Becoming a Research Supervisor: Reflections on a Postgraduate Supervision Course

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Abstract: This piece of work presents reflections of lessons learnt from a postgraduate supervision course, which is considered an educative process that any research supervisor requires. This type of journey can lead to the success of doctoral programs or mismanagement thereof in most universities, nationally or internationally. Looking back at the postgraduate supervision course attended, it can be described as a personal journey that is capable of addressing the challenges any novice research supervisor would encounter in the field of postgraduate research. The supervision course comprised of a group of 13 lecturers from the same institution coming from different specialist fields. The facilitator was from a different university from which this course was offered. This course was voluntary and it was done during own spare time. During the training session, each novice supervisor would detail how they moved through different stages from initial stage of accepting a student to a final stage where a student qualifies with doctoral qualification. Within group discussions, each one of novice supervisors would detail how they moved through the process of advising students, what worked for some and what did not work for others, thus learning in a process. The tensions surfaced in each other's words, reflections and comprehensions of being thrown at the deep end by institution's practices. Here follows the discussion on how issues of power relations, scholarly work and project management are crucial in postgraduate supervision project. On completion of the course, there was a realization that there is a need for supervisors to be taught how to supervise in order to do justice, to be ready for the task at hand and be confident in future about postgraduate supervision. In conclusion, the researcher highlights few lessons learnt and recommendations that could help supervisors who are operating in similar contexts to help improve postgraduate supervision in institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: Postgraduate Supervision, Scholarly Work, Power Relations, Project Management

1. Introduction

The South African higher education system has experienced substantial growth in postgraduate enrolments since 1994. However, graduation rates for doctoral programmes are much lower than desired [16], but they have doubled in recent years. Therefore, there has been a lot of growth especially when considering the supervision capacity in the system. There are many reasons for lower doctoral graduation rates, such as, increasing burdens for academics to supervise the students [17] and that many students in South Africa and internationally are underprepared for research studies [8]. For this reason, postgraduate supervision in South Africa has become a most contested area and the quality of masters and doctoral qualifications is also highly contested [4, 17], which is underpinned by the fact that South Africa has embarked in

conducting a national review of doctoral qualifications which is taking place in 2020 and beyond. We are yet to see what the results of this national review will be. It is known from survey studies that South African doctoral graduates have much better employment rates than school-leavers, considering the current high unemployment rates in this country [4]. The social movements such as 'free education' and 'fees must fall' have also caused the influx of ill prepared and economically struggling students into the higher education institution sector. For example, these movements have allowed most learners who are coming from Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 schools (schools that are fully funded by government) to access the higher education sector with a hope that government will pay all university expenses for them, which is not always the case.

This is a good move in one hand but bad on another side. They are used to be provided with free food, books, electricity and water. Even some of the very same schools do not have enough resources, infra structure and specialist classrooms for quality education to take place. While some of these schools are performing better, most of them rely only on books and teachers for quality education, of which in some cases there are not enough books and qualified teachers in the classrooms. The 'free must fall' campaigns, in my opinion, have hoped to see the same situation happening in higher education sector, which unfortunately is not the case. While these movements were meant for the public good, they have also caused some bad results at the end. In South Africa there is this prevailing culture of people made to depend on government for everything in exchange of votes.

On the other hand, most of these learners (from Q1 and Q2 schools) come from socio- economic struggling backgrounds of child- headed homes, and homes that are mostly headed by grand parents whose only source of income is Government Support Grants. They live in RDP houses built by the government and on shacks, while their parents cannot afford to do anything for their children. The electricity is free or is bypassed, water and services are not paid for, the culture of paying and working is not practiced at all. They were taught to 'vote and get everything' you want free or you 'march and destroy' and get what you want. Now, the new university life throws these learners at the deep end because they are not used to university systems of learning and the new way of life. They are unable to support themselves financially while waiting for NSFAS and bursaries to pay. Even their parents or siblings do not afford to support them throughout this waiting period, because they are not used to. That is why in differing opinion, more disruptions (in the form of riots) are seen in universities in recent years. New models of funding and more university readiness initiatives, such as academic literacies and first year experiences, on the part of the students, need be put in place to help students cope with the university life. Therefore, the 'free must fall' and 'free education' campaigns increased the influx of three type of masses to the universities, that is, the struggling masses in terms of education, the struggling masses in terms of economic backgrounds and the struggling masses in terms of ethics/ behavior practicing Ubuntu-they are struggling to live in harmony with one another.

The inheritance of the colonial and apartheid histories have left a highly divided society where a significant proportion of the population is poor and not in the formal economy. Considering all these challenges facing postgraduate enrolments, especially masters and doctoral studies, educating research supervisors is becoming more complex and is needed to improve the throughput rate of the doctoral studies. These vastly changing environments will not afford the untrained PhD supervisors to copy the way they were themselves supervised. So, what is needed to be done to minimize these challenges or concerns? The range and depth of concepts of supervision a supervisor holds will dictate how they supervise and what type of a researcher will emerge at the end of the process [7]. In the next paragraphs, reflections on postgraduate supervision course (PGS), based on the writer's experiences on the course attended and how it has impacted on supervision skills are presented.

2. My Personal Journey of Becoming a Supervisor

I graduated in September 2018 with doctoral degree in Science Education. I was a senior lecturer at a University of Technology teaching Mathematics Education in a Bachelor of Education degree programme. I taught students from level 1 to level 3, with 200 students in level 1, 120 students in level 2 and 90 students in level 3, which is a huge teaching load.

There were other duties as well, such as monitoring students for Teaching Practice in schools and extra administrative duties such as conducting assessments and projects and any other related work. The amount of duty load that I had did not afford me time to read for supervision, but I was expected to supervise. Supervision is reading, I needed time to read in order to be a successful supervisor. To overcome this challenge, I gave myself time to read articles in my field, at least two hours per day, in order to be able to supervise students. It was a hard but doable task. Once, I obtained a doctoral qualification, I was then required to supervise doctoral students as one of my responsibilities. I was given three doctoral students to supervise. I was not trained as a supervisor, the only thing that I knew was to do as my supervisor was doing. The challenge with this approach is that alternative approaches that are available may not be known to supervisors who practice as they were supervised [1]. Lucky, for me, I had a very good renowned supervisor, who had a passion for his work, who guided me well, supportive, very knowledgeable in his field, who was strict, he gave me direction when I needed one. It is worth noting that, initially, I am a Mathematics person. However, in a university where I was enrolled for doctoral studies, there were no trustworthy Mathematics supervisors at the time, therefore, I had to switch over to science education. I did not want to be held back by disorganized supervisors. This was our perception as students and according to what we observed happening to other students. This is interesting point in that students often choose supervisors based on their conversations about supervisors' approaches rather than their disciplinary expertise.

A novice supervisor can imitate his or her own supervisor to a certain extent, as time goes on he/she become short of skills and expertise to supervise. There is always a need to be knowledgeable in the field, that is how this group of participants and the writer were motivated to enroll for the PGS course. The PGS course is aimed at building supervisory capacity across the South African higher education system. The PGS course has four major themes, that is, social justice in postgraduate education, importance of scholarship, supervisory practices and supervision processes, which are discussed in the next sections. The themes are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. *Themes for the PG Supervision Course.*

3. Issues of Power Relations

It is crucial for the supervisors to be aware of power relations, students' issues, and to know their students background. Supervisors need be cautious about knowledge and should always try to come down to the level of students and pick them up to supervisor's level.

The students need to be given instructions which will give them guidance but they must be trusted to make their own choices as long as they are within the rules. The main purpose of the supervisor is to know how to transform raw material to final product, while keeping students and all doctoral processes on track. Lee and Meng et al. further emphasize the growing expectations on postgraduate supervision [7, 10]. These are increased emphasis on employment outcomes, skills formation and timely completion. It is important for the supervisor to understand himself/ herself first and be able to reflect on questions such as who is teaching? Who is being taught? What is being taught and why? How do supervisors perceive students? How do students perceive supervisors? All these questions will have impact on how students learn and what is being taught. Asking reflective questions is crucial for any supervision environment. Reflective questions allow both supervisor and the student to look back over what, how and why they have learnt whatever they learnt in the supervision environment, taking that information and using it for future endeavors. It is important to ask a variety of questions such as probing questions, divergent questions, higher questions, affective questions as well as structuring questions [2] in order enhance students' reflective skills. In this era of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), it is important to understand that the challenges students are facing today are not the challenges that we faced in our times. It therefore becomes important to equip students with e-learning skills and computer skills for them to be able to use the skills in future. Using supervision schedule, students are arranged to meet with the supervisor face to face on the 3rd Saturday of each month in the university's library in order to show them different skills (usage of NVIVO; endnote, SPS, how to search for literature) that they need to learn in order for them to use in their thesis writing and also in future. Issues of transformation and current thorny issues are discussed in order to equip students with relevant discussions in class and also to give them opportunities to air their views. In this case, it is where issues of race, gender, power dynamics and histories need be discussed. The new understanding should be that epistemological access cannot be supplied or delivered but it be shared, discussed and agreed upon. This short discussion answers the above questions, *who are your students*? *What is taught and why*? As supervisors there is a need to be open to learn from our students, therefore, supervision need to be understood as a two- way process, students are learning from supervisors and supervisors are learning from students.

Bitzer et.al and Lee identify different models of supervision for different purposes [1, 7]. These are functional, enculturation, critical thinking, feminist, emancipation and relationship development qualities. These models hold different views for the role of supervisors. For example, a feminist supervisor will support a student in constructing knowledge and possible student reaction will be that of reframing knowledge. For critical thinking model, the prominent activity will be evaluation challenge, where skills acquired argument. The student reaction will be constant inquiry, fight or flight. Therefore, the supervisor must be enabled to uncover conceptions that they hold and examine them alongside other supervisors. If a supervisor wants to act as a mentor, he /she can use enculturation model- which looks at communities of practice, where the prominent activity is gate keeping, the skills gained are nurturing; diagnosis of deficiencies to be remedied. The possible student reaction is apprenticeship and role modelling. All these models can be used bearing in mind the purpose of supervision at a particular instant. Supervisors need to move across four roles, that is, emancipation, critical thinking enculturation and feminist, depending on the student they are supervising. The type of role a supervisor subscribes to will align to examples that they give when they are leading the students to master the processes of doctoral programmes, the relevance of knowledge to local communities. The core duties of a university are to find the solutions to problems of its community. The most common challenges in any community/society is unemployment, drugs, poverty, illiteracy. There are few research projects underway which are directed to youth to try to solve some of these problems.

With few resources, online learning approaches are also limited, which also affects how research modules are taught in university PG programmes. How are power relations used by supervisors? Do they impose ideas on students, do they allow discussions to prevail between group discussions? Students need to be given spaces to mess up, they grow when they make mistakes. Higher education sector, nowadays, is highly affected by socio-economic issues- most new students are coming from low socio-economic backgrounds and are financially struggling. Universities are experiencing high masses of students from quintiles 1 and 2 schools and programmes like academic literacies should be put in place to help those students understand the university learning. A supervisor needs to try to shift according to the needs of the students as [11, 14] suggest that access to how we make knowledge will help the new students cope in the university life. In my class scaffolding in the form of support, is crucial to establish first the level of the students, their context and background in terms of their knowledge in research matters

before providing basic support and move on to more complex activities where they need to engage and apply learnt knowledge in different scenarios. It is important to find out what is the students' expectations about the course. Due to shortage of time, guided by university calendar and policies, everything on a curriculum cannot be changed, but starting locally while making expectations clear is key. There is an option to learn from students as Freyer's work on humanizing pedagogy suggest. Supervisors need not impose ideas but allow discussions to prevail between group discussions. Students from different backgrounds, different races, different cultures and different knowledge systems are supervised. Therefore, there is a need to be sensitive to diversity. A short survey should be conducted in order to have a snapshot of understanding of where each student come from. Whenever support is offered or examples are given, different diversities should be covered. Class discussions and team work should prevail in classes to let students share their differences and show how they deal with different topics in their different cultures and backgrounds.

4. Importance of Scholarly Work

Scholarly work is important to create a reading and a writing culture in students as well as in a supervision schedule. Supervisors have learnt that writing is a practice- it is something acquired and developed. It is not a skill that is inherent.

Supervisors teach the writing skills and it takes time. Sometimes they are given article and also asked to read the abstract and give supervisors summaries of the abstracts, allowing them to jot down some important points. After that they are asked to go to the conclusion section, to find out what was concluded about the article or problem at hand. In this way they will indicate the author, the main idea, the problem statement and what was the findings. They are encouraged to keep writing journals. Supervisors learnt some skills such as pre-writing, editing, and drafting in the PGS course, which are very helpful. Therefore, time management at different levels, such as practical, philosophical, mother, and partner level, is crucial. Supervisors have learnt how to supervise the writing process; and that PG writing need to be contextualized within a university. They have also learnt that writing is not transparent but is connected to disciplinary values and attitudes [19, 13]. There should be a regular, habitual approach to writing [8, 9]. As a research supervisor, we also created space of positive peer pressure such as research buddy, research group where we sit down and write or we find an experienced colleague to sit with and each one of us do his or her own writing. Supervisors have learnt how to use a structured student support model. Students need to understand that one learns by writing and writing is the learning. One reads then write; one can't write without reading. Therefore, for every reading, there must be writing. Learning to provide a conducive learning environment that emphasizes importance of scholarship was a good lesson.

Using collaborative and cooperative learning groups, in most cases, do encourage students' responsibility for their own reading and learning. But, it is also not suitable for some students who are not in the residences. I have used collaborative and cooperative learning groups with students who are staying in residences and they learn fulltime and it was fruitful. However, it was not successful for part time students who are working because time frames to meet were not relevant for them. Also, some of the students prefer to work alone and not in groups. Therefore, applying mentoring and coaching approaches did not work well for old students who are part time and do not stay at residences. Old/grown-up/ students are also very difficult it is not easy to convince them to change their thought, even if it is not good. It is also important to be cautious of the relationship issues, how am I using my power as a supervisor and also asking reflective questions will help the students in putting forward their ideas.

In the PGS course we have learnt that writing is a process with overlapping stages across disciplines for productive writers. These stages are *pre-writing*, *first drafting, editing* and final *drafting*. In pre-writing- students write for themselves; in drafting- they write for someone else; they have an imaginary conversation with potential readers and finally they edit their work.

As a supervisor, the plan to teach students how do pre-writing and how to engage in the actual process of writing, which are the new writing skills learnt in PGS course. There is a need to allocate time in class for students to practice this skill. Students will be taught how to keep a reading journal or how to keep a full reference list. A reading journal will show what a student has learnt from the article, who says something similar or different, what is still not understood about the article, which is key for my own study. They have been taught a skill of doing a mind map and writing a research journal, which is crucial to learn for their studies postgraduate level. It is also important to teach my students how to build arguments- knowledge claims and evidence. A student must be able to state or build claims and support them by evidence. Each claim has to be supported by an evidence which comes from literature or from research itself. At the end of the reading the article the student must able to write down the core argument or the main claim of the article. These are all the new skills learnt from SPS course and will be implemented in supervision of students. However, they need to be practiced extensively before implemented. Supervisors need to request more relief period as a doctoral supervisor so that they can get more time to prepare, because with current heavy-duty load does not allow them to supervise effectively. Lastly, the facilitator of PGS course has done a very good job. This study/assignment is done because of her motivation. Shout out to her!

Supervisors have learnt that the ability to write well is an essential skill in every aspect of life, not just in academics' settings. However, learning to write proficiently can be difficult for all students irrespective of the writing stages or whether in primary school, secondary school or in a higher education institution. The writing process tends to be recursive rather than linear, often requiring the writer to move

back and forth through different stages. Supervisors have learnt that to support struggling writers, procedural facilitators such as writer's checklist provide explicit, scaffolded frameworks to guide students as they complete each stage. In attending the PGS course we have learnt that it is important to write in front of students so that they can see that as a supervisor also struggle to put words or points together. The skill of accessing knowledge making is on its own 'threshold crossing'. My own threshold crossing will be explained by language of description. Thus, it becomes crucial to model skills to students where peer revising and peer editing are part of the process.

5. Supervisor's Practices

There are different debates on purposes of doctoral programmes and postgraduate supervision. The role of the supervisor is complex and involves organizational/management, social intellectual/cognitive and emotional aspects [1].

Supervision is a dynamic process and the supervisor needs to adapt to facilitate the learning process and support the students' progress through their own journey of learning [9, 18]. As a novice supervisor, I have come to realize that there are different expectations and conflicting pressures a supervisor needs to cope with. The pressure to produce high quality original research versus pressure to complete the degree. There is also the pressure to meet high demand of governmental or commercial organizations. To be able to strike the balance between these pressures, four possible links to models of supervision are suggested depending on the role the supervisor wants to play at that particular supervision. These are functional, critical thinking, enculturation and mentoring [1, 13]. These models will help the supervisor to cope with the pressure they normally face when supervising the students. As a supervisor, I have learnt that it is important to discuss or negotiate my roles with the students in order for the student to know what to expect. It is always good for the supervisor to know the purpose of supervision at a particular instance. It is always advisable to move across the roles and not to stay on one role. Research supervisors need to be able to uncover the conceptions that they hold and examine them alongside other supervisors. The supervisor must be clear and explicit of what they want their students to learn.

Nowadays the changing contexts in higher institutions calls for a move to sub-specializations, cross-disciplinary learning and interdisciplinary learning. This calls for a new set of supervision skills, this means that a supervisor will be required to supervise the students seeking expertise that they do not have. This means that there is a need for even experienced supervisors to update their skills and share their experiences [15, 1]. To address the issues of changing contexts, literature suggest different approaches to supervision such as traditional, group approaches, team approaches. While apprenticeship is the most common approach in South Africa [1, 2], it is advisable to accommodate the new approach, as we have indicated

previous that supervision is a complex activity. No one supervisor is expected to provide all the necessary support in these challenging times. Group and team approaches will help so that a set of expertise will be used to help students holistically. Some advantages of team approaches include access to range of supervisors, a more holistic approach to problem solving and socialization of new supervisors for continuity [6, 1]. However, these approaches might not work well in institutions because which have more duty loads which are demanding. There is no time for meetings not unless our time tables can be arranged in such a way that all supervisors are free on the same day in order for us to be able to form group supervision. I think this idea has t be tabled to the management for consideration as it sounds like a good approach. We only use the co- supervision model where a more experienced supervisor is paired with a novice supervisor but there are no visible engagements between these supervisors, they only meet if they discuss students' work. Therefore, the novice supervisor is not learning anything.

A supervisor needs to know and understand his or her students. Supervising old students, who are teachers, they are part time and are working is sometimes challenging. They come with their own rigid ideas which sometimes becomes difficult to make them understand. However, the way I engage with them will help them to gain trust in me. Emails, SMS and WhatsApp messages to communicate effectively make life easier. Treating them with respect, encourages independent thought, sets high but achievable goals. The duty of supervisors is to teach them different skills of finding information in the library, how to organize information, how to use different search engines and tools. This will all be a result of me knowing students. Students feedback is a crucial part of supervision for development. A supervisor, must keep it in mind that feedback is a conversation between student, self and the work that has been done, therefore it must be done with great care. Written feedback is more fruitful than oral as it will help students develop as researchers and writers. Constructive feedback will be effective if work is done in smaller chunks, for example, articles are submitted in pages. As a novice supervisor, learning to write is achieved over time, it is achieved through writing, it is achieved by getting constructive feedback. Supervisors have learnt that to writing coherently is linked to lots of pre-writing, discourse and norms. Article auditing is crucial for PG student, where the student is taught the skill to find the central argument of the article, the title, abstract, claims and evidence. All this information helps the student to link to own reflective essay where the student gives the claim and is able to provide evidence.

Lee and Winberg et al. mention different approaches to cater for changing context in the higher education environments [1, 19]. These are group approaches and team approach as opposed to one-on-one which is common in South Africa. They further suggest a planning tool or supervision framework which might help ease the supervision work. The tool can be applied to provide an overview in planning to avoid haphazard, unstructured processes that overload

supervisors and compromise the quality of students' work. They further suggest that integrated approach to supervision is imperative.

6. A Doctoral Supervision Project

The process of recruiting students is very unclear, in the institution. While we know that they have to send a brief narrative of what they want to study and their field of choice.

The supervisors have no choice of selecting a student he/she will supervise; we are given the students. This is not good because there is no consideration whether you are a specialist in the field or not. Even the duty load or the lecturing load one has is not considered. Most lecturers in my department do not like to be involved in supervision, hence doctoral students are put at risk by this practice. Another concern is that once you graduate for doctoral qualification, you automatically become a supervisor without any training, support or mentoring. It is like you are put in the deep end. It becomes hectic, because you need to manage a project and also do a lecturer duty. As a supervisor I need to manage supervisory processes and reflect upon them. Relationship issues and time management form important part of supervision. These engagements should be practical, philosophical, at mother level as well as at a partner level to the student you are supervising.

Once a supervisor is appointed, a meeting with student is set up. A schedule of meetings and agreements on how we are going to communicate and how we are going to meet are put in place. The student is provided with all relevant forms for different stages of the doctoral journey. All university forms are downloaded from university cloud or website. In my university (university B) the first form to sign is the PG1 form where the agreement to be a supervisor is signed, then the next form is a proposal form, PG2A form, where the student completes proposal, applies for ethical clearance and she/ he is ready to defend his/ her proposal. PG supervision is project management on its own therefore same principles should apply.

A supervisor needs to keep learning contracts which are functional, such as clear deadlines, clear outcomes, when does she/he respond to emails, how communication is managed between students and supervisors, submissions- how feedback is provided. Supervision agreements are signed to be used not for compliance, make expectations clear. Supervisors need to realize that students are not the same. Some students cope well in a less involved approach of supervision, while others need a structured support in order to succeed [13]. when supervision of students is underway, there should be supervision agreements, where expectations are explicit as [8] contends that learning agreements are clear conversations. Students are also encouraged to submit grievances following the correct processes. Issues need be negotiated, for example, how often do we meet, when, who sets meetings, does students submit rough ideas or polished ideas. Negotiations should also be around issues of potential publication and co-authorship. Publication can be for money purposes, for contribution, can be a developmental tool and also a quality monitoring tool. Issues of how students are selected should also be negotiated, for example, when students are

required to write an essay, that is known as scaffolded access. As [6] cites good practices in supervision which are examples that help to lay good foundation in supervision.

Supervisors are advised to use a collaborative model of supervision because of the changing contexts of HE students and programmes which puts more pressure on supervision. A movement from traditional apprenticeship model of supervision to a more collaborative learning environments is a way to go. This study [4] interrogates how being part of such a community enables conceptual depth expected at a doctoral level. This is also what happened to me at a supervision level. Working in the community of PG supervision course have impacted on me conceptually because it was supportive, encourages risk-taking and facilitates conversations across different issues and disciplines, the community have to regularly articulate their position, the programme structure enhanced likelihood of fortuitous encounters with theories and concepts. I felt myself crossing over to what is known as Conceptual threshold with concepts such as transformative, integrative and irreversible which forms part of the process.

7. Some Lessons Learnt from the Postgraduate Supervision Course

There are many lessons learnt from the Postgraduate Supervision course, few of them are discussed:

Students come to higher institutions of learning with different learning needs and ill-prepared due to a variety of factors. Some students come into the postgraduate program with unequal research background depending on the universities they graduated from [5].

According to van Rooij [14], supervisors must be responsive to students learning needs. Supervisors are aware that most students lack an understanding of research methodology when they come into the postgraduate program, while many do not understand the tenets of academic writing. This reveals that undergraduate education does not adequately prepare many students for research-based study at the postgraduate level [6]. Some students have good grasp on technical skills but struggle with writing and communication skills. It is should be noted that the lack of skills on students' part is traceable to the quality of their prior learning, it is not in most cases because of their academic potential nor cognitive ability. This is amplified by socio-economic status in South African Context [4]. *Students need to be taught how to write academically.* Supervisors were taught how to become good writers themselves and that academic writing is a skill to be learnt. The lesson learnt is that most students do not have what it takes to write a good academic paper on their own without significant input from the supervisors, especially in their first time. Therefore, mentoring students to write an academic paper for the first time can be demanding on the part of a supervisor. *Students need to be motivated in order to succeed.*

Students must always be motivated to learn and complete their studies. Questions such as Why did you enrol for a

master's degree?" or Why did you enrol for a PhD" should be discussed. It is the supervisor's duty to encourage students not to give in times f distress or that taking a break should be the last solution. Students need to know that persistence and consistence are the key when the study is not progressing as planned. *Supervisors learnt that managing mutual trust is key in student-supervisor relationships.* In interactions with students, supervisors should advocate for three different levels of trust, that is, 1) be sufficiently knowledgeable in the field in order to be a good guide to students; 2) have their best interest at heart and want them to succeed; 3) be willing to help and be honest at all times. *Supervisors need to train students on how to handle and manage critique from their peers, critical readers and peer reviewers.* As part of the postgraduate process, students' work has to be shared with peers both within and outside the university to be reviewed and accessed. These are difficult times for students and supervisors as their work is subjected to critiques from colleagues which in most cases proves to be useful and lead to improvement of the work. In these times, both the supervisor and the student are at the learning curve. Supervisors have to *seek opportunities in terms of funding and allow students to attend seminars, conferences, both national and international*, in order to do presentations. The harshest lesson that supervisors learnt is that *students seek help somewhere else if they find that their supervisor is not doing what he or she is expected to do.* Some students do not mind whether they get help from supervisors or not. Students need to be afforded opportunities to attend conferences and also publish as they learn their PhD qualification.

The PG supervision programme has helped supervisors to have the community which is important in providing collective learning opportunities in a seemingly individual PhD supervision process or journey. Supervisors have a duty to lead students to the future that they will be proud and aspire to move forward to with confidence; and when they look back they would say indeed they advised and mentored correctly. With this knowledge, they can be fully prepared to solve as many challenges as possible that they face in future and as responsible adults, supervisors would not be held accountable for the failures of future young generations.

8. Recommendations

A future research need be conducted to establish whether there is improvement in practices on how postgraduate supervision is handled in institutions of higher learning. Another research is needed to find out whether the training of research supervisors does have impact on improving quality of doctoral studies and throughput rate in South Africa.

9. Conclusion

From a supervisor perspective, using a collaborative model of supervision is key, because the changing contexts of HE students and programmes puts more pressure on supervisors to engage collaboratively. A movement from traditional apprenticeship model of supervision to more collaborative learning environments is a way to go. It is crucial that supervisors are taught how to supervise so that correct procedures and methods are employed. Supervision is a challenging and delicate adventure where the quality of motivation, intellectual investments of the student and the supervisor, and the quality of the relationship between the student and the supervisor determines the outcome of the project [6, 13, 15]. Supervision cannot be taught like a subject but is more of a skill that is acquired through lifelong learning and practices. Thus, supervisors must regularly engage in self-reflection as a critical step towards improving their practices. In this paper, reflections on lessons learnt on the PG Supervision Course and contention that there is a need for supervisors to be trained for supervision is amplified. Thus, the hope is that this reflection on supervision will serve as a useful purpose for other supervisors and contribute to a general improvement of the research supervision culture, particularly in South African institutions with similar contexts.

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