‘Love it when you speak foreign’: A trans-national perspective on the professional development of doctoral supervisors in South Africa

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Abstract

Being a successful doctoral supervisor and adhering to international requirements and contexts involves important qualities, for example: being knowledgeable in disciplines and understanding different methodologies; being sensitive to cultural diversity; and cultivating interpersonal relationships. As doctoral candidates and their supervisors carry major responsibilities, doctoral quality and success are associated with several challenges. This article explores some of these challenges and suggests that candidates and supervisors might contribute more substantially to new knowledge if international quality measures for theses and ‘doctorateness’ (or ‘doctoralness’) are considered. This explorative study reports on descriptive and analytical findings from a project whereby three senior academics from three countries collaborated and acted as facilitators of research and developmental efforts concerning doctoral education and the professional development of doctoral supervisors. Such efforts involved both supervisors and doctoral candidates – the latter whose views are seen as important to shape supervisors’ views of their own supervisory practices and standards for the doctorate. The article outlines the processes and feedback from a series of developmental opportunities that were created and provides guidelines as to how trans-national efforts – particularly, but not exclusively, in the context of a developing country – can be used to promote doctoral education and the professional development of doctoral supervisors.

Keywords: doctoral education, ‘doctorateness’, doctoral supervision, professional development, trans-national cooperation, supervisor development
INTRODUCTION

Doctoral education and the supervision of doctoral candidates as a field of scholarly inquiry and practice has been described as contributing to the advancement of science and knowledge. Some authors point out that such activities represent a ‘normal’ path for entry into research communities, while others view doctoral degrees as contributing to society at large by educating competent researchers and creating possibilities for new knowledge and its application (Bartlett and Mercer 2001; Fitzsimons 1997; Manathunga, Paseta and McCormack 2010; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel and Hutchings 2008; Wisker, Exley, Antoniou and Ridley 2008). Others argue that doctoral education provides nothing less than ‘a rite of passage’ into academic communities (Andresen 1999, 30). Unfortunately, doctoral supervisors frequently base their supervisory approaches on their own, and often unquestioned, experiences as doctoral candidates and graduates (Bartlett and Mercer 2001; Bitzer and Albertyn 2011; De Beer and Mason 2009). It seems therefore important for supervisors to consider research evidence and theoretical frameworks for reflecting critically on their own supervision practices, particularly considering international best practices.

There appears to be little doubt that doctoral supervision as a scholarly practice involves complex academic and interpersonal skills throughout the supervision process (Aspland, Edwards and O’Leary 1999; Bak 2012; Bills 2004; Heath 2002; Taylor 2002; Waghid 2012). Such skills include guiding candidates towards proposal writing; making methodological choices; documenting and publishing their research; maintaining supportive and professional relationships; as well as reflecting on research education processes.

A less explored area is trans-national collaborative efforts, where both doctoral supervisors and candidates are exposed to universal practices which, in turn, are expected to contribute to setting standards and to enhance quality doctoral provision (Austin 2009; Bills 2004; Cumming 2010). This seems of particular importance in developing contexts such as in many South African universities where doctoral output, capacity and quality are lacking (ASSAf 2010; Backhouse 2009). In an attempt to narrow this gap in knowledge concerning trans-national co-operation, the article reports on how three senior academics from three countries collaborated on efforts concerning improving doctoral education by enhancing the professional development of doctoral supervisors. In particular, we explored processes and results from a series of professional development opportunities offered to 202 doctoral supervisors and candidates from 13 South African universities between 2010 and 2012. The developmental efforts aimed at providing guidelines as to how trans-national efforts may promote the quality of doctoral education and supervisor professional development towards ‘doctorateness’. Novel to this developmental approach and what added to the richness of the development opportunities offered was the contribution of the experiences and views of doctoral candidates regarding their own supervision experiences; the knowledge and experience of foreign supervisors; and a mixed participant group of both novice and seasoned supervisors.
‘DOCTORATENESS’ (OR ‘DOCTORALNESS’) AND DOCTORAL EDUCATION

There are generic features of ‘the doctorate’ that transcend disciplines, universities and doctoral procedures. These are features of received wisdom, which examiners often refer to as the ‘gold standard’ of the doctorate (Trafford and Leshem 2008, 34–35). When standards at such a level are met, they constitute ‘doctorateness’, which is what examiners expect to find displayed in doctoral theses (Halse and Malfroy 2010; McAlpine and Ashgar 2010). To achieve this, candidates are expected to progress beyond merely reporting facts, since the doctorate represents a level of knowledge, skills and attitudes that involves intellectualising, conceptualising and contributing to existing knowledge. Candidates and supervisors also have to understand the scholarly nature of the doctoral degree by appreciating the connection between doing research, writing a doctoral thesis and, at some institutions, defending a thesis in a doctoral viva. When these criteria for a doctoral degree are achieved synergistically then ‘doctorateness’ is demonstrated (Trafford and Leshem 2008; 2011).

Since doctoral career options are to be found in increasingly fluid and tight job markets, universities are concerned that research education might be viewed narrowly as research training with research results being produced at the expense of limiting educational and scholarly functions (Eley and Murray 2009; Malfroy and Yates 2003). The characteristics of an educated, rather than a trained, researcher have been identified as being:

- an expert in a particular area or field of knowledge;
- resourceful and able to search out what is needed to be found out and to use;
- mindful of the ‘bigger picture’ and belonging to scholarly networks of expertise so as to know what is important, current and relevant; and
- someone who is adaptable and prepared to change or link research areas and/or techniques to particular contexts and circumstances (Cumming 2010; Pearson and Brew 2002).

For university professors responsible for quality research education, doctoral supervision becomes a matter of creating high-quality research environments for candidates. Here issues arise as to whether there is sufficient access to those resources (including trans-institutional and trans-national expertise) essential to conduct and promote high-quality research and advanced levels of conceptual understanding (Austin 2009; McAlpine and Asghar 2010; Trafford and Leshem 2008). The resource requirement poses multiple challenges to doctoral supervisors for reconsidering their roles and their own professional development.

RESEARCH INTO SUPERVISORY ROLES AND CONTEXTS

Research into doctoral education indicates that worldwide, but in South Africa in particular, candidates differ increasingly in their backgrounds, ambitions and career expectations. Such variance inevitably creates differences in supervisory
needs (Johnson, Lee and Green 2000; Martinsuo and Turkulainen 2011; Samuel 2012). Where some studies point to matching candidates’ expectations with those of supervisors (Golde 2005) or focusing on the relationship between candidates and their supervisors (Bak 2012; Frischer and Larsson 2000; Waghid 2012), others emphasise the nature of these interactions (Ferrer de Valero 2001).

In many developing countries, including South Africa, doctorates have traditionally been earned in dyadic master-apprenticeship relationships rather than within structured programmes with cohorts of candidates (Bitzer and Albertyn 2011; Herman 2011). Current trends point increasingly towards a need for structured doctoral programmes, including multiple supervisors and supervision committees – rather than a single advisor – and often with international members as well as doctoral or pre-doctoral coursework requirements (Malfroy 2005; Martinsuo 2007; Nerad and Trzyna 2008; Teichler and Yagci 2009).

Recent research also suggests that support from peers (Backhouse 2009; Boud and Lee 2005; Lizzio and Wilson 2006; Samuel and Vithal 2011) and support from employers in the case of industry or for professionally-based research candidates (Malfroy and Yates 2003; Martinsuo 2007) play important supporting roles in research quality. In particular, several studies have shown that supervisory support for candidates can be supplemented or enhanced by involving foreign expertise and input (Allen-Collinson 2004; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2005; Malfroy 2005; Malfroy and Yates 2003).

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPERVISORS TO SUPPORT DOCTORAL CANDIDATES**

A common theme throughout much of the literature on supervisor development is what professional development opportunities for doctoral supervisors may entail. The following three examples make the point that supervisor professional development is not merely a ‘local’ concern but has implications for countries and regions which involve themselves increasingly in international knowledge-based economies and societies.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) has, since its merger with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), enabled academics to gain recognition for professional activities related to supervision. The creation of the Training and Accreditation Programme for Postgraduate Supervisors (TAPPS) scheme in 1998 was initially designed for the biological sciences. It was, however, flexible enough to make provision for other fields of study (Eley and Murray 2009). TAPPS provides a framework and process for the development, professional accreditation and support of research supervisors. Such a scheme promotes supervisory practices while simultaneously recognising supervisors’ experiences and practices as research leaders and mentors. Accredited supervisors are expected to demonstrate, amongst other things, that they can:

- develop or agree to a programme of research that is suitable for a doctoral degree;
recruit and select appropriate students for a doctoral programme;
• plan and agree to appropriate doctoral research supervisory processes and teams;
• use an appropriate range of supervisory skills to support doctoral education, attainment and professional development; and
• provide appropriate support to individual doctoral students on academic and pastoral issues (Eley and Murray 2009, 174).

Similarly, the Bologna process proposed that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) be developed through promoting mutual recognition of qualifications, thereby demonstrating transparency of systems and allowing easier mobility of staff and students across higher education in Europe. In this respect, the European Charter for Researchers comprises principles and requirements specifying the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers and supervisors (European Commission 2005, 15–22). Supervision and supervisory duties are highlighted in the code and elaborated on in follow-up reports (European University Association 2007, 22).

In South Africa, the situation regarding postgraduate supervisor professional development is rather unsophisticated if compared to some of these schemes. It has been hinted that since postgraduate education is regarded as a major building block in the research dispensation, the development of doctoral supervisors should be promoted by the National Research Foundation (NRF) as of prime importance (Van Jaarsveld 2009). Also, the quality of supervision is regarded as a key factor that determines quality in doctoral studies (ASSAf 2010; De la Rey 2009). However, no formal coordinated supervision training and professional development programmes for doctoral supervisors currently exist in South Africa.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION ON DOCTORAL SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In view of a lack of such programmes, three senior academics – one each from South Africa, the UK and Israel – co-operated to provide professional development opportunities for candidates and supervisors. These opportunities evolved from extensive research on the concept of ‘doctorateness’, disseminated in a series of joint best practice developmental opportunities in South Africa.

Two issues are relevant to the discussion here. The first is the current position of doctoral education and supervisory capacity in South Africa in developing its knowledge base; and the second is the process of trans-national co-operation towards supervisor professional development.

The South African doctoral supervisor context

The stated aim of the NRF (Herman 2011; NRF 2007) is an almost fivefold increase in awarding doctoral degrees by South African universities by 2025. This means
increasing the current 1,500 doctorate annual graduates to over 6,000 per year within 13 years. Apart from concerns about the target’s feasibility (CREST 2009; Herman 2011), the supervisory capacity at South African universities is questioned. Not only is capacity lacking in the ‘younger’ universities of technology and historically disadvantaged universities, but a lack of capacity is also discipline-specific; figures ranging from only 46 per cent of academic staff with doctorates in natural and agricultural sciences to less than 30 per cent in many other disciplines (CREST 2009). Furthermore, many universities in South Africa are regarded as teaching-intensive where undergraduate teaching obligations are high and therefore academics do not have the ‘luxury’ of doctoral supervision as their primary responsibility.

Another major concern is the quality of doctoral supervision, which includes inexperienced supervisors, unsuitably qualified supervisors and an unequal distribution of candidates among supervisors (Herman 2009; 2010). This is exacerbated by insufficient funding for full-time doctoral education and a lack of institutional support and infrastructure at several universities. Because of the legacy of apartheid and slow progress in capacity building programmes, there is also a lack of qualified supervisors from previously disadvantaged groups such as black South Africans. Additionally, many current doctoral supervisors are ageing white male professors who are close to retirement or working part-time, while newly-qualified black doctoral graduates are quickly absorbed into managerial positions rather than extending their respective university’s capacity as doctoral supervisors (ASSAf 2010).

**Trans-national co-operation towards professional development of supervisors**

One way of capacitating doctoral supervisors and enhancing quality doctoral education is to provide professional development opportunities which combine research findings and explicit developmental strategies, including:

- providing challenges related to increasing inter-nationalisation of doctoral programmes, which may involve inter- and multi-disciplinarity as well as multi-national approaches to contemporary global issues;
- increasing the shift towards a variance in models of supervision and moving away from traditional master-apprenticeship models of supervision;
- appealing to supervisors for greater self-awareness, building reflective capacity and self-improvement;
- challenging supervisors to explicate their assumptions and mental constructs regarding concepts such as ‘doctorateness’ and scholarship as, even within the same disciplines and institutions, supervisors may expect different levels of doctoral outcomes from different candidates; and
- creating an awareness of and a sensitivity towards developing and maintaining high standards of quality for doctoral education, sometimes with the assistance of foreign expertise.
Such a process of professional development for supervisors emerged in this explorative project through four distinctive phases. Phase 1 focused on ‘awareness’ in which the needs of supervisors (and candidates) became clearer; whilst concurrently, the need for trans-national co-operation embedded in local contexts, was apparent. Phase 2 emphasised the development of learning opportunities and activities; while Phase 3 involved a ‘pilot phase’ of development and Phase 4 addressed ‘implementation, evaluation and refinement’. These phases are outlined below.

Phase 1: Creating awareness of development needs
Since 2002, two colleagues from the UK and Israel started publishing extensively on the concept of ‘doctorateness’ and doctoral education (Trafford and Leshem 2002a; 2002b; 2008; 2011). Their work was aimed at doctoral candidates and emerged from six years of conducting professional development with supervisors and doctoral candidates from at least 30 disciplines and 50 countries. In addition, these colleagues participated in over 100 doctoral vivas/oral examinations at different universities and in various roles. Their experience of masters and doctoral levels of supervision/examining proved to be extensive.

Noting the questions that examiners asked doctoral candidates in doctoral vivas highlighted patterns across disciplines and, thereby, demystified the summative examination process as well as the doctoral standards sought by examiners and supervisors (Trafford and Leshem 2002a; 2002b; 2008; 2011). These findings were supplemented by analysing two sources of documentary evidence. Firstly, the texts of draft and completed doctoral theses displayed how candidates assembled and presented their arguments. Secondly, examiners’ interim and final reports illustrated how they approached, undertook and reached conclusions about the scholarship displayed in theses. This evidence generated practical insights that could be acted on by candidates and supervisors.

In South Africa, at the same time, numerous developmental opportunities for supervisors across disciplines and universities were facilitated (CHAE 2008). These opportunities, mainly in workshop format, were aimed at inexperienced supervisors who had completed their doctoral degrees and were supervising master’s students or only one or two doctoral candidates. Prior to each workshop a needs analysis survey determined participants’ developmental needs in order to address their most prominent needs. Although participant satisfaction was continuously high (above the 80% satisfaction rate), these workshops were not benchmarked against criteria external to South African universities. However, new international developments and publications – in particular Trafford and Leshem’s extensive work on ‘doctorateness’ – provided for such an opportunity. In a joint effort, considering both local and foreign best practices and doctoral education criteria, a series of developmental opportunities and workshops were designed and offered to reflect best supervisory practices towards ‘doctorateness’.

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Phase 2: Developing the format and activities

Developmental opportunities offered in the UK and Europe by the two non-South African partners plus national workshops offered by the South African partner indeed provided a sound base for joint professional development for doctoral candidates and supervisors in South Africa. During 2009, the three partners discussed mutual supervisory issues that included:

- contextual issues unique to South African universities such as capacity, diversity, lack of experience and variance in doctoral requirements;
- generic international requirements for becoming ‘doctorate’;
- challenges involving ‘doctorateness’ and scholarship; and
- levels of scholarly thinking as explicated by doctoral theses and examinations.

A two-day developmental workshop format, appropriate for both doctoral supervisors and candidates, was decided upon. Participation was therefore inclusive of both ‘providers’ of supervision (doctoral supervisors) and ‘receivers’ of supervision (doctoral candidates). The rationale was that both could learn from each other’s expectations and experiences within a professional learning dynamic. The latter argument also prevailed in a decision to include more experienced as well as less experienced supervisors as participants.

Workshop themes or topics were closely related to both local and foreign requirements and those which would potentially address the notion and implications of supervision towards ‘doctorateness’ rather than focusing on either the mechanics of doctoral supervision or the complexities of research methodology. This approach emphasised in particular how candidates could be assisted in raising their levels of thinking about their research topics, their research processes and their potential contribution(s) to knowledge. Such an emphasis also aligned closely with what examiners expect to see in doctoral-worthy theses and then, where applicable, could examine during the viva. These expectations also recognised generic research features and processes that transcend disciplines. Thus, the workshops argued for promoting doctoral education and the professional development of doctoral supervisors across disciplines and layers of responsibility. Table 1 provides an overview of the topics planned for and covered during the pilot developmental workshop in 2010.
Table 1: Preliminary topics included in the pilot developmental workshop

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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Topic 1: The nature of 'doctorateness' and its significance</td>
<td>'Doctorateness' includes those essential features that are necessary in all doctoral theses. This topic explains the components of this notion showing how supervisors can guide their candidates to include these features in their research and writing their thesis. Examples illustrate how examiners view either the presence or absence of 'doctorateness' and how this influences their judgement of scholarly merit in theses.</td>
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<td>Topic 2: Levels of thinking</td>
<td>'Doctorateness' emerges when researchers raise their level of conceptual thinking about research. This topic illustrates how to approach research in a scholarly manner moving from the descriptive to the conceptual and so display understanding of research, 'doctorateness' and scholarship.</td>
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<td>Topic 3: The conceptual framework</td>
<td>Appreciating how conceptual frameworks emerge from theoretical perspectives, influence research design and aid drawing conclusions represent theoretical and empirical consistency. Examples of 'good' and 'poor' doctoral research are provided.</td>
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<td>Topic 4: Thinking like researchers</td>
<td>Examiners judge doctoral theses against criteria for doctoral candidates to become competent researchers. This topic explains how supervisors enable candidates to 'think like researchers' and thus provide such evidence in theses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic 5: How to conclude a thesis in one chapter</td>
<td>The conclusions chapter is usually the most difficult chapter for candidates to write – a view widely held by candidates, supervisors and examiners. Since the conclusions chapter is usually the last piece of significant text that examiners read, it is important that it conveys justifiable and positive impressions about the thesis and its scholarly merit. This topic draws on examples from candidates, supervisors and examiners to illustrate how this can be achieved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic 6: Introducing a model to audit a thesis</td>
<td>Research is expected to be coherent and integrated. This topic explains how auditing the text of a thesis can ensure that methodological rigour and scholarship are appropriately demonstrated. By viewing research as cyclical rather than linear, the audit model offers practical ways for supervisors and candidates to scrutinise doctoral research before submitting a thesis.</td>
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<td>Topic 7: Polishing protocols: guiding candidates to better academic practices</td>
<td>Drafting a thesis includes acknowledging administrative and academic protocols that are frameworks of rules which readers expect to see in the text of theses. Evidence shows that examiners give particular attention to how candidates – and by implication supervisors – ensure that the protocols are self-evident in doctoral text.</td>
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Phase 3: Piloting, evaluation and changes

The pilot series of developmental workshop opportunities took place in South Africa in April 2010. The two-day event was repeated three times with 20 to 25 doctoral candidates and supervisors per group, representing seven universities and 15 disciplines or areas of study. After the workshops, participants provided feedback on features they could potentially and productively incorporate into their studies or supervision practices. They also indicated those elements that were considered to be less useful.

Participant observations such as the following were frequent:

Candidate: Ideas from other supervisors, particularly those from overseas and other universities were very useful. I don’t mean that my own supervisor is not good, but these ideas are really new and exciting
Novice supervisor: For me the criteria for doctorateness were made more visible. They helped me to see explicitly what I should be doing and it will be easier for me to communicate about the doctoral education process with others – particularly my students.

More experienced supervisor: The doctoral education guidelines provided to us made sense. I am going to amend those I have used up until now and apply them in my supervision. The difference between narrow research training and a broader doctoral education also seems important. I have learnt a lot – both from the students that were present and the two colleagues from abroad.

No topic or theme in the pilot workshops was deemed unnecessary and very few activities were reported as being of little or no use; also, workshop processes and dynamics were judged as positive experiences. However, responses showed that contextual variance among international doctoral education systems, and even among local doctoral and supervision practices, could be better accommodated within activities and discussions. For instance, participants from the University of South Africa (Unisa) indicated particular concerns regarding supervision within the context of an open and distance learning (ODL) institution. Overall, however, participants judged the pilot workshops to have achieved their aim of lifting the level of thinking about ‘doctorateness’, doctoral studies and supervision. The programme was thus slightly adapted for implementation in 2011 and 2012.

Phase 4: Implementation, evaluation and refinement

Two series of three two-day workshops attended by 127 supervisors and doctoral candidates from 13 South African universities followed in September 2011 and February 2012. It was argued that during the implementation phase, workshop activities could include how developmental opportunities and activities may be cascaded in institutions. Cascading is a process whereby people who have developed their knowledge and skills assist colleagues in the same environment or institution to acquire a similar level of knowledge and skills.

Although the workshops had no official standing in any university, feedback from participants pointed to the recognition of potential value. Table 2 provides a number of typical samples from categories of participant responses as rendered from supervisors and candidates a month after the last workshop took place. A total of 116 (from 127) participants responded to an invitation to comment on how they experienced the particular developmental workshop they were involved in.
Table 2: Sample categories of comments rendered in the project implementation phase

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participant (S = supervisor; C = candidate)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Opening up of opportunities</td>
<td>'For me this workshop pointed to the many opportunities available in the supervisory relationship. It suggested a generic benchmark for doctoral studies and supervision which I will consider to use' (S45). 'This workshop came at the right time for my PhD studies and covered aspects very relevant to the question of doctorateness. I must admit, I did not think about my studies in this way before' (C22).</td>
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<td>Thinking like a researcher</td>
<td>'This workshop was an eye-opener. It has helped me to see my doctoral studies from a different angle. It has also helped me to be sensitive towards raising my level of thinking (as a researcher) and adopting a more critical analytic attitude' (C36). 'In future my supervision activities will include some of the suggested tools to assist my students to think like researchers' (S27).</td>
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<td>Providing tools and models</td>
<td>'Three things stood out for me: Firstly, the 'magic circle' model, which represents a holistic approach to research and linking the components by looking at their relationships. Secondly, guidelines on concluding a thesis have highlighted that there is no need to repeat what has been said already. Thirdly, the designing architecture as a working document should be a priority for discussion between candidate and supervisor' (S86). 'Seeing the various models made me aware of how narrow my thinking was to date as to starting with my doctoral degree. I am going to alert my supervisor to these different options. The entire workshop, including all its parts, were valuable to developing my self-awareness regarding the doctoral journey awaiting me over the next few years' (C29).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structuring</td>
<td>'A more structured way of supervising has been advocated and I will definitely try that. For me the workshop covered most of the important aspects of supervision and advising doctoral candidates. Although the workshop did not attend to very specific issues in my field of expertise, I consider myself fortunate to have been exposed to generic international expectations and standards for the doctorate' (S65). 'Beginning with the end in mind opened up new opportunities for my studies and my thesis -- to structure it differently. One thing that I would have liked to see in the workshop is ideas on how research results (my thesis) may eventually be disseminated for wider use' (C72).</td>
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Facilitator observations and reported workshop experiences such as those indicated in Table 2 were encouraging. On the one hand, supervisors typically seem to have found trans-national involvement in developmental opportunities valuable in a number of ways, including: opening up new possibilities for approaching their supervision (e.g. S45); assisting their doctoral students in lifting the level of thinking about their research findings (e.g. S27); applying a more comprehensive design architecture for projects and using audit instrumentation for theses (e.g. S86); as well as expressing appreciation for being exposed to generic scholarly expectations and international standards (e.g. S65). Candidates, on the other hand, found novel ways to think about their studies (e.g. C22); to take a more critical-analytical stance towards their studies (e.g. C36); to broaden their research options and increase their self-awareness (e.g. C29); and to study and write theses with the examined product in mind (e.g. C72).
What became clear was that the development of generic skills and competences regarding the completion and supervising of doctoral studies, as embodied by wider, trans-national scholarly requirements and examination, were considered important. Furthermore, supervisors’ roles and candidates’ expectations clearly reach further than merely undertaking or advising on any one particular study. Expectations of ‘doctorateness’ and scholarship include levels of thinking that need to be explicated and supervised in order for candidates to succeed academically, as well as be assimilated into research and scholarly communities. This may open up new opportunities, particularly for doctoral graduates who aim to undertake post-doctoral studies or pursue research careers outside of particular institutions or abroad.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Theoretical explorations of ‘doctorateness’ and doctoral education, together with the experience gathered from trans-national co-operation on the professional development of supervisors, point to a number of notable implications.

Firstly, if the professional development of supervisors is broadened to include (a) generic trans-national quality criteria; (b) salient perspectives of doctoral candidates on conducting their studies; and (c) candidates’ sharing their experiences of their own supervision towards doctorateness, the quality of supervisory practices and doctoral education may be considerably enhanced. It seems clear that supervisory practices which are more educative and sensitive towards trans-national supervision pedagogies are rewarding to both candidates and supervisors. This is something which cannot be learnt through own or local experience alone and requires joint developmental interventions – especially for younger, inexperienced doctoral supervisors. Thus, a trans-national perspective can strengthen the relevance of planned professional development for supervisors.

Secondly, research on doctoral education as referred to earlier in the article clearly indicates that supervisors’ conceptions of important ‘threshold concepts’ (i.e. concepts crucial in the understanding of related concepts and practices), such as ‘doctorateness’, scholarship and good supervision, influence supervisory practices. Developmental opportunities that emphasise generic doctoral outcomes, what it means to be ‘doctorable’ and adopting a scholarly approach are therefore prerequisites for effective supervision. This has been well illustrated by the feedback from supervisors and candidates exposed to trans-national perspectives such as in this explorative project. Appropriate supervision strategies may therefore assist candidates in their transition from initially being dependent doctoral candidates to becoming independent researchers. Thus, it seems possible to learn from the experience of others and transform current supervisory practices.

Thirdly, in rapidly changing higher education and knowledge environments, more research and development work is needed into what developmental strategies for supervisors are required. For instance, literature and feedback from participants confirm that supervising international, part-time and distance doctoral candidates
provides particular challenges to supervisors. Thus, universities and professional
developers who provide research-based pedagogical guidelines for doctoral
education will be better able to actively support supervisors in their various multiple
roles and will be particularly applicable in a diverse and challenging South African
doctoral education dispensation.

Lastly, debate and more clarity are needed as to the scholarly expectations at
the doctoral level of studies at South African universities. Clearer notions of, for
instance, the level at which doctoral studies needs to be completed, the standards for
doctoral supervision and universal criteria for evaluating doctoral work are needed.
Clarity is needed on doctoral research features that determine originality, scholarship,
academic rigour, research design, and presentation. Thus, learning from trans-
national approaches to doctoral education could improve professional development
for doctoral supervision and also address current discrepancies between levels of
doctoral qualifications and outcomes in universities.

In conclusion, the professional development needs of supervisors or those
individuals responsible for coordinating doctoral research vary in scope, sequence
and intensity. The important outcome from an initiative as reported in the current
article should be an adaptable, flexible supervisor. Furthermore, the supervisor’s
skills should be grounded in an awareness of broader doctoral education issues
and generic standards for the doctorate associated with the induction of research
graduates in a world increasingly characterised by complexity, universal challenges,
plurality and competition.

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CHAE see Centre for Higher and Adult Education.

CREST see Centre for Research on Science and Technology.


NRF see National Research Foundation.


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