two-part process. Management, or managing, conveys action and has been defined as an individual's attempt to handle, direct, make and keep compliant, treat with care, exercise direction, work upon or try to alter for a purpose, and succeed in accomplishing. When one manages, he or she takes initiative to effect a situation. Before any managerial action can be taken, however, there must be some resolution or acknowledgement of the situation to be managed. In other words, one must realize that there is "something" or "someone" to manage. Management, therefore, includes two aspects – an acceptance that there is a process to get through, followed by actual strategies and efforts toward completion of the process. Managing a supervisory relationship thus implies managing people – the student him or herself and the supervisor -- as well as any of the other controllable elements related to the supervisory experience.

The current study findings indicated that the first part of the students' management process included some level of acceptance of the situation, no matter how negative it might initially have been perceived. This acceptance level varied depending on the student. Some found it easier to accept while others less so, but virtually all of the respondents in the current study alluded to acceptance. Even among students having very negative relations with their supervisors, we found that acceptance was an important theme throughout. For example, Allison, a foreign PhD student described her overall

supervisory experience as, “It was not a good experience for me. In my whole life, I had many bad experiences, but I think it was the worst.” Allison’s experience was so negative that she was compelled to change her supervisor just before the interview for this study took place. Despite her negative experience, prior to “giving up” on the relationship, she described her initial acceptance of it:

Our relationship, most of the time -- she was the boss, the leader of many big projects, so she ordered everything -- yes, I accepted it, maybe this was the culture.... So I accepted it, that maybe she wanted to be like that...

Another respondent, Harry, who described his PhD supervisory experience as very positive on the other hand, and who had just completed his program at the time of the interview commented:

...They (supervisory committee) commented but I accepted their comments. I had to accept because these were the people that were going to get me through. So whatever comments (they gave), it was only to help me survive my viva. It was as if they helped me to survive ... so I accepted...

Another foreign student, Matthew, also spoke of the need for acceptance:

...Acceptance of the situation of my supervisor for me is the best way, because I have accepted that the behaviour of my supervisor is like this and I don’t force myself to be angry or to be worried.

Jennifer, a local teacher and part-time PhD student spoke about not only accepting the fact that students cannot always have what they want in a supervisor, but must also be flexible and adjust to their situation:

Because we want him to have the expert knowledge, we want to have this, we want to have that, but you have to adjust. You have to play that kind of thing, you know... we don’t have the choice many times... to suit our style or to get him to be my supervisor. But along the line, we have to adjust.

Management as a two-part process also includes being proactive and even strategic in order to cope with the situation. It reflects the students’ efforts to maintain some level of control of their own situation and fate, despite the difficulties they face. This became evident when students discussed ways of getting through the process in order to achieve their overall goal of completing the PhD. Coupled with acceptance, management in this context refers to the efforts that the students made to not merely accept the situation but also devise a variety of approaches and techniques for navigating their relationships with supervisors and striving to achieve what Terrell et al. (2009) refer to as “connectivity.” Francis, a community health student commented:

We can't close the gap but what we can do as a supervisor and student is a sort of adaptation... we have to adapt to the supervisor's rules and regulations and the supervisor has to adapt to us on our weaknesses, our limitations and how we can maximize and enhance...to close the gap... how are we going to link that gap...

This quote by Francis is indicative of the two-part management mentality emphasized above. She mentions that (a) there exists some sort of gap in the relationship that must be adapted to or accepted, followed by (b) a simultaneous attempt to strategize ways of "closing the gap" or what can the student do to change the situation for the better. Another student Nancy, in facing the reality of having little time with her supervisor, responded with a strategy of her own:

I know the one supervisor is so busy I can only see him for ten or fifteen minutes, that's the most time I can meet him. But I try to be ready with everything. At least for 15 minutes I can have a good discussion. Or at least maybe I email him before. That's what I'm doing to get him to at least criticize my writing, but it's not easy.

Allison spoke about working through the difficulties and trying her best to impress the supervisor through producing high-quality work:

I think I tried my best because during the last year, I didn't sleep well -- maybe every night two to three hours. So I tried to work hard, may be harder than possible. So I pressed myself to do whatever she wanted....

And Katherine explicitly mentioned how her supervisor's advice to her helped her to realize the importance of managing:

Prof. Ramos tells me that, you know... as a student you should know how to manage your supervisor. Don't bring *keropok* (Malaysian delicacy), don't bring fruits for me, don't bring gift for me, but bring your thesis, bring your chapters... that one I need...

Jennifer added the importance of making a commitment to the relationship by being proactive in understanding the supervisor's background, schedule and the like, as an approach to being strategic in managing the relationship.

If you tell the person how you want the relationship to be with your supervisor, you have to make an effort. You have to see his time, you have to see his schedule, you have to understand a little bit of his background, you have to even understand a little bit about his (inaudible)...

The students' responses to the situation and their efforts to make the relationship work took on many forms, but there was a common need to adapt to the situation through management strategies and approaches following their understanding of the situation and

personal level of acceptance of the nature of the relationship with the supervisor. From this overall theme, four sub-themes also emerged that lent more understanding to how students understood the nature of the relationship and how their perceptions of it influenced their management of the experience.

Managing expectations

An important aspect of PhD study, for many students, revolves around how they manage their expectations of the process and the relationship with supervisors. According to McClure (2005), students' expectations of the student/supervisory relationship are often based on previous cultural and educational experiences and their perceptions of whether or not those expectations were fulfilled. This was true for some of the students in the current study, but others expressed having very few expectations either due to their unfamiliarity with the PhD process or because they were foreign students in a new country. Fran, a Malaysian adult education student, commented:

From my experience, with my supervisor actually, from the start, I didn't really expect much, you know. I didn't know what to expect from my supervisor. For me I would rather think that the responsibility is on myself. I am the main mover.

Despite having few expectations, Fran's approach to her relationship was similar to that of Jennifer, reflecting self-regulation in learning by expressing a high level of self-efficacy and sense of control. This could be due to the fact that both students were in the field of adult education and had internalized the values of their field.

Matthew's experience, on the other hand, was more in line with the students in McClure's (2005) study, as he responded to the issue of expectations from the perspective of the experiences of other students that he knew. Thus he compared his experience with theirs when he stated:

Yes, it was different than my expectations and now, when I see that it is far away from my expectation, and when I see that other students in other countries like in the Netherlands, they say that we should meet our supervisors often.... I don't force myself to have the same (as) with (my) previous expectations. Now I want to manage myself to accept the situation of here and now.

Managing time and accessibility constraints

In managing the supervisors' time constraints, many of the respondents spoke about how this was a major challenge, due to the heavy workload of the lecturers. One of the unique aspects of the University chosen for the study is that as a newly established Research University, there are very high expectations placed on lecturers in terms of their supervisory load with students. This heavy workload led to many complaints from students about the difficulties in getting time with their supervisors. Although some of the respondents merely expressed their frustration with the difficulty in getting what they felt

was enough meeting or face time, others went beyond and spoke about their attempts to manage this constraint. Matthew commented:

One of the problems that I think that affects the relationships between the student and the supervisor is the number of students. They have so many students and they don't manage all of them at the same time. My relation with my supervisor, just now, is not very good.... It is regarding our thesis and it is not very good because of the time...

Sam, a Sudanese student nearing completion of his PhD program at the time, spoke about the responsibility of students to do what they can to effectively manage the time constraint issue and thus maintain a good relationship with one's supervisor:

It means that if you're not satisfied with enough time, so...you have to keep this relationship good. This is our rule. You have to keep it good. Otherwise if it's not good you need to change the supervisor. If you want to change the supervisor, you need to look for someone that you can build a good relationship... So keep this relationship good is one of our rules. Basic rules.

Although he didn't elaborate on the meaning of "keep the relationship good," Sam was clear in his sentiment that the onus was on him as the student to do whatever necessary to maintain positive relations with his supervisor.

Being resourceful in the face of dealing with supervisors' time constraints was mentioned as an effective response by several students. Nancy, a Malaysian student, commented:

Of course, I managed to write the proposal but it was not good enough for the supervisors - not to their expectations and that's why I had to get some other lecturers, some other students - I don't know - some other resources to help me because they (supervisory committee) don't have time. Of course maybe they have time for a few hours in a month...

She added:

...The one supervisor is so busy I can only see him for ten or fifteen minutes, that's the most time I can meet with him. But I try to be ready with everything. At least for 15 minutes I can have a good discussion. Or at least maybe I email him before -- that's what I'm doing to get him to at least criticize my writing, but it's not easy.

Managing academic compatibility

Academic compatibility as a sub-theme relates to the supervisors and supervisees having a "shared language about the research topic" (Styles & Radloff, 2001, p. 100). In

the current study, several students discussed the issue of academic compatibility from various contexts. Jennifer spoke about academic compatibility in the context of expert knowledge, and how she was able to both accept her supervisor's limitations in expert knowledge, and respond proactively by engaging other faculty members to acquire the knowledge she felt was needed.

How could you expect your supervisor to have all the knowledge? When I started my research Dr. Shilling told me very frankly, I don't know that subject Jennifer, you have to teach me. We went along the line, so I made sure I consulted Prof. Ramos and Prof. Anthony, for other expertise, for other knowledge. Right or no? You can't expect him to be good in everything – he's supervising 20 students, you can't expect him to have all the knowledge in all the fields that he is supervising the students.

Jennifer's response to the situation reflects a highly self-regulated approach, whereby self-efficacy and adaptability toward achieving one's goals are employed (Styles & Radloff, 2001). Her response also reflects a high level of intrinsic motivation on the part of the student, which has been shown to act as a protective factor against attrition (Terrell, 2002). This same theme was evident in other students as well, some who spoke directly about "managing" the relationship. Abbott, another foreign student, talked about his experience.

I look at the relationship as a dialectical process. So I try to manage my relationship with my supervisor. Fortunately, he is also in communications and he knows these (same) issues. Always I try to manage my relationship by dialogue, I always tell him these are my limitations and these are my needs. Fortunately, up to today he (is) always up front with me.

Abbott thus relies more on dialogue in his attempt to manage his supervisory relationship. Perhaps it is this approach – being pro-active and assertive to establish clear communications -- that helped him avoid some of the other problems that other students experience in dealing with the difficulties related to academic compatibility.

Managing personal relations

Managing personal relations is a common theme found in much of the literature on supervision that often pertains to student and supervisor personalities, work styles and chemistry. Like any professional relationship managing personal relations is an important element to healthy and productive interactions that requires a shared commitment from both parties. In the current study, despite being queried directly about personality and work style, the study participants focused more on the overall process of building chemistry or rapport. Nancy commented:

I think that's one of the keys... when we look for a supervisor, we need a good relationship by them knowing what we are doing, by knowing our background. I know what my supervisor's doing, where she's going. I also know what she's doing. So we have a good rapport on that. That's why

she will advise me if there's any problems because she knows what happens. I think it's a good start to get to know each other and then the relationship will get better and better.

Rapport between supervisor and student can be strengthened by taking an interest in each other's work and lives. Rather than approaching the relationship by focusing expressly on what the student's were not getting out of the relationship, or what their supervisor was or was not doing for them, several respondents mentioned the importance of taking the initiative to build rapport, and likewise appreciated having a supervisor taking an interest in them and their work. Ruth, a middle-aged foreign student, shared her own efforts at managing the relationship through gaining her supervisor's trust:

I wrote for her two or three articles and every time when I met her she told me it wasn't good. I changed my article and wrote, wrote, wrote and then when I went to her office after that she believed that I could do it and I want to do it. Now I think she has trust in me because she wanted me... We are now joined for writing an article for a journal. It shows that she trusts me.

The students interviewed cited many examples of how the friendliness and helpfulness of the supervisor made a huge difference in building rapport and chemistry. It also encouraged the students to be more engaging and open with the supervisors as well. Betty, a Malaysian student, said:

Okay, socially my supervisor is very good with me. She's very kind... sometimes I feel really surprised the way she treats me. She's very, very nice really. She always takes care of my needs, especially when I had some family matters during my master's (degree). She helped me a lot.

Yusuf, a foreign student studying English Literature, echoed Betty's experiences in discussing how his supervisor's helpfulness contributed to developing positive feelings and rapport with his supervisor:

So whenever I need a book or anything... She's a very good supervisor. Very accessible. Whatever book I need, she asks me to go and look in the Malaysian local libraries. If there's no book, she'll just make the order. I think now more than 17 books she has ordered for me and I am very, very grateful to have those.

From their accounts, it was clear that much of what the students experienced in terms of personal relations with their supervisors boiled down to mutual respect, professionalism and an openness to engage in the conscious work of relationship-building. Management, in this sense, occurred through the work of attempting to establish reliable lines of communication and a respectful working relationship. This was evident by some of those who had negative experiences as well such as Allison who commented:

You know, it is not a matter of academic relationship. It is not a matter of academic subject. It is a matter of human relations. We should understand each other. I think that we are here to understand each other.

Discussion

Of the numerous studies investigating PhD supervision, few have addressed the issue of "management" at length, and how students not only "do it" but also how they experience it. Styles and Radloff (2001), in their study on self-regulated learning in PhD supervision, put forth a four-part model for supervision that includes "Management Strategies," as one of the major components of the process. The authors describe it as "organisation of self and task, and selection and use of strategies and relevant resources at optimal stages of the research" (p. 97). Apart from this, however, they do not elaborate on what management means to students or supervisors.

Grant and Graham (1999) describe the supervisory relationship as a "pedagogical power relation" where both supervisor and student are both capable of acting to change the relationship dynamic. They assert that the supervisory relationship is one that allows for the empowerment of students. They emphasize the fact that despite students' institutional disempowerment, students do indeed have the ability to co-manage themselves and their supervisors to facilitate the pedagogical process in spite of some supervisors' unwillingness to adapt to the needs of students. The current study findings support the assertion that students can empower themselves to be better co-managers of the supervisory relationship; however, in certain cases this may be less realistic as not all relationships and certainly not all supervisors are indeed "manageable" by students, such as in the example of Allison. This is also supported by Grant and Graham in reference to their experience conducting university-based programs on reconstructing supervision for both academic staff and students, where the authors cite supervisor resistance to attending the program as a barrier to changes in their supervision approach.

The current study did not target the PhD process as a whole but rather focused on the qualities and strategies of the supervisory relationship in particular. Management as a key theme can be due to contextual factors. There are several possible explanations for this. For one, as half of the respondents were comprised of foreign students, it is possible that much of the management employed was in response to the fact that so much of the experience itself was new and in many ways – foreign. These respondents were not only trying to adjust to the academic life of a graduate student, but were also experiencing a new culture (both on a national level as well as academic level), a new language (much of the campus uses the local Malay language), new food, different climate and others. In addition, the University was going through a process of structural development, resulting in major changes in the everyday work of supervisors. This had a major impact how the supervisors were able to work with students, for example, less time to devote to student development due to heightened demands for research and publications. Therefore, beginning with the students' expectations themselves, of which many said they had no idea what to expect, the adjustment process to a new setting and new academic environment can greatly shape the overall experience for the students, including their supervisory relationships.

In reflecting on the findings as they relate to our own experiences as supervisors, we can identify much with Styles and Radloff (2001) when they write that in the context of graduate supervision, both supervisor and student are involved in self-regulating processes. In the current study, although not one of the explicit objectives at the outset, the findings expound on Styles and Radloff's synergistic model of supervision by providing a greater level of understanding as to why management of the supervisory relationship is a major element within this unique professional relationship. Too often, perhaps due to cultural differences as elaborated on by McClure (2005), students enter into the PhD process assuming that management is entirely the responsibility of the supervisor. Perhaps only by necessity, many students over the course of their study realize that to be successful in forging a positive, working relationship and thus increasing their chances of not only finishing the process but making their time together tolerable and even enjoyable, they need to take on the responsibility of managing their supervisory relationships to the extent allowed. This is a deeply reflective process for the students as they often find themselves spending as much time and mental energy on relationship management as on their research and coursework.

One of the major differences between the current study of PhD students in a non-Western setting and McClure's (2005) study of Chinese nationals in Singapore is the fact that the current study results went beyond describing the experiences of the students in the context of their supervisory relations and attempted to show how the students actually react and respond. Although the original research questions focused on trying to understand their experiences, the resulting themes went beyond mere description of the experience and included the all-important element of "now what?" In other words, how do the students respond, strategize and understand this relationship situation and what are the different ways that they do it? How does it affect them personally and impact on their overall course of study? We believe this is the current study's main contribution to the current body of knowledge on PhD supervision in a cross-cultural, non-Western context.

Like most qualitative research studies, this study has certain limitations particularly in regard to generalizability, as the sample was purposively selected and small. However, in complementing previous studies, particularly McClure's (2005) and others, we find certain thematic consistencies across different settings despite the limitations. Although the study questions and samples differed in a number of ways, some similarities can be seen such as in the students' need to develop a high level of independence in order to solve their research problems; a good supervisor is one that provides a high level of guidance to "keep students on track"; from the process students develop a deepened level of self-awareness concerning their personal strengths and limitations; and tensions in experiences of the student/supervisory relationship may be understood in terms of unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations being brought to the new study context but grounded in the home culture (McClure).

The findings, although limited in scope, can help students and supervisors alike better understand the need for conscious management strategies, especially in the context of organizations experiencing rapid and dramatic change such as the university that served as the setting for the current study. In such settings, the excessive burden on supervisors to manage the change process can be overwhelming. Thus, they may be unaware of how change is affecting their supervisory efforts and effectiveness with their students. In such settings, it is all the more important for students to be able to co-manage

their supervisors and their experiences so as to more easily facilitate the process. Likewise, supervisors must recruit their students to be co-managers in the process. A student empowered with the knowledge that he is a co-manager of his experience as a PhD student could lead to added confidence and decision-making ability, thus reducing the burden on supervisors. Students' and supervisors' combined awareness and acceptance of students as co-managers of the supervision process could develop into an added dimension of self-regulated learning, which has been identified as an important element in graduate education (Styles and Radloff, 2001).

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Appendix

Interview guide

1. In your experience so far, how would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?
2. What do you think makes the relationship positive/negative?
3. In what ways does your research topic or field of study influence your relationship with your supervisory?
4. In what way does professionalism (or lack thereof) influence your relationship?
5. What kind of expectations did you have going into your PhD study in regard to your relationship with your supervisor?
6. If you could give a label to your relationship, how would you describe it? Parental, apprenticeship, mentoring, coaching, supervising, etc.??
7. What role do non-relationship factors (either within or outside the UPM campus) play in influencing or shaping your supervisory relationship?
 - Culture?
 - Infrastructure/resources?
 - Others?

Author's Note

Steven Eric Krauss is a Lecturer in the Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He received his B.A. from the University of Delaware (U.S.), his M.S. from Columbia University (U.S.) and his PhD from the Institute for Community & Peace Studies (PEKKA), Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2005 in the field of Youth Studies. His research and teaching interests include youth development, human resource development, Islamic religiosity/spirituality and social work. He has worked as a Program Assistant for the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research-Academy for Educational Development (Washington, D.C.); Social Worker at the Montefiore Medical Center (Bronx, New York) and the Jewish Child Care Association (New York, New York); and as the Director of Documentation and Evaluation at Community IMPACT! (Washington, D.C.). Since 2001 he has completed research in Malaysia on Muslim youth religiosity and family strengths among rural poor families. He is currently involved in several research projects including the nature of PhD supervisor-supervisee relationships, professionalism among youth development practitioners, leadership capacity of undergraduate students in Malaysia, mental models of smallholder farmers and career pathway mapping for graduates of technical and vocational education. He currently teaches courses in Adult Education Program Development, Youth Development, Qualitative Research Methodology and Youth Program Development. He has authored and co-authored several articles in local and international journals. Correspondences regarding this article can be addressed to: Steven Eric Krauss, Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Serdang, 43400, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. Phone: (603) 8946 7925; E-mail: abd_lateef@hotmail.com.

Ismi Arif Ismail has dedicated himself in the area of continuing education and joined UPM in 2000. His significant and scholarly contributions and involvements in building the capacity of people in the community, especially in the field of continuing education, human resource development and leadership are highly acknowledged nationally and internationally. Ismi completed his high school at Sekolah Menengah Sultan Abdul Halim, Jitra, Kedah. He obtained his honours degree in TESL from UKM in 1993. Due to his strong interest in continuing education, he decided to pursue his higher education in the area of extension education at the master's levels. He was appointed as a lecturer with Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2000. Since then, his contribution in teaching, research and services has been focused on continuing education covering the areas of extension education, youth development and leadership. Ismi obtained his doctoral degree in 2005 in Continuing Education from the University of Warwick, UK. Currently he serves as the Advisor of the Human Resource Development Student Association at Department of Professional Development and Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies. He has been involved in research and consultancy work, both nationally and internationally in the area of continuing education, extension education, human resource development and youth development. He has also been involved in advisory and community services both national and internationally.

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Nationality :Iran
Programme : PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

QUOTE

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new

Albert Einstein

A free people, free to believe as we wish, free to speak our minds, free to raise our children as we see fit, will, make no mistake about it, endure.

Nick Rahall

A THOUGHT

" Think about it! If you were ever really truly alone do you think you could have made it this far?

Don't feel sorry for yourself and hate everything about life just because things may not be going your way!

Do something about it! You're not helpless!

You may discover that in the long run you are much stronger than you believed and life will then take on a whole new meaning! You will be Great!"

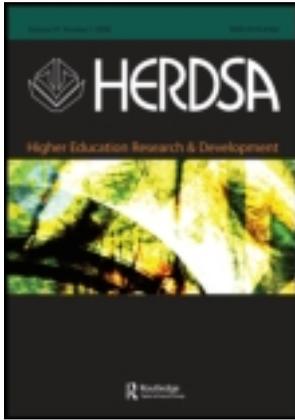
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Doctoral education in international context: connecting local, regional and global perspectives, edited by Vijay Kumar and Alison Lee

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BOOK REVIEWS

Doctoral education in international context: connecting local, regional and global perspectives, edited by Vijay Kumar and Alison Lee, Serdang, Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia Press, 2011, 233 pp., US\$25 (paperback), ISBN 978-967-344-254-6

The title of this book, and the essays within, originated from a conference held in Malaysia in 2010. The International Doctoral Education Research Network Conference brought together researchers from around the world. Collectively the essays address challenges of the doctorate for students and supervisors with consideration of ‘both the “high order” and the everyday issues of doctoral education’ (p. xx). The diverse contributions consider the nature and purpose of the doctorate, models of doctoral supervision, the student experience (particularly that of the international student), team supervision, writing and authorship. In their preface, the editors emphasise intercultural exchange, the recognition of diversity and respectful relationships.

The editors position the book as useful for academics establishing or strengthening their careers and for preparing doctoral students for future work. Ann Austin contextualises the competences a doctorate needs to develop in an environment of growing diversity of the student body, of quality and accountability regimes, local and global competition for students and funding, the expansion of knowledge and rise of interdisciplinary work. Historically, a doctorate developed disciplinary knowledge and research competence but did not cultivate those competencies that are increasingly needed, such as pedagogical expertise, interpersonal skills, professional skills and attitudes. Austin’s chapter provides an excellent outline of the current and future competences required of the doctorate, albeit one grounded in the North American experience.

A strength of the book is its contribution to understanding the experience of students and supervisors. The late Alison Lee was the lead author in a chapter with the enticing title ‘Excavating difference: stories of experiences of doctoral education from five countries’. The five accounts therein present views of the doctoral and supervision experience from Malaysia, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The five contributors worked collectively reviewing and commenting on the drafts of their colleagues. Entering the chapter I was excited by this approach, but by the fifth account longed for stronger editorial input. Despite being uneven in quality and content, the five combined bring to life dimensions of the internationalisation of the doctoral experience, the expansion in numbers and the process of learning to be a supervisor. For instance, Kumar, in his standout account, refers to the Universiti of Putra Malaysia having 2800 doctoral candidates in 2010, with the majority coming from the Middle East. I made notes for my own practice from Kumar’s descriptions of his experience as a doctoral student and of his supervision practice. Sarah Cotterall reminds us that students have multiple roles and offers sobering lessons on the problems encountered by doctoral students. She tells the poignant story of a student (whose supervisor was never told of her traumatic experience) who spent three days

at a hospital with a sick child unable to contact her husband or get food because in the rush to get help she left home without money or a phone.

A number of the essays provide practical guidance for students and supervisors and make visible some of the mysteries of scholarly success. Anthony Pare's essay, 'Publish and flourish: joining the conversation', provides an excellent account of writing for publication. Pare acknowledges he is writing from a particular and privileged location, one in which 'the conventions and expectations of that world have become a global standard, imposing on scholars from other places and traditions, a rhetorical hegemony that continues the colonial project' (p. 173). He argues that in order to be influencing the debates in a discipline, people need to be publishing and, in the western Anglophone world, this requires being knowledgeable about academic text genres. Drawing on rhetorical genre studies for a simple theoretical perspective on writing, he discusses the academic genres of the journal article, the book chapter and the conference paper in relation to disciplinary practices. This chapter has much to offer supervisors and students alike.

Despite glancing references to theory, including a nod to Southern theory, the book lacks the theoretical underpinnings that an emphasis on intercultural relationships should command. Among the exceptions is Catherine Manathunga's chapter, which provides a sketch of the major theoretical traditions for research on intercultural doctoral supervision. Manathunga provides an overview of post-colonial theory and introduces concepts or 'tropes' useful 'to understandings of intercultural doctoral supervision' (p. 86). These included liminality, transculturation, contact zone, unheimliness and assimilation. She defines the 'post' in post-colonial as encompassing both the time following colonisation and those beyond the limits of the ongoing influence of colonial discourses: 'Post-colonial understandings also emphasise the need to position yourself at or beyond the limits of colonial discourses and identities. For supervisors and students this means that change or transculturation for both is possible and generative as they work and [re]think together' (p. 97).

With 10 chapters and 21 contributors from Malaysia, Pakistan, Australia, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, reading the book was like attending a conference. Paradoxically, hugging closely to the conference was a strength and a weakness. As with any conference, there were the scholarly presentations, theoretical discussions, reports of research and practitioner-oriented sessions and, among these the surprises, the disappointments, the puzzles and, in the end, a broader and deeper understanding of the main conversations going on in this scholarly community. It is an accessible book and one that readers will dip in and out of.

Despite its unevenness, this collection provides insights into the private and hidden world of doctoral supervision. It contributes to the conversation on doctoral pedagogy and makes openings for further theorisation of intercultural supervision, particularly for Southern theory. The editors aptly refer to 'an enthusiastic attentiveness towards the dynamics of western and non-western, self and other, in the very real processes of establishing the orientation of research and of doctoral supervision' (p. xix). I concur and have recommended chapters to colleagues and students.

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