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Supervising African Doctoral Students:
Enhancing Intercultural Supervision in Aotearoa New Zealand

Research Report

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INTRODUCTION

International students provide significant economic, cultural and social benefits for universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. They make an important contribution to New Zealand's economy, international education being the fifth largest export earner in 2012, contributing $2.59 billion. While there has been a great deal of research documenting the experiences including the difficulties and hurdles faced by international students undertaking research studies (Andrade, 2006), very few studies have specifically focused on the experiences of African international research students. African international students are a fast growing, but little researched group. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is one of the most outwardly mobile regions in the world, with 4.9% of its higher education students studying abroad compared to 2% from the rest of the world (Chien & Kot, 2011; Daniels, 2014; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Demand for tertiary education in the region is predicted to outstrip supply over the next decade. Interestingly, the country from SSA with the lowest percentage of students going abroad, Nigeria, (population 177 million) is predicted to be the country in the world which will experience the greatest annual growth in outbound student numbers over the coming decade (British Council, 2014).

In 2013 6,668 doctoral students were enrolled in New Zealand universities, of whom 2,953 were international students (Ministry of Education, 2014). Although only 113 of these international doctoral students came from African countries, this number had steadily grown from 27 in 2006, in keeping with an international growth trend for African students studying abroad (British Council, 2014).

We argue, with researchers such as Fischer (2012) for the need for insights from research into the cultural context, expectations and experiences of African research students and their supervisors. Along with being a growing market, the lack of previous research suggests the possibility of new and different perspectives on supervision practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Therefore, this research interviewed supervisors and African students at two Aotearoa/New Zealand universities, Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University, with the view to generating New Zealand-based research evidence about supervising African students. The emphasis of this project was on identifying ways of enhancing intercultural communication and understanding within supervision practice for all students, thereby improving supervisory practices in universities generally.

The overall aim of the project was to investigate African students' and their supervisors' experiences of supervision at two different Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary institutions, Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University, across a number of different disciplines. The specific objectives included:

- To enhance our understanding of intercultural communication within the supervision relationship and how this may shape learning.

- To identify which supervisory processes (both teaching and learning) are most appropriate in moving African students to successful completion.
- To document culturally effective supervision practices in work with African students.
- To develop a set of web-based and print resources for supervisors that will improve the learning outcomes of African research students and enhance intercultural communication within supervision generally.

We conducted a literature review of the existing international research on the supervision of African students in order to trace global understandings of the experiences of African research students, which will be discussed in the literature review section of this report. We also linked this literature with broader investigations of experiences of intercultural supervision for culturally and linguistically diverse students and indigenous students both globally and in the Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australian contexts. These understandings shaped our research methods and theoretical framing and guided the interview questions we used to discuss African students' experiences of postgraduate supervision and the experiences of supervisors in working with African students across a number of different disciplines. In particular, we focused on the following research questions:

- How is teaching and learning affected by the supervisory relationship between African doctoral students and their supervisors including the challenges of intercultural communication, relationship management, learning needs and differing expectations?
- How might the findings of this project be relevant for improving the supervision of all research students (especially those from diverse cultural backgrounds such as international students and Māori and Pasifika students)?

A thematic analysis of the interview data, revealed the emergence of five major themes, which will be outlined below in the findings and discussion section. Finally, some recommendations for the effective supervision of African students were developed from these findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of research concerning international students, particularly research from Australia and New Zealand, focuses on the experiences of undergraduate students and students from Southeast Asia and East Asia (e.g., Novera, 2004; Wang, 2015; Zhou & Todman, 2009). From the limited amount of research available internationally on African research students, most of which has been conducted in the US and the UK, it would appear that the experiences of African students are different from other international students (Barker, 2011; Lobnibe, 2013) and that they may have different or additional difficulties to those that many international students experience (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004); Lobnibe, 2013. Indeed, there is some suggestion that they may be faring less well than students from Asia and Latin America (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004).

In particular, in the US and the UK African students may:

- be over-represented in rates of attrition (Barker, 2011)
- have more problems with adjustment due to differing cultural perceptions (Constantine et al., 2005; Essandoh, 1995; Hallet, 2010)
- not readily seek help (Constantine et al., 2005)
- experience more severe financial challenges (Essandoh, 1995; Evivie, 2009)
- have a lack of social support (Essandoh, 1995)
- face more perceived discrimination (Hanassab, 2006; Lobnibe, 2013).

It appears from four studies that African women doctoral students studying science in North American and Australian contexts may face double discrimination and marginalisation because of their gender as well as their ethnicity (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Bullen & Kenway, 2003; Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004; Lobnibe, 2013).

As Lewthwaite (1996) argues, supervisors play a key role in international students' adaptation to academic life. Indeed, postgraduate research supervision is a complex, advanced form of teaching and learning. Effective supervision has been shown to result in timely postgraduate completion rates and excellent educational and career outcomes for students. Research in Aotearoa New Zealand (Grant, 2003; Rath, 2008) and around the globe (Cotterall, 2011; Lee, 2008; Manathunga, 2005) has shown that effective supervision requires a mixture of teaching and learning strategies, high-level communication skills and professional relationship abilities. When supervisors are working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, intercultural communication and relationship management skills become important (Krauss & Ismail, 2010). These aspects of supervision create the frame within which teaching and learning strategies, such as modelling research practices, providing critical feedback on research planning and writing and mentoring, can be effectively implemented.

There have been a number of studies that investigate Western supervisors' experiences of working with international students generally (e.g., Egan & Stockley, 2009; Goode, 2007; Manathunga, 2007 & 2011a; 2013). In particular, this work focuses on intercultural communication and the ways in which culture operates within supervision. There have been a number of special issues of journals that focus on supervision and culture (Grant & Manathunga, 2011) and international doctoral education (Devos & Manathunga, 2012). This research has emphasised the importance of broadening what comes to count as knowledge globally by encouraging students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to draw upon their own cultural knowledge in their research studies (Singh & Chen, 2012; Devos & Somerville, 2012; Ryan, 2012; Yang, 2012). As a result, the latest literature on intercultural supervision suggests that empowering intercultural supervision rests upon acknowledging the cultural knowledge students bring with them to Western universities and facilitating the further development and dissemination of this diverse knowledge. Mutual respect, dialogic approaches to supervision and the recognition of the intellectual resources diverse students bring with them are now regarded as central features of effective supervision teaching and learning strategies.

Interest in the issues of, and the study intercultural supervision is not restricted to international education and encompasses a range of different strands with potential to provide insights beyond their own populations of interest. These include studies of local and indigenous students and supervisors. There have also been a number of studies of the supervision of Māori students in Aotearoa/New Zealand that highlight positive teaching and learning strategies Pākehā supervisors can use in working across cultures with Māori students that may be relevant to the overall study of intercultural supervision. In summary, McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin and Williams (2011, p. 127), recommend that Pākehā supervisors be:

- aware of the multiple agendas some Māori candidates bring to their academic work
- prepared for unpredictable consequences of their involvement
- understand that some Māori candidates may be using their doctoral study to strengthen their Māori identity
- open to the influence of community-based mentors
- open to unfamiliar ways of knowing and thinking.

Each of these recommendations may have ramifications for supervising culturally and linguistically diverse candidates, including African students.

RESEARCH FRAMING AND METHODS

The theoretical framing for this research comes from post-colonial theory. Post-colonial theory is currently acknowledged as particularly relevant to the study of intercultural supervision because it provides a nuanced and critical understanding of how culture and power impacts upon supervision (Grant 2010a & b; Grant & McKinley, 2011; Middleton & McKinley, 2010; Manathunga, 2007 & 2011a & b). In particular, post-colonial theory encourages supervisors and students to become conscious of, and seek to [re]examine the Western/Northern constructions of knowledge that remain dominant in many disciplines (Connell, 2007). The fresh and critical insights of post-colonial theory can assist supervisors to engage more effectively in empowering intercultural supervision. In particular, recent work by Manathunga (2014) has used post-colonial, feminist, indigenous and cultural geography theories to reimagine the role of place and geography, time and history and knowledge and epistemology in intercultural supervision. These theoretical insights were used to frame our analysis of the themes that emerged from the interviews we conducted with supervisors and African students.

The participants

After gaining ethical approval from Victoria University[1] the students and supervisors were recruited with the assistance of administrative departments (e.g., international student and graduate research) and through the African Students' Association either distributing information sheets on the project or by providing email contact details of potential participants. This is not a matched pair study. Students were recruited separately from supervisors.

The 30 participants came from a range of disciplines including the social sciences, natural applied sciences, management, and the humanities.

The students

Those interviewed came from Massey University and Victoria University of Wellington, and included 16 doctoral students and 14 supervisors. The students comprised nine men and seven women from diverse countries: Ghana (5), Kenya (3), Nigeria (2), Tanzania (3) and one from each of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Most were in their second or third year of study, with time since registration to the interview ranging from two months to just over three years. Four were accompanied to New Zealand by a partner; three with children. Five referred to their children or partners being back at home.

Ten of the 16 students had completed their Masters at overseas universities: USA (4), UK (3), Malaysia (1), Norway (1), and the Netherlands (1). One student spent six weeks studying in Sweden on a scholarship while completing his Master's of Philosophy. At least two of the students were graduates of internationally highly ranked universities. A number had two Master's degrees, one from their home country and one from an overseas university. Coming to New Zealand was the first experience of studying overseas for five of the students.

Fourteen of the 16 held competitive scholarships awarded on academic merit, nine from Victoria University, one from Massey University, one a New Zealand Government International Doctoral Research Scholarship, two on Commonwealth Scholarships, and one on a scholarship from their home country. A small number continued to receive a salary from the university that employed them at home. One student described herself as "self-funded" with her husband meeting her fees and living costs.

Prior to coming to New Zealand eight of the 16 were employed as lecturers or assistant lecturers in either a public or a private university. Three were in professional roles in either a government department or a university, and one was a senior official. One was a teacher, and three were full-time students prior to coming to New Zealand. The occupation of one was not recorded.

As well as discussing their current supervisors, students referred to previous supervision experiences at home and abroad, when they had been supervised for Master's theses, or on other research projects. A few had themselves supervised Master's and other student research projects. Some had extensive supervision experience.

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[1] Requirements for ethical approval at Victoria University satisfied Massey University requirements.

Profile of non-participant students discussed by supervisors

Eight of the African students discussed in the interviews with supervisors were participants in the current study, and eight were not[2]. Two of the students (discussed by supervisors) who were not participants in the current study came from Tanzania, and one each from Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, and South Africa. One was of white European descent, and one was of Indian ethnicity. At least five of the eight were on scholarships: two on Commonwealth Scholarships, one on a World Bank scholarship, one a NZ Government doctoral research scholarship, one on an unspecified scholarship, two were self-funded, with no details available for the eighth. Two students were described as coming "with good research backgrounds and with a strong expectation of delivery and return." Four of the supervisors were discussing supervision in relation to a student who had recently completed their PhD and returned to their home country.

In reporting on the students' experiences, in order to protect the identity of individuals we will sometimes use the term "African" rather than "Nigerian", "Ghanaian" and so on which would have been our preference. Similarly to protect identities we will on occasion just refer to a participant as "a student" or "a supervisor" or similar.

The supervisors

Fourteen supervisors were interviewed, four from Massey University and ten from Victoria University. Seven of the supervisors were men, and seven women. They came from a range of disciplines including the social sciences, science, management and the humanities. While information was not collected on ethnicity or nationality, when interviewed, one supervisor referred to being Māori, and another supervisor referred to a co-supervisor as African. Doctoral supervision experience ranged from two years to at least thirty years. One supervisor had supervised 30 students to completion, whereas two were yet to supervise a student to completion. Two of the supervisors had lived and worked in African countries, one for a number of years. The 14 supervisors between them explicitly discussed the supervision of 16 current or recent African doctoral students. Although one supervisor had supervised up to 10 students from African countries, for most this was their first experience with a doctoral student from an African country.

Supervisors who were not participants in the project

A number of the students discussed more than one current supervisor as well as past supervisors in home countries and overseas. Overseas experiences of supervision discussed included those in Malaysia, the Netherlands, UK, and the US. As this was not a matched pairs study at least four students did not have a supervisor participating in the current study.

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[2] One supervisor was currently supervising two African students, one of whom was a participant, and the other who was not. Another supervisor discussed supervision experiences with two African students one of whom had completed.

DATA COLLECTION

In this project, we drew upon two sources of data to investigate the experiences of African students and supervisors at two Aotearoa/New Zealand universities across a number of disciplines: a brief analysis of African research student demographics in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and in-depth interviews with supervisors and African students.

Firstly, we conducted an analysis of student demographics in order to chart the number of African research students studying at Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University and the disciplines in which they had enrolled. This was later updated.

Semi-structured interviews

A set of interview questions was developed for use with the student participants, and a separate but linked set for use with the supervisors (see Appendices A and B). Both were influenced by the frameworks of post-colonial theory and of intercultural supervision. These were emailed to participants prior to interviews along with information sheets and consent forms.

The interview questions asked students to describe their:

- reasons for enrolling in an Aotearoa/New Zealand university
- experiences of research education and supervision
- expectations of the doctoral experience
- expectations of supervisors
- communication styles and preferences in supervision
- relationship management approaches
- any areas of concern.

Using the same semi-structured approach, supervisors were asked to describe their:

- supervisory practices and strategies
- experiences in supervising African students
- expectations
- expectations of students
- communication styles and preferences in supervision
- approaches to identifying and responding to learning needs
- relationship management approaches in supervision
- any areas of concern.

Interviews were held in locations that were mutually convenient to the interviewees and interviewers. Typically supervisors were interviewed in their own offices, and students in a meeting room on their campus. Three members of the research team conducted the interviews, interviewing 13, 12 and 5 participants respectively. Researchers did not interview staff or students from their own faculties nor any participants with whom they had a personal or professional relationship.

Each participant was interviewed once for between 45–90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The planned questions served as a guide, and participants were encouraged to talk freely. Following the interviews participants were emailed a copy of the transcript to check. Participants either approved the transcript, or made minor editorial changes. In one case a participant used track changes to delete approximately one third of an interview. Each interviewer took responsibility for removing material that might identify an individual from the transcripts of interviews they conducted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Informal analysis occurred during and after interviews, including during the process of checking and gaining participant approval of transcripts. A systematic approach to the data analysis was implemented in the preparations for, and through a team data analysis workshop. One transcript was randomly selected and separately analysed by all research team members, and the approaches taken as well as the identified themes were discussed at a team *Skype* meeting which then formed the basis of decisions in relation to the ongoing analysis. Following this, to gain an initial sense of the data, the team members were expected to have read most if not all the transcripts prior to a three-day research team data analysis workshop.

At the data analysis workshop emerging themes were identified, discussed, prioritised, and an analytic framework developed. For the process of constructing and conceptualising the core themes of the framework, we took cognisance of our initial theoretical framework derived from post-colonial theory and from Manathunga (2014) on intercultural supervision as well as fit with the emergent themes. At the workshop each transcript was allocated to two team members to independently analyse and create a word file using the analytic framework as a guide. Later, the 30 paired files were cross checked by one member of the team. The checking involved identifying inconsistencies in coding, such as the one passage being coded variously as epistemology or as language or with multiple codes, or if one or both coders had had omitted themes from the framework. These sheets were checked against the transcripts and as appropriate additions, amendments, or notes made. Umbrella folders were created for each of the five majors themes, described below, and for some secondary themes such as recommendations for future practice. In the next level of analysis attention was paid to patterns and relationships within and between themes, and to the prevalence and the intensity of patterns.

The core themes of the framework

In particular, Manathunga's (2014) theoretical work on the centrality of place and the ways in which intercultural supervision is a social and relational space was utilised to construct the theme of **connectedness and belonging** in this study of supervising African students. Manathunga (2014) also argued for the need to adopt not only a present-time focus on getting students through their research higher degree programmes, but also to acknowledge and value their prior intellectual, cultural and personal histories and to actively plan for their future careers. These considerations led to the adoption in this project of the theme of **time**. The extent to which supervisors appreciated and made space for African epistemologies, knowledges and ways of knowing, being and thinking was also explored by Manathunga (2014) within the frame of Connell's (2007) concept of Southern theories. We were also interested in students' recognition and articulation of possessing knowledge, and ways of viewing the world that were different to what they perceived as their supervisors. This resulted in the articulation of a theme of **epistemology and what counts as knowledge**. Issues around the **English language and writing**, oral communication and accents and experiences of English as a medium of instruction became the fourth important theme to emerge from these supervisor and student interviews. Finally, the category of the **supervisory pedagogical relationship** was developed to explore the mutual expectations students and supervisors had of each other and of the process of research study; the ways in which supervision was regarded as a dialogic, reciprocal process of knowledge exchange and the types of feedback supervisors provided students with.

While we discuss each of the themes independently, they are interwoven. For instance, language is underpinned by epistemology and infuses discussion of pedagogy in relation to feedback on writing, and connectedness is at the core of the pedagogical relationship.

In the following section we report on, and discuss our findings, beginning first with what motivated the students to come to New Zealand (the why this country? this city? this university? questions). We then move to outline the supervision arrangements. Once the scene has been set, we discuss the findings from our analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Motivations for study in New Zealand

Each student typically had multiple reasons for choosing to come to New Zealand, and to their university. Recommendations or suggestions from friends/supervisors influenced the decision-making of nine of the sixteen students. The expectation that the standard of supervision and education would be high was important for seven of the students. Being awarded a scholarship from a New Zealand university or body was important for seven students. The idea of being in a different country and having new experiences was important for five of the students, four of whom had previous overseas study experience. Aspects of New Zealand such as its beauty, or reputation as a safe country were considered by four of the sixteen.

One student who wished to influence policy making in his country referred to the impact of international ratings on the perceived value not just of a qualification but of the holder of the qualification. Such recognition was viewed as helpful for opening up opportunities for being able to have an impact at home.

> We are increasingly aware that universities are also rated and so on. New Zealand universities are good universities and I thought that's where I want to be so that I can get a qualification that is recognized so that I can be able to carry some status that would help me share my ideas." (Student 3)

Another student was seeking a supervisor in her chosen and specialist topic area, and her response illustrates how the process of preparing to enrol, including identifying a supervisor with appropriate expertise for a PhD, takes time. In this case the search began during the student's master's study.

> I was in the UK doing a master's degree and I wanted to do a PhD after that so I started looking around to get a university where I could do my PhD but also get a supervisor and get funding. So for me the three things had to happen at the same time. (Student 4)

Although, for Student 11 the deciding factor was being able to bring his family with him to New Zealand, this was only one of a number of factors, including desire for an internationally recognized qualification, the recommendations of friends, and expectations around the supervision relationship.

> Personally what I wanted was an international degree and there were friends that have been to New Zealand ….A friend used to say it's a mighty nation and so he told me the right place to be is New Zealand, one because of the personal experiences they have with their supervisors, they relate on equal terms kind of and you can't tell who is the supervisor and who is the student. So because of that they feel at home, they work together comfortably from the beginning to the end. And to me, one other issue was as well, if, for instance, I decided to do my PhD in America my family could still be in Africa. (Student 11)

One supervisor made a practice of asking her international students why they chose New Zealand and Victoria University.

> For some but not all of them they have said that it's because this is where the High Commissions are, in Wellington, it's where they can, they feel like they have, are likely to have more easy access to immigration type services. So capital city but for most of them New Zealand isn't necessarily a first choice, it's, it's Australia, New Zealand, where am I going to go to get the money?

Scholarships did make a difference in the decision-making. Student 15 describes her reasons for coming to a New Zealand university.

> I'm an academic at a university in my home country, and we have these regulations that after 5 years every staff should enrol into a PHD …. I got admission from other universities in the US but I didn't get scholarship, so when I applied for Victoria and I was awarded a scholarship I said 'yes this is a great opportunity for me to do my PhD

> study, so my big reason is just also the requirement of my university, that every staff should have a PHD, … but it was my wish not just the requirement of the university, but I also passionate of getting a PhD degree.

Demonstrating the multiple influences in decision-making around whether or not to undertake a PhD, where to do so, and what one is wanting from the experience – Student 15 emphasises her desire to learn about people.

> I did my masters in the US so I just wanted more experiences of going abroad, studying abroad and learning. Not just only getting a degree but also learning about other people, just seeing people from different parts of the world, because if I do my PhD at the university at home maybe it could limit me to meet different people from different parts of the world.

Supervision arrangements

Both universities expected students to have two supervisors, usually with one being the primary supervisor and the other taking a more secondary role. For 12 of the 16 students both supervisors were actively involved in the supervision process and attended all meetings, and commented on drafts. In the remaining four cases the second supervisor did not play an active role. A number of students appreciated the different areas of expertise, or roles taken by the second supervisor. Often the second supervisor focused on editorial input leaving input on content and theory to the primary supervisor. Some students described second supervisors as deferring to the primary supervisor, or as taking a lead from the primary supervisor and this included situations where the secondary supervisor had greater seniority than the primary supervisor. In a small number of cases the primary supervisor had made it clear that they were a team of equals.

Technology played a role in most supervision relationships with students typically in regular email contact with supervisors, and in two cases having one supervisor routinely joining the supervision meeting by *Skype*. *Skype* meetings were set up with varying degrees of success when students returned to Africa for fieldwork.

One student described how in addition to meeting students individually his supervisor held weekly group supervision meetings with his PhD and Master's students (Student 16). Another student described a student-led thesis group where insights from supervision were shared among the PhD students (Student 11). One department held periodic group supervision sessions attended by all doctoral students and their supervisors (Supervisor 13). Here the students would share what they were doing, and other students, and sometimes staff would offer feedback, advice and support.

Student-led thesis groups were a source of support and guidance for some. In these community of practice groups students shared experiences and learnt about the requirements for the confirmation/proposal stage and for the thesis itself. "We have the thesis group…. a group of PhD students and even masters, we …have discussions amongst ourselves on topical issues. And so you learn from the word go." (Student 11)

The frequency of supervision meetings varied. A few students described having regular scheduled meetings: varying from once a month, every three weeks, every two weeks and weekly. Typically, meetings were held every two to three weeks during the early stages as the student was developing their formal proposal and moving from provisional to full registration. Later, meetings tended to be structured around the submission of writing. Sometimes this meant a meeting date was set, and the student expected to have submitted work prior to the meeting. The expected time of submission varied from one day to two weeks in advance of the meeting. Where work was submitted in advance, supervisors would usually provide written feedback before, or at the meeting. One supervisor referred to the submission of a piece of writing two days beforehand as the one requirement for the two-weekly supervision meeting.

There was some variation in the formality of the meetings, and who was responsible for calling the meetings, setting the agenda, and keeping notes or records of the meeting. A student who audio-recorded meetings on his phone later partially transcribed these and circulated to the team as a record of the meeting. Other students described calling meetings, setting the agenda and in some cases emailing the supervisors notes of the meetings. Students and supervisors couched such approaches as the student driving the project, and taking responsibility for keeping the project on track. Supervisor 5 was clear about his/her requirement for the student to take minutes by having “a non-negotiable rule which is broken all the time which is that the students have to take minutes and then they never do!” Supervisor 6 described how he expected students to take notes of the meeting, and to refer to them at the next meeting, and he had found this kept students on track. However, he noted his African student did not do this but was still on track! A number of supervisors expressed the view that the record of the meeting needs to be what the student has taken from it. Expecting students to write brief notes of meeting, was described by one supervisor, as an aspect of research documentation, and part of training to be an independent researcher. During the doctoral journey the student was expected to become increasingly in charge of the project. “At some point the student has to take over and start running faster than I am.” (Supervisor 6)

Whereas some students only saw their supervisors at scheduled meetings, others were in offices or laboratories close to their supervisors and would see them on a daily basis in the corridors, lunchrooms, or by dropping in which made informal discussions more likely. In a small number of cases students assisted with undergraduate tutoring, marking, or audited a supervisor’s course(s). Mostly, students valued informal contact, however, one student identified a downside to this. Because he was seeing his supervisor daily, formal meetings were not being held and although he had not voiced his concerns he felt his work would have benefitted from formal meetings. Another mused that while he had valued frequent contact with supervisors in Europe during his Master’s, he had come to think less frequent contact gave him great ownership of his ideas and doctoral thesis. At the same time he thought it would make a difference if they were to look in on him from time-to-time.

Unofficial or informal supervision arrangements

Three examples of informal supervision arrangements were identified in the interviews with supervisors; Māori and Pasifika supervisors holding a monthly meeting for international students; the interviewee being an official third supervisor; and a group seeking guidance from their former Master's supervisor (an Africanista).

Two were shared by an individual supervisor, and not referred to by any students, possibly because students may not have recognised that were relevant to questions on their doctoral supervision experience. One supervisor described how supervisors held a monthly meeting that was open to international students both from their school or elsewhere in the Faculty[3]. This group served as a support group. Students shared difficulties they were experiencing in their lives (personal, social, academic and financial). A supervisor described herself as a "secret, invisible third supervisor" for international students, including for three African students who were experiencing difficulties with their supervision/supervisors and who did not have the confidence to exit the supervision relationships. This supervisor attributed such difficulties to supervisors pushing approaches such as post-colonialism, or who were perceived as racist.

> And sometimes students aren't always very well paired with supervisors, sometimes supervisors have all sorts of ideas about what they think African people are like or Asian people are like, I mean New Zealanders are great travellers but we're also really parochial and we're really racist a lot of us. … This wider environment that we're sitting in here is a really middle class white environment and those are the norms that go. (Supervisor 5)

Interestingly, a small group of students whose research drew on African epistemologies maintained an ongoing relationship, emailing questions, drafts and interacting by *Skype* with their Master's supervisor who they treated as an unofficial extra supervisor with African expertise. If they were uncertain of advice suggested by their New Zealand based supervisors, they would discuss it with the former supervisor. This supervisor appeared to reassure the students that the advice was sound, and appropriate to their context.

Theme One: Connectedness and belonging

In particular, Manathunga's (2014) identification of the centrality of place and theorising intercultural supervision as a social and relational space were utilised to construct the theme of connectedness and belonging. The students were a long way from their home countries, and the sense of being connected or the absence of that sense; the feeling of belonging and being known, or conversely of not belonging and not being understood; of being visible or invisible that came through the transcripts is captured in this theme. Connectedness and belonging was linked to experiences of community, place and pastoral care.

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[3] This group was not mentioned by any of the students.

Common threads in supervisors' transcripts were the recognition of the distance the students had travelled, and how far from home and from extended family they were. Supervisor 12 felt that being so far away from his family was the hardest thing for her student. Another referred to "the tyranny of distance" (Supervisor 5). There was an awareness of cultural distance with some supervisors being watchful and even anxious about how the students would be treated by others (e.g., racism). Distance had an allure for one student: "I wanted a change of environment and for some reason the fact that this place is too far away from everything, it just called out to me" (Student 6).

Being recognised as a whole person, and being able to be that person was important for Student 4, who thought about this before deciding to come to New Zealand. She describes what is important to her in a supervisor.

> I guess somebody who realise that I was not just a student at this but as a human being. I'm many things. That what I am is not just the part that shows up for supervision and so we talk about supervision and then after that you know you don't really care about you know the rest of me. […] when I was coming to New Zealand I was very conscious that it's very far away from home and I thought I hope the people that I work with in the department will realise that in addition to being a student I am also a human being who is trying to settle in a new country.

While she was satisfied with the academic supervision from her UK supervisors, they and the university exemplified the separation between the world of ideas and the everyday world, where the former is sacred and the latter almost profane.

> So sometimes I think I felt as though that … the academic side of things was this holy place that they get contaminated by life you know, this is just pure academics, we don't want life in it you know … is all that unnecessary.

She began her search for a doctoral place while still in the UK, and, recognised that the person she was exploring supervision with from New Zealand saw her as that whole person. This was borne out in her later experiences in New Zealand.

> I thought to myself maybe these people have a realisation that if they're taking in international students those people are going to come in with other needs that are not purely academic. […] Yes, this person is employed by the university, but for some weird reason, she also cares about me as a person. And she says it, she said it on more than one occasion and she feels because I am an international student she knows I am away from home alone, in a way she feels as though she is responsible for my wellbeing in New Zealand.

A few students described turning to their supervisors for guidance and advice about the practicalities of life in a new country: finding accommodation, learning where to buy different products, getting help from church agencies with furniture and other goods. Sometimes supervisors checked that these things were working out for students:

> When I go for supervision we talk about my academic work but my supervisor at some point will also ask, especially at the beginning of the year when I first came, she would ask things like ‘so how is your accommodation?’, ‘have you got accommodation?’, ‘how do you get around the city?’, you know things like that.

In one department a lecturer hosted an annual barbeque for the international students and their supervisors. Students from another department talked of going to the homes of staff members for dinners, including one dinner held to welcome the African students.

Student 6 a relatively young student valued what she described as friendship with her supervisors. For her it was a combination of the relationship and their contribution to her thesis that was important. Prior to coming to New Zealand she was not confident that the supervisors would be able to provide her with good advice on her topic, and was relieved when she found they could.

> It’s like we have a friendship. It’s not like they are just supervisors that you go and you have to be so proper with them. They are young, so you go in, sometimes I make fun of them and they make fun of me. We laugh a lot. So I really value that friendship and I also value the kind of input they are making in my thesis which I think is… somebody will say, “Ah, sorry, you are talking as if you supervisors are perfect.” I think they are. They are close to perfect.

Other students had more uneasy relationships with supervisors, and felt a disconnect. Coming through a number of the student transcripts was a sense that either the student or their friends did not feel understood by their supervisors and vice versa. The sense conveyed is absence of the taken-for-granted mutual understandings shared by those with a common frame of reference, and in its place a disconnection.

> So some of my African friends have all these worries about how their supervisors don’t get them and they also don’t get their supervisors. So there’s always this going back, it’s like this distance from one another because of the cultural difference. I have had a good experience but some people don’t, so if they could find a way to maybe the lecturers or the students will have to learn more about different cultures or maybe the African culture and vice versa. (Student 6)

The distance students feel from their supervisors, is in part foreign-ness, and in part experiencing cultural difference which for some is exemplified in language issues, where different ways of thinking, idioms and accent create communication problems.

> When I came here, it was my first time to stay in a foreign country that is speaking English and English is their culture, you see. I had, I had problems to hear my supervisor and the supervisor had problem to hear me, the way I speak was difficult to both of us. (Student 14)

As well as initial difficulties with language, some students and supervisors were conscious that there may be misunderstandings about social and cultural dimensions of communication. What might be appropriate in one context and setting, may be inappropriate or misunderstood in another. Student 1 refers to a discussion with his supervisor on different attitudes and ways of conduct.

> I mean he was talking about how western kids are trained to look a person straight in the eye, otherwise it would be seen as disrespectful, in our context it's the other way around because I remember my grandparents [...] just looking at your face means that you are disrespecting your elderly, so some of these things once they get to be aware, I mean when a student comes to your office and he puts on a different attitude, sometimes the student is maybe shy or timid or something, because of the way the culture I mean the barriers of the culture has set for a supervisor, a student. (Student 1)

A couple of students argued that university staff needed to be aware that there were African students, and that not all international students were Asian. There was a sense that African students were visible because of their colour, and yet invisible in discourse around international students. Some made the case for an Africanist to be appointed to the university. For one, the lack of African staff had initially been a barrier to her enrolling at a New Zealand university. Yet coming from Africa, and even coming from the same country did not mean that students necessarily felt connected. The African students came from different countries, and within countries may have had differences and in some case hostilities in terms of ethnic groups, language groups, rural or urban background, class and income. It was not uncommon for students from one country to be allocated shared student offices, presumably based on the assumption that there would be a positive connection, when this was not always the case. A student recounted experiencing extreme tension and stress over interactions with a fellow countryman from a different group and finding it difficult to get support to work the situation through.

A number of supervisors commented on what they observed in relation to their students' relationships and sense of place. There was relief in seeing that, where deliberate strategies were in place to create a sense of community among graduate students, this was working (e.g., evidenced by students supporting each other in presentations, and hearing that a student was socializing with people from their home country, or from other countries).

Family entered the picture in diverse ways. Several supervisors recognized that their African students were homesick. One described homesickness in terms of missing family – "A family sickness as well as home sickness. I think all of them [are] homesick." (Supervisor 9)

Several of the students were accompanied by partners and children, others left partners and children behind in their home countries. A pre-school child came to join her mother in New Zealand and then returned home for good when her mother had fieldwork. One supervisor and two students recounted partners or family coming later to join students. Prior to his wife and small child joining him, one student spent time and money phoning home, but once they joined him in New Zealand he felt that he was "in balance" and more productive in his work. Family were not always settled in New Zealand, and while the supervisor did not know the circumstances one doctoral student ended up going back and forth to his home country in relation to family issues.

Illness and even deaths of parents at home were experienced by a small number of students, and this has an impact on study. Supervisors supported the students in taking time to return home to grieve.

The student who had spent time in Sweden during his Master's although accompanied there by other students from his home country, still experienced loneliness from being on his own. Being alone at home would be rare.

> Also issues about maybe loneliness if you like, because although we were there with friends, I mean everybody had his own room, and we were at different places, we were not that close that we can just walk into the next room, and so you are on your own sometimes, which is not usually normal back home, so those are the cultural issues that we had but then also we met a few Ghanaians, there was one who was readily or usually available when we needed something and they took us round. (Student 5)

Notions about space link to connectedness. When Student 5 talked of the experience in Sweden and not being able to go and see fellow students in the next room there was a sense of being in individual separate spaces. In Student 1's description of his relationship with his supervisor, he talks of going into his supervisor's office, not necessarily to see him, but to select a book.

> I'd rather go to my supervisors' office officially all the time, and sometimes I go there and he says I'm busy and I say 'well I didn't come because of you, I'm coming to see if I can pick a book. So do whatever you are doing.' There's that kind of informal relationship between us yeah sometimes you just go there, and they say don't come and disturb me, then I will tell them I'm not here to disturb you I've come to see if I can pick a book, then I go through his shelf and I tell him I just pick this book so I'm off,

Changing place is not just about different relationships to space but may bring a raft of differences in everyday life. In Sweden a Ghanaian doctoral student helped Student 5 and his fellow Ghanaian students with life issues, finding African shops, managing finances, explaining to them how to interact with people.

> Issues about how to relate to people in terms of being nice, being polite and then also being frank if you have to, then issues about how you address supervisors or talk to people, we come from a background where titles are very important.

Creating academic communities and connections

Two supervisors and a student referred to belonging to a community in relation to group supervision, one group operating at the departmental level where every 6–8 weeks all the doctoral students and their supervisors met together for three hours (Supervisor 8, Supervisor 13, and Student 16). Another tried to foster a research culture amongst his students and met with his students as a group weekly.

> I like to create a sense of community within the lab and I think that's extremely beneficial and provides that level of support, particularly in a large group and in fact I favour a large research group for that reason. … I think that that sense of community

> instils a sense of pride in the students in terms of having a strong research group and motivation, because they learn from the others, it actually creates a sense of competition amongst the students …so I think it increases the productivity of the students, it means they're more likely to finish on time. (Supervisor 8)

Although connecting to other students and to academic staff was important for some students, not all students want to be connected to their peers or to be part of an academic community. In explaining why a particular African student had not gained what her supervisor would have hoped from her doctoral studies, Supervisor 11 talked about how the student was not interested in her fellow students, and essentially was only on campus for supervision meetings. In this department there was a large, very active and effective thesis group run by the students, but which the student chose not to attend. This student has the added complication of living some distance from campus, partially because her husband and children had accompanied her and affordable accommodation was further away from the campus.

Supervisors held diverse views on the relationship between home and campus, and on the nature of the student-supervisor relationship. Supervisor 14, was comfortable meeting her student in settings and at times that accommodated her student's needs as a parent. This included occasionally holding supervision meetings in her home, and her student bringing her child.

While Student 7 was at home in Africa doing fieldwork, his supervisor accompanied by his wife visited him and got to know his family. After Student 7's family joined him in New Zealand the two families socialised together.

In contrast two supervisors were very clear that they maintained boundaries between work and home, and would not invite students into their homes. This did not mean that they were aloof from their students. One was very active in the running of an international student forum/group in her department and would host her students for dinners in restaurants. The other organised a departmental welcome for her student's partner, and helped with household items and warm clothing, and was very conscious of connecting her student to the academic community (in her field) nationally and internationally. This latter referred to having lifelong connections with doctoral students. "But all the international students I've supervised I have great contact with since so you know they're lifelong bonds. They're lifelong contacts." (Supervisor 10)

A supervisor from a different university expressed a similar sentiment:

> That's the joy of science – is that you form lifelong relations. Our head of institute has been very strong, he said I expect you guys to be involved with your students to the point where you're invited to the birth of their, to the celebration of the birth of their first child. (Supervisor 6)

For some students this personal connection was crucial to their ability to feel 'at home'. A number of students used familial metaphors to describe supervisors and supervision relationships. While acknowledging that there is no universal meaning of family and family roles, we have interpreted metaphors as meaning a strong bond and sense of care. Student 13 referred to his supervisor as his "academic parent" and "like a mother". When

there were delays and difficulties with his funding, his supervisors indicated that they would pay the fees in the interim if need be.

> If I call my supervisors like my academic parents [I am] not making mistake here because what I've told you, because I see like having heard from other students, how things are going and all that, I think I would say they're like a mother.... otherwise it would be all myself.

While the common metaphor was for the supervisor as parent, Student 11 described them as siblings. "To me I would use the African approach to explain what I see, the New Zealand supervisors use the brotherly approach, it is like they are teaching their brothers and sisters." The students were clearly interested in locating the nature of the relationship in terms of types of relationships they were familiar with, and in emphasising the importance of the relationship to their work.

> I know the they're white, they're not Africans but the way I regard them, I regard them as my you know like my parents or my aunties … I think good relationship has helped me even to reach the stage I am right now […] you know my aunty so and so, ah that's your aunty ok come, come, so relationship is very important, a good and understanding relationship between supervisors and their students is very important.

Student 7 appreciated the help of his supervisor, who had become "like a friend" in helping his family move to NZ. Meanwhile Student 8, had somewhat unfulfilled expectations that her supervisor would be "like a mother" to her, because

> In the African sort of context, anyone who is older, or old enough to be your mother, would naturally assume to take on that motherly sort of role.... In that sense they just feel the need to look out for you in every sort of sense, in every way.

Supervisor 13 felt that personality characteristics could be more important than age or culture in making connections. She felt that the good relationship she had with her African student came from them being similar in their personalities.

Some students and supervisors referred to being connected through sharing a Christian religion, one of many connecting links, including those of gender and profession. For Supervisor 1 "I think first and foremost I'd try and get on with the person as a person and you try and find common links." Supervisor 7 referred to male-to-male bonding as making a difference when things were tough for the student.

Another connecting was in terms of the discipline and at the level of researcher "You know we're starting to talk the same language as far as doing the analysis" (Supervisor 1). A few supervisors consciously sought to connect their doctoral students to others in their field and to the discipline, through encouraging conference presentations, scholarly meetings, and in one case supporting students to spend time learning technical procedures from colleagues in other universities including in Australia (Supervisors 3, 8, 9, 10, and 13). Students also talked about presenting at conferences and/or submitting articles to journals (Students 1, 2, 13, and 16).

Theme Two: Epistemology and what counts as knowledge

We were interested in the ways participants thought about, recognised and valued different knowledge and epistemologies and whether they had different ideas about what counted as evidence. We found that students, particularly those from the humanities and social sciences, expended time and effort in providing their supervisors with background knowledge to their project and to their ways of thinking.

Supervisor 9 recognised that his African student knew more about his own country than his supervisor would ever know, and that as a supervisor all he could offer was "a bit of experience". He went on to say that doctoral students arrive as accomplished people with higher degrees, and who know quite a bit about academic knowledge and their own context.

> So they don't come to us novo, they don't come to us naked, they're already half dressed, they're half clothed, they're half finished. So you ask me to characterize it, I mean, they already know more than I know about the thesis, and if they don't there is something wrong.

Students did not always feel their prior experience and education was valued and recognised. When asked about what might make a difference to international students from Africa, Student 7 commented.

> It's not like you have just come from nowhere, you have done your masters probably somewhere else, […] it's like, if you haven't done like school here, they tend to be like underrate you, what should I say, they don't give credit to your previous work so they always look down upon, say 'no, this is how you do things', 'this is not the way you do things', 'this is not the way'. So that demoralises, so I'd recommend that they just try to be very flexible and understand the background which we have all come from, it's not the first thing to be here, we have also done school in other places.

A number of supervisors admitted knowing little about the country and cultural context of their African student, and sought to widen their understanding through discussion with the student. For some this highlighted the extent to which the African context was different to anything they had known or experienced. One supervisor suggested that conditions in her student's home country meant that she was used to "papering over holes", because that was the only option at home, where students might turn up to class but the teacher is not there

> Because they're paid so little and they're not rewarded and they have such poor conditions that they have to moonlight, and where do they moonlight? Oh, at a university which is two or three hours to get there by car, so they might not get there in time. When they do get there they find there's no chalk, they find the students are lining up outside peering in because they're so desperate for knowledge. (Supervisor 1)

In some instances, supervisors' accounts suggest that they encountered students assuming that their context was known, and supervisors needing to push the students to identify and articulate the context within their proposals and thesis. Some students expressed frustration with this, thinking an African supervisor would know the context and would not be seeking this information. The supervisors are thinking of their field of knowledge and how to make the contribution accessible to the field.

> And so his job was to go back and formalise what he knew anecdotally. […] And that becomes one part of his, so I would expect that will be part of a chapter or a whole chapter in his thesis, because with research in this field you've got to position the context. (Supervisor 10).

One student was impressed that her supervisors were reading to familiarise themselves with the context of her research and with Africa. But some students were frustrated by being pushed for context and examples and experienced this as slowing down their work.

> Because some of the terms that you write, I mean someone familiar with the cultural context will take it for granted, they always ask you to give examples, and sometimes I am frustrated, I'm like why should I give an example in the proposal then what will I be working on in my case studies. (Student 1)

Supervisors appeared to be wanting to ensure that the research project and thesis was designed from a home country perspective, while being clear that the resulting thesis needed to be connected to the literature.

> I need to know their country's system, I need to know the issue from their country's point of view and from them as people. So that's actually the first writing I get them to do. … Because I need to be clear as a supervisor in challenging them on their questions that I've got the context right. (Supervisor 10)

The essence of knowledge, its meaning and its use was interwoven with language and culture. As a result, some of the later analysis on the theme of language and writing is also relevant to this section on epistemology. For example, diverse ways of thinking and structuring the logical development of ideas vary a great deal across cultures (Manathunga, 2014). Supervisor 5 was conscious that ways of thinking were embedded in culture and language:

> When Tanzanian students come in and they're thinking Swahili …. it's a really, the structure, the way the thinking is structured is really different, so sometimes […] it's like a little bit of the world opens up in a new way that you haven't seen before when it happens well. (Supervisor 5)

As a result, Supervisor 5 suggests she values Swahili ways of thinking and makes a conscious effort to try and value such epistemologies as they emerge from their students' writing.

In another example of how what counts as knowledge, and to whom, is mediated by language is provided by Student 3 as he highlights his desire to use specific local language terms in his thesis.

> So there are certain words in my local language which have no direct replacement in English, […]. So that also became quite a serious challenge that I wished actually that it was possible for me to maybe put it in a parentheses and in brackets, write the English term and maintain that because my passion in doing the thesis was that the document would be one they put in the library back home and also in the library at my Ministry where I work. (Student 3)

How the knowledge developed in the thesis was to be used in future was explicitly addressed by a small number of supervisors, and implicitly by others. One quoted her student as not wanting his thesis to end up gathering dust in a New Zealand university library but to be used for his country's development. Another supervisor with links to a number of African students referred to their passion to make a difference in their chosen fields, which included human rights. "So this is a life issue not just a PhD, but that the motivation can be channelled into coupled with analytical acuity and I mean an argument that is not just that it's wrong" (Supervisor 9).

As well as discussing his own students, one supervisor recalled studying at Oxford with African students who were clear that when they graduated they wanted to go home in order to make a contribution. Tied to the purpose of the thesis and the contribution of the thesis, was also the notion of who the student/the knower was. Supervisor 5 referred to discussions with international students about recognizing the long-established scholarship of home countries.

> [..] students saying I have to go back to my home country and be Vietnamese or Tanzanian or whatever Thai, you know I can't be a little white Briton for people. I have to go back to my home country and Foucault is lovely but you know I've got to deal with people there.

For the most part, the epistemological issues raised by the supervisors were those common to supervision in general. Initially for some in the social sciences and management this was addressing students' preconceptions that quantitative research was to be preferred because it would be more highly valued at home, even if it were mismatched with their research question and espoused intentions.

> She initially came in wanting to do this really quantitative stuff, but given the aim of her research and her research questions, so if you were looking at things like perception, meaning, understanding, you're not going to get that from doing … [experimental or correlational type design] and it was all about cause and effect, and umm so having to work with her so that she could make that shift. (Supervisor 13)

Later across disciplines, and for all PhD students not just African students, the focus went onto challenging students to think more deeply and critically about their findings, to moving to joined up or connected thinking, to questioning existing research, to thinking conceptually. Supervisor 3, linked his student's difficulties with conceptual thinking to her earlier education as an accountant. Describing her as a linear thinker, he acknowledged that the positive attributes of her thinking were in terms of planning and organising herself.

Across disciplines a number of supervisors, including Supervisor 2 discussed the challenge of pushing doctoral students to think beyond their immediate results.

> We struggle with our PhD students who do superb complex experiments and can describe mathematically what they found but can't then say 'ah ha that gives me insight in to the underlying processes' or "it suggests there's a new experiment which might distinguish between the two hypotheses'. So they're perfectly capable of analysing and describing what they see but the joined up thinking goes 'Ah! Ha! that might mean this', and it's the leap, which goes beyond what's in front of you and to me that's missing.

One of the challenges of doctoral study and of research is that of developing an understanding of what individual findings mean. Something the supervisor of the one white student in the study felt the student struggled with:

> [She] struggled a little bit with the writing, so she was, in terms of, not in terms of English but in terms of big picture, she was very prone to getting caught up in just her study and not seeing its broader implications and that is something that was a challenge in the PhD.

A sense of supervision as effortful comes through, as do the links between thinking and writing, as the supervisor goes on to exemplify the ongoing connections formed between supervisor and student that go beyond the thesis to supporting the student getting publications.

> It was a challenge in writing publications afterwards … I think that she … think she is very focussed on the very tiny details, very details person and lost sight of what she was doing and how it related to other things, she was very fixed in her opinions … this inability to extrapolate … and it was an ongoing battle with her.

The relationship of theory to the research is a challenge in the doctoral supervision process, and there was some evidence of this in the current study. There were diverse challenges in relation to theory. Student 1 identified one of his issues as needing to build up theoretical knowledge "When I went to [US university] one of the major difficulties students from [Home Country] in particular had was theories, that was a major challenge".

In contrast one of the supervisors struggled to curtail his African students' enthusiasm for theories.

> But this is my personal problem as well as theirs, but they like theory, but they, and it has a kind of juju about it, I mean it's, that seems to be significant and more powerful, whereas I'm horribly pragmatic which is you know, if it's useful it's useful, if it doesn't tell us anything your data, don't bother, if it allows you to interrogate the data in new ways and makes new connections or highlights different variables it's valuable.

His concern was that a theory or theories should not be used as a lens unless it opened up new insights or connection. He felt his African students were more concerned with the theory than with its fit to the data.

> Otherwise you know, I mean it's more interesting if it comes out of your work than is imposed on it, but all of my African students, and this is over a 20 year period, have really warmed to theory, and I don't know where that comes from and it's often, it's European theory, American theory, it's a kind of strange post-colonial reality, that we need to understand African data through someone […] a sense that you've got more if you've theorised Africa through other lenses.

In the field of education, students used, or investigated learning theories or approaches such as constructivism, and supervisors wanted to be convinced on appropriateness to the African context. One supervisor, whose African student had convinced him, and could provide good local examples, saw this as an issue in working with international students.

> Whenever you're importing ideas from abroad, like social constructivism or policy or whatever into a different cultural context, there's always potential for misunderstanding by the people who are in that context, because you can't just introduce something from one context to another without making some adaptations and so on, and so the likes of social constructivism I sort of sometimes think I wonder whether they have adapted it and adjusted it to meet the needs of the local context, and it's quite subtle those sorts of things and you can't always tell that it has been or not, […]but you sometimes wonder is that something that they have to grapple with, they're trying to interpret something from a pure western ideological position, in their own context without taking into consideration the local aspects.

Not only the Sub-Saharan region, but individual countries in the region are huge and diverse in terms of ethnic groups, tribes, classes, and urban and rural differences. At least two of the supervisors found it a struggle to unsettle students' beliefs that they could "just cruise into the field, cruise into villages" and to convince them that "you need to be living in the village, you need to be living in there and you need to be forming relationships with the people" (Supervisor 14). This could be hard for an international student from the city who does not want to live in a village. *"*Sometimes the students who are going home to work in their own country assume they can kind of dip in and dip out" and this is in contrast to Kiwi students who *"*often realize that they're going to have to work really hard to be there and [that] you need to be available and form relationships and be visible*".*

Bound up with the role relationships play with accessing knowledge, is how students construct the role of the researcher and the researched. One student was described as struggling *"*with the taking the researcher enquirer role, rather than the researcher I know the answers role" (Supervisor 11). From what the supervisor gleaned from the student at home it was very much *"*a culture where the person in a senior position gets to say exactly what shall be done and everyone else says 'jump – how high?' And in spite of all the discussions and reading we felt she was heading off [home] with that view still intact*".* The supervisor went on to acknowledge how hard it was for a person to change such positioning.

> It can be extremely difficult, seeing things from other people's point of view for example, putting yourself in the one down position in order to be able to get people's trust and be able to work with them in a qualitative way, and so we again talked with her at length about the need to get people's trust and to take it on board, that they're doing you a favour by participating, they're not obliged to, you can't assume that. (Supervisor 11*)*

Individual supervisors expressed particular perspectives. These included one who found Hofstede's dimensions for classifying cultures helpful and who compared his experience with Pacific Island students with his experience with African students. While being cautious not to overgeneralize about African or Pacific students, his experience had been that students from societies with more traditional cultures responded to more directive styles of supervision.

As well having been challenged by her African students for "projecting" her own approaches on the student work, a supervisor provided a third hand account of difficulties African and other international students in her faculty had experienced when supervisors imposed their own theoretical preferences on students. She described her own experience early at the beginning of the supervision relationship thus:

> I said 'okay let's look at the topics you are doing in terms of the power relationships, let's talk about colonization and you know all of this' and were, like in both cases was just a this absolutely dead silence. (Supervisor 5)

Supervisor 5 was critical of what she viewed as supervisors pushing constructions of colonisation onto students in ways that did not recognise that constructions of colonisation were not necessarily transferable to settings with different histories of colonisation.

> Some supervisors have a particular post-colonial view on colonisation and […] those theories kind of work quite well in places like New Zealand but they don't speak very well for the experience of colonisation of people from other nations. [...] But some students are coming in with different colonisers and they're English, some of them are French, some of them are Portuguese, some of them are German, […] students have said that they sometimes feel a bit boxed in because it's like supervisors want to make a connection and say okay lets theorise around colonisation and decolonisation but they're kind of forcing them in to the kind of Anglo-colonial. (Supervisor 5)

Student 3 made the point that differences in culture can impede supervisors appreciating the viewpoints of students. He recalled his supervisors pushing certain ideas during his Master's experience in Europe.

> The professor felt that he understood them [certain things] better from a theoretical point of view and perhaps I understood it differently from a practical point of view in my environment back home.

Conceptions of knowledge and how people come to know things are interlaced with cultural attitudes to time and to learning. Student 12 illustrates this in narrating how at the time of her proposal presentation she did not have a good grasp of the theory she was using, nor was she particularly interested in this but this changed during her data analysis

phase when fieldwork provided her with practical examples to work with. There is an epistemological dimension to this, including conceptions of time, and of knowing. Student 12 is philosophical in looking back and emphasising that previously she had not understood or sought to understand the theory because the time had not come for her to understand the theory. This time came later.

> And me one thing that I know is that learning takes time, learning takes time, some of the things you know you learn so in the process of all these things so, so I went and presented whatever, I was presented during that time ….. I could understand, that was why I was not understanding – the theories, that was a good thing.

This sense of time, and the time coming was perhaps quite a different way to many New Zealand students' ways of looking at the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. As well as the sense of time, this student identified the difficulty in understanding theoretical knowledge in isolation from what it means in practice.

> I was not understanding the theory because the time had not come for me to understand the theory because I'm using this theory as a methodology. You get me? And unless you're applying to practical it's very difficult for you to understand theoretical. So then if you do practice with that, you know things it's not as if when you're playing it practically, and for me it just was…I will wait until I get to that point and I know that I will be able to get these concepts better when I am applying it, then I concentrate better that time. So that is now what I am doing right now, that's what I'm really trying to understand. (Student 12)

In addition to the gaps between supervisors' theoretical ways of knowing and students' practical or lived experience of phenomena, there were differences in the nature of the knowledge and thinking about those knowledges. In the social sciences and humanities, a number called for the appointment of an Africanist or at least someone with experience of African ways of knowing to be appointed to their university. One of the students was doing work around beliefs around health and migration, and had done work in more than one country on related topics. Religion played an important part in decision making around migration. She described how some from her country linked being able to travel to their future wellbeing, and that their wellbeing depended on being able to migrate. They use traditional religion when they have problems getting visas into their desired destinations. While her supervisors understood her work, these ideas were not readily understood by all academics in her department. "I remember at my defence [of proposal], somebody was like 'I don't see how travelling can bring wellbeing to anybody" (Student 9).

Theme Three: Time

Manathunga (2014) argued for the need to adopt not only a present-time focus on getting students through their research higher degree programmes, but also to acknowledge and value their prior intellectual, cultural and personal histories and to actively plan for their future careers. While Manathunga was focusing on how institutions and supervisors could use knowledge of the past and thinking about the future, we were aware that we were talking to participants at one point in time and what the past, present and future looked like at that time might change. We were also interested in students thinking about things in terms of the dimension of time.

Colonial history and its role in time past and time present

Only two of the participants situated supervision within a broader historic context. One, Supervisor 5, discussed the different colonial histories of the countries many international students came from, and the lack of recognition that there were multiple and diverse forms of colonisation. Supervisor 2 who had lived and worked in Africa has a background in development studies and is conscious of the legacy of colonialism and how it has restructured countries and economies.

> But we're generations after that time as well and still we're living with the, the second or third generation of consequences of a very distorted everything land holding system, political structure, education system. So it takes a very long time for those shadows to leave a society and I guess I would like it very much if we stopped meddling and coming up with smart sounding interventions in other people's economies which are actually still unwittingly just serving our own Tradenz or whatever.

Students may grow and change with time

Supervisor 3 recounted the story of a student who struggled in her first year, and who he did not believe could complete a thesis. When the decision needed to be made as to whether she would be confirmed, he had to be persuaded by the second supervisor that the student should be given the chance. He had learnt from this experience not to judge things too quickly.

> She got there in the end… I can remember … the first year thinking she wouldn't, and indeed if my view had prevailed we wouldn't have taken her on beyond the first year, I remember having grave reservations about confirming her, whatever the process is that we have to go through, confirming her project […] [2nd Supervisor] was much more optimistic, …I remember almost cursing him …. basically he persuaded me that we should continue, and of course well I did most of the hard yards.

The pressures of time, and completing a thesis in three years

Many of the students and some supervisors discussed the pressures of time, of time bounded scholarships and the need to finish within three years. There was a degree of anxiety about time taken with going through the confirmation or approval processes of the first year of doctoral study, and thinking ahead to what might be required to have a thesis submitted in the three years. “I’m conscious of his time frame and knowing how much and what you have to do when and where.” (Supervisor 9)

Focus on future careers

There was evidence of the changing understandings about what the doctoral experience was about, with a number of supervisors talking about actively developing students as researchers, teachers, and as scholars in their fields. One department had instituted a mentoring approach with doctoral students, and was seeking to develop them for scholarly careers through providing lecturing experiences, and encouraging publishing.

> So we encourage our PhD students to lecture in our classes, which we pay them for, but the idea is for this, I discuss the readings for them, that they're given the students articles they can read about Africa for the week's readings and the tutorial. […] So we're trying to encourage them, to, the mentoring is, we want them to leave here with, it doesn't always work, but the idea is that they leave here with publishing plans for their dissertation, with one possibly two articles and with a teaching profile, a lecturing profile, and some experience. (Supervisor 9)

Student 1 switched the focus of his thesis after supervisor pointing out there was not a department in their field internationally that had an academic position with that focus. This was a small field with limited opportunities, and the supervisor thought that if the student wanted an academic career he might need to shift his focus.

Working with very bright, scholarship students, such as her current African student, had led one supervisor to consciously adopt the role of mentor, and very early in the doctoral process encourage the student to present at conferences and publish (Supervisor 10).

> But I’m hoping that we will develop a lifetime of partnership and that I will support him, cause he’s a young academic as well so like I’m growing him, I didn’t have a mentor when I was young so people like me came in you know in their late 40s and did PhDs that they finished in their, you know when they were 50 really. So, to actually support and grow somebody like that that’s why the conference experience, the publication, the kind of discipline, and I use the language discipline in, I mean it in a nice way because it is about role modelling really.

Future focus: Returning home

A number of students were working on doctoral projects that they wished to be able to use to improve practice, policy or some aspect of life back in their home country. Supervisors were aware of this and wanted both to ensure a good outcome for the PhD, and for the students to have something that was useful at home.

> I see my responsibility as ensuring if he works hard everything is rigorously set up for a good outcome. Cause, and this, I'm sure a development study is a bit the same, but the likelihood of, likelihood of his research is it, is likely to inform a national program in his country ultimately. So we have to make sure.[…] Its rigorous really and that's my job, to make sure the gap is there so he can deliver his PhD in terms of contribution for knowledge but then the research can stand so as he's got something to take back when he goes. (Supervisor 9)

Supervisor 5 commented that the usefulness of a particular student's thesis is determined by uniquely different situations back home.

> Because people are coming from different places so they're different places that they're returning to, their home countries. They have different needs in different places just like for Māori students they're going back in to different tribal situations, so how they engage some form of social change through education in the South Island and Ngai Tahu is going to be really different to how they do it in Gisborne and [13.05] because the needs are different, the people are different so they're going back in to different places. (Supervisor 5)

A number of the students came from countries, or conducted research in countries where the political situation was likely to present challenges for their work or safety, or raised questions as to what could be included in the thesis without compromising the future employment opportunities for the student.

> We've had talks about how is she going to talk about the political situation given that she actually wants to be employed back at home and we've talked about things like the importance of keeping her safe and that if we need to we'll embargo her thesis, or the idea that she might have a separate chapter that isn't, that is only part of the thesis for the examination process but kind of sits alone in relation to what might go online. So having those wider conversations about the long-term impact and also the fact she does want to be an academic, and so part of her goals of being. (Supervisor 14)

Not all students aspire to return to home countries, some are hoping for other opportunities. A supervisor described how her student actively sought a range of opportunities to develop her knowledge of the discipline, and in academic work. Her supervisor supported her in this. **"**She wants a job. She does everything she can to prepare for a job and she would like to stay in New Zealand".

Theme Four: English language and writing

Given the centrality of the production of the thesis to the doctorate, and the importance of discussion and debate with supervision, unsurprisingly, issues around the **English language and writing**, oral communication and accents and experiences of English as a medium of instruction became the fourth important theme to emerge.

English was the official language (Nigeria), one of multiple official languages (Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), and nearly always one of many languages spoken in the African students' home countries. Five of the students described English as a second, third, or as "not our mother language" (Students 7, 10 11, 12, and 14). English was the language of instruction for some or all stages of the education system either in the recent past or currently in many of the countries. Earlier, it was noted that 10 of the 16 students completed Master's degrees abroad. These degrees were in English, and exposed those students to varieties of English, for instance English in the US, or in other countries such as the Netherlands or Malaysia. Interestingly, students coming from the same country came with different levels of English language proficiency.

Writing is both a core process and an outcome of doctoral study. In this study of intercultural supervision, language has close connections with the themes of epistemology and of the pedagogical relationship. This is exemplified in Student 3's recognition of the complexity of discussing African terms within supervision meetings, and how moving from local language to English diminished or altered meanings in the written report.

> So that was where people understand the language that I was trying to put in, and sometimes when you use a word in English it lightens the interpretation or the intensity of what you are trying to refer to in the local language, or it will come with different meanings altogether. Even English, the usage of words in English, sometimes the interpretation in different cultures are different of the same word. So those are some of the challenges that I would say that I found especially when we're having discussions.

Language is how thinking is shared, and Supervisor 5 makes the point that language is influential in how we think about the world. African students in Supervisor 9's department tended to be from West Africa and he suggested that there were issues with mistaking a shared language with shared meaning.

> Anglophone yeah, and that's part of the historic connection, although in some ways having had students who don't speak English as an equal primary language and certainly the language of their higher education, the resonances of African English should never fool us into understanding it in a way that is unproblematic and so I've been learning the hard way that there are African usages and African modes of expression which are specific to having a language that is used for particular purposes.

African modes of expression may not sit easily within the context of a thesis for a New Zealand university. One of the students recounts the reaction of supervisors to the inclusion of certain expressions.

> At times you do get feedback like “No, we do not like these terms” and you know. And yet they’re totally relevant to the study because they are very valid in the environment and just the fact that I am discussing certain issues, if I’m discussing [specific topic] and this is the language that is used.

Learning about grammar, punctuation and technical aspects of doctoral writing

Some students discussed the emphasis placed on the use of English language, and the challenges for those for whom English is a foreign or another language grappling with grammar, punctuation and expectations of doctoral writing either in relation to their own experiences or those of their peers (Students 10,11,12, 14, and 15). It was clear some students were frustrated by feedback that supervisors were having difficulty reading their work. Student 14 picked up the emotional reaction of supervisors to issues with grammar, situating it as arising as students struggle with deadlines, but perceiving the reaction as not being about writing but about a cultural transgression.

> So when you read you can find that somewhere I have put say two articles, one after the other, it is not because I didn’t know, I did it, because sometimes I didn’t see it, I thought that maybe I have removed it but it’s still there you see. And then when you read it you become scared. I wrote your English culture incorrectly. It’s a common mistake, you know the supervisor can say it seems he is careless, he’s a careless student, you see.

Student 12 became conscious of structure, and its role in conveying meaning or argument, after a fellow student pointed out that she was not connecting ideas in her writing:

> And in fact it was highlighted to me I even went through an English course here to help in the writing … which was really important and that is one aspect that, that was raised not directly by my supervisor, in fact not by myself, is one of my office mates who had said that many times when you talk you don’t connect, you don’t support evidence or something like that.

Having recognised the importance of connecting ideas in her writing, Student 12 reported developing a habit of checking for connections. “I mean it became like part of my writing and today whenever I write I usually stop and look at you know the connection and all these, is it formed properly and all this?”

English grammar, punctuation and readability featured in a number of the supervisors’ comments on writing, not just in relation to their African student/s, but in relation to international students and doctoral students more generally (Supervisors 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10). Grammar, punctuation or organization of writing were at times a barrier to supervisors being able to decipher a student’s ideas or thinking and time consuming to address. For this reason, in addition to recommending students take writing classes and, access the university learning support services, use grammar and writing websites, supervisors had developed diverse strategies for addressing such issues. These included using track changes, or detailed handwritten corrections to a sample of the submitted work (e.g.,

editing the first six pages of a chapter) to model what was expected; from time to time having a specific session or workshop or focus on grammar or punctuation. Some supervisors divided up roles, with one taking the editing role.

Supervisors identified a mismatch between institutional guidelines suggesting that supervisors be cautious about editing, and working to support students express their ideas effectively in another language. On the one hand, the work needed to be the student's work, but on the other, students needed to develop their writing to that expected at doctoral level in what might be another language. Supervisor 5, while acknowledging that the extra work required could lead supervisors to feel put upon, described her practice and its rationale. She explained that while international students did grasp the big picture in terms of their wider work, Supervisor 5 thought that 'big picture' feedback was not effective for international students for whom English was not a first language. In her experience English as an additional language (EAL) students responded better to concrete and detailed feedback.

> People are often working, English is a 3rd or 4th language so it, it seems to work better if I am really clear, like – concise 'this sentence doesn't work, here is a way that you might write it up.' So not this sentence is vague, rewrite, you need to give an example of what you mean by that.

The ways in which language and epistemology are interwoven was apparent in some supervisors situating grammar as strongly connected to thinking, analysis and even how we know the world. Supervisor 5 has come to see English as a passionless language.

> I'm just thinking about a Malaysian student of mine […] her English it's, it's grammatically fine but the thinking is really different and I think language does shape how people think about the world. So when, when Tanzanian students come in and they're thinking Swahili …. it's a really, the structure, the way the thinking is structured is really different.

Although language both structures, and is structured by thinking Supervisor 5 argues that when a student is able to express within an English construction their own way of thinking then this provides new ways of seeing things. But getting to that point is not easy.

> She can actually get to a point where you explain this is the English way of constructing a sentence, a paragraph, an argument so they've got the technical stuff. But then they overlay it with their own stuff and it's like a little bit of the world opens up in a new way that you haven't seen before when it happens well. But sometimes it's quite hard work to get to that moment where the world opens up and you've got a, you've got English grammar but Swahili thinking.

Supervisor 9 thought that if his students could shift from using the passive voice with its associated lack of agents where no one was doing anything to a more active voice it would help them develop their analytical thinking.

> All our Ghanaian students seem obsessed by the passive voice, for some reason, I don't know what they teach them at the university where they study but a common issue for at least these two at the moment that I'm working very closely with, is things just happen, they don't seem to have agents, nobody seems to be doing anything and so there are those sorts of issues which I want him to develop a much more active voice because it will help him analytically, I mean to think about who is making the changes.

Commenting more generally on his African students this supervisor described them as writing well but in a particular register that had an artificiality about it. He wondered whether their previous training required a formality in writing. In talking about one student he said, “He’s funny, he is engaging and he knows what he is writing about. Give him a keyboard and it all comes out much more formally”. Supervisor 9 acknowledged he did not know whether it was a good thing or a bad thing to demand less formality.

Student 14 emphasised that the English he uses reflects his culture, and he challenged the notion of there being a correct way of writing English.

> Similarly, in writing, I write in English, but the English will reflect my culture. And when you read you will say ‘no this English is not correct’. It’s not correct to whom? To your cultural context and that is the base of many problems faced by most of the students from overseas.

In this instance, Student 14 is extending his comments beyond African students to other international students. He emphasised that many African students are multilingual.

> And most of the PhD students particularly African students, they belong to more than one language, they have much language. They speak more than one language, they have, they have their mother language and then they have a second language and they have a third language, the same thing for me.

Language is intimately associated with communication and relationships. Student 15 highlighted that the student, and the supervisory relationship could suffer when the emphasis on English language went alongside a failure to respect the student:

> A good and understanding relationship between supervisors and their students is very important, yes we come from poor country or whatever but I think also we need some respect, and you know that guy is holding a very big position at his university back home, when he came here he was regarded like just a little boy, because he does not have good English, so it’s bad he didn’t like it.

Accents

Many of the students initially, and sometimes for longer, struggled with their New Zealand supervisors’ Kiwi accents and idiom. The struggle to hear and understand, meant students had to “lean in” to hear, “to open” their ears or to ask them to repeat what they had said. One student audio-recorded supervision sessions so that he was not struggling to hear and make notes at the same time.

As well, students recognised that supervisors may have had difficulties with African students' spoken language.

> It was my first time to stay in a foreign country that is speaking English and English is their culture, you see. I had, I had problems to hear my supervisor and the supervisor had problem to hear me, the way I speak was difficult to both of us. (Student 14)

Those students who had experience with supervising or teaching other graduate students had additional insights. During Student 1's time in the US he had been a language instructor at his university and he linked the experience that his fellow African students were having in New Zealand with those of his EAL students in the US. He felt that part of the role of the supervisor was to find a way to get the student to articulate their thinking in order to better assist them with their writing.

> Of course the language is also a barrier, so sometimes it becomes very frustrating trying to raise something that you don't know exactly what the student is, I mean is writing about, not because the student doesn't have a good grasp of whatever he or she is writing, but because of the language barrier, and so as a supervisor I need to think for the student, it's not that he or she doesn't know what he's doing, so I need to find a way of asking him or her to explain exactly what they mean…. I mean it makes sense trying to find a different way of asking the student to look at the other new or emerging ideas. (Student 1)

A number of supervisors commented their African students written English was better than students who were variously referred to as "non-English speaking", "Asian", or "other international". Supervisor 6 went on to wonder "if African languages have a more similar structure to English than some Asian languages do, or whether it's just him". It was not uncommon for the supervisors to comment favourably on their African students writing: "He does write well" (Supervisor 6); "All of our African students write quite well, but in a very particular register" (Supervisor 9). "[He] would be in the top 20 percent in terms of the English he is writing" (Supervisor 12). "Her English is excellent, and her written English very good (Supervisor 13), "She's got good English, yep. And she's got really solid written English as well" (Supervisor 14).

Writing is multi-faceted, and as well as knowing how to write there is the challenge of actually writing a proposal or a thesis. Supervisors sometimes need to encourage students to write, and other times to support students in learning to write in particular ways such as constructing different types of paragraphs, and constructing an argument. Supervisor 1 compared the proposal writing experience of her African student to those of other international students.

> Her English is so much better than non-native English speakers that we've had to coax her in her writing quite a lot cause she's a much more, she's a much deeper thinker in some ways but shallower in others, it's really interesting … she worries more about how to put things together and it took her longer to get her proposal together than the non-English speaking student, [her depth as a writer has to do with] I think she's able to craft, she's able to use the language better and so she's able to get the nuances a bit more and put together something that flows.

Three of the supervisors (SUPs, 3, 4 and 7) framed their African students' written English as of significant concern, and a fourth Supervisor 8 recounted his student's distress in struggling with writing. More typically issues with writing were framed as what was usual for people learning to think and write at doctoral level.

Supervisor 3's student came from a country where the most common language apart from local languages was French, something her supervisor was not aware of before her arrival in New Zealand. Because this student had a Commonwealth scholarship her supervisor anticipated that she would have a good standard of written English and this was not the case.

> The main recollection I have is of just simply tearing my hair out at her written expression, ... you'd sort of think oh my goodness, can't she get this sentence right, in the right way, you know so I would give her back you know a script of a chapter of chapters whatever with pretty detailed grammatical corrections and punctuation corrections and so on as well as you know more substantive comments (Supervisor 3).

Experienced with supervising students for whom English was not a first language, Supervisor 4 positioned his African student's writing issues as similar to many others, and identified learning to express ideas in writing as the biggest problem.

> He comes across as a person who's thought a lot about his topic, it was very technical to start off with, that was a little bit of a concern but then no different really to a lot of other PhD students, the biggest difficulty I have and certainly not just directed at him, is that English is a second language and sometimes it's very difficult for them to express what they actually want to express, in an academic style, they can often express it in a talking style but not necessarily in an academic style.

When Supervisor 4 was new to supervision, the experienced primary supervisor asked him to correct half of an ESOL student's 12-chapter thesis. It had taken him hours and he realised that the student would not learn anything from these grammatical corrections, and from then on he had adopted the practice of modelling the grammar by marking up the first six or so pages. He pointed out that modelling was acceptable in terms of the directives that supervisors not proofread. He emphasised that the issues for grammar and academic language were not unique to this student or to African students.

> I can think of a pakeha student I've got at the moment whose got very similar problems, and that's what I'll do with that student as well the fact that he's African doesn't mean to say that they do have, they lack the scholastic language, certainly pakeha people do.

This had some similarities with Supervisor 7's description of his African student's spoken English as excellent, but there being a disjoint between what he was thinking and his writing. The supervisors were concerned that he was not distinguishing between his opinions and his findings. The student had a tendency to be flowery and verbose in his thinking and writing. Supervisor 7 was not sure whether or not this was just his student's personality or whether it was cultural or whether it was because he was male. He referred to spending "frigging hours" trying to make sense of the writing.

> What became obvious really quickly was when the first written work came through I couldn't decipher what he was writing, I mean the English words were there and when you first read through it you know you'd read it you know you'd read it through and you'd sort of have a sense of it. So for the first year virtually everything, he would write stuff, I'd go through it and then we would sit and I'd literally have to say 'so what does this sentence mean?' (Supervisor 7)

The audience supervisors were most conscious of for the thesis were the examiners, and they referred to them as part of the argument for students to change their approach to writing.

> He's quite flamboyant in his language and… I said to him, 'I don't want to take your voice out of this but the examiners have to be able to read, you know understand it easily because if they start struggling to understand it they're going to get mighty slacked off.'

Illustrating the way in which past history, writing, and views of what counts as knowledge within the pedagogical relationship Supervisor 8 discussed the difficulties he experienced in working with his South African student. The student was a high achiever and had a strong personality and yet demonstrated dependence as a student.

> Equally there were aspects to the supervision which were surprising to me in terms of how, in some respects she needed to, in the writing, tell her exactly how she needed to approach it in order to get it done, anything slightly outside the box she struggled with it, and I don't know whether that's her or whether that's her training or who knows, who knows.

The student could write reasonably well, but it was writing up the research that was difficult. This was an issue for the thesis and in writing for publications.

> I've never had a paper which required so many drafts, so it required I think six drafts by the time I had read it, before we even submitted it and then the reviewers said it's too detailed, too much information, she had another go at it based upon their comments, and onto the seventh draft, I then got it back again and I thought this is just going to get knocked back again, I'm going to rewrite some of this, and so in the end I had to step in, at that point, but I normally are given most drafts, you know you're talking three or four at the most, suddenly this was up to eight.

Academic journal reviewers can be harsh. "You could see her soul being slowly sapped out of her, as it went through yet another iteration". (Supervisor 8)

During the interview Student 6 expressed what appeared to be contradictory perspectives on written English for the thesis. On the one hand she talked of how her supervisors wanting her to stop using sophisticated words and instead to use simple words, and on the other she talked of the need for African students to learn to embellish their writing.

> Like you have to stop using sophisticated words; just write simple English that it makes your work forceful, which I think at first I thought: 'oh, why are these people doing that. This is a PhD'. I thought I should write all these sophisticated English grammar. But when you sit there and think about it they are right because it's not as if you are showing off to everybody that you can write good English. (Student 6)

What is not clear in her later comments, on African students and their writing, is whether she is referring to words, or to perhaps argument. She refers to Africans writing in a straightforward style and needing to learn to embellish their writing.

> The way we write is different. Sometimes I don't know if we are afraid to write but we don't embellish the writings enough. We just write straightforward. Those people who are coming directly from Africa they write straightforward, it's like we are afraid to write. So the supervisors will have to understand the culture we are coming from. …These people need more time to know that when you write in academic situ you have to embellish it a little more and make it look much more appealing. (Student 6)

The students were perhaps more conscious of the differences, and the difficulties with language than the supervisors, and their views illustrated how language and feedback interconnect. Many were exasperated with common comments written on their own or fellow students' work. Student 14 recited the familiar litany of comments that a number of other participants recalled supervisors writing on student work.

> You may find that they are being corrected now and then 'your English', 'I don't understand,' 'I don't understand', 'I don't get everything', 'what you have written here doesn't make sense', 'I don't understand'.

These comments clearly rankled with him, and with other students. It was likely that they had been much discussed on the campuses. Student 4 argued that such feedback is unclear, and that if someone were to write on her work "Please explain" or "I don't understand" she wants them to be specific about what it is that they want explained, what is it that they do not understand".

Writing for the thesis is multifaceted and includes disciplinary based thinking, argumentation, style and standard of academic writing, and presentation. Supervisor 10's student work was of a standard that she was encouraging him to present at conferences and for publication. At the same time she wanted him to lift the quality of his writing and to take responsibility for editing it himself before submitting it to her. The supervisors had encouraged him to go to student learning support for assistance with this.

> It's not, grammar, some of it's not building the argument although that was initially he's now arguing well some of it not interpreting the data, not presenting the details well, not formatting the tables well so they were difficult to read using hundreds of abbreviations, he loves abbreviations. […] a degree of sloppy, well I would call it sloppiness and I probably have said to him. And he's getting to the point where if he doesn't take more care I will send it back and say edit it first.

Theme Five: Pedagogical relationship

The fifth and final theme was that of the **pedagogical relationship**, and this encompassed the mutual expectations students and supervisors had of each other and of the process of research study; the extent to which and in what ways, supervision was regarded as a dialogic, reciprocal process of knowledge exchange and the types of feedback supervisors provided students with.

The journey towards the confirmation of the doctoral project/proposal in most cases occupied the first year of the doctoral journey. During this year there was often an emphasis on the student reading widely, and developing their writing to doctoral level. Student 15 described how her supervisor told her during the beginning stage of her PhD she needed to read widely and to identify a gap in the literature for her own research. The intensity and level of the reading was challenging.

> Where I'm coming from …we don't have that culture of reading so at first it was […] it was very hard just reading and reading and reading, sometimes you read the paragraph and don't even understand what it means, you have to start off again and it was hard but yeah it was helpful, so I read and read then develop this interest of reading, reading more and more in order to try and understand the material and all this

Being left to explore the literature was part of the doctoral journey. Several students (e.g., students 11, and 12) valued an approach to doctoral study that they described as "learning by doing" and "guided discovery". These students appreciated their supervisors' use of those approaches in order to build confidence and allow them to be in charge of their own material

> They wanted me to kind of develop a measure of confidence, so in order to not be that some people are telling you do this, so that it would now be that you are doing something and transferring, and something that you actually figure out from literature, and then something that at the end of the day you'll be glad that you did, and also along the line because I discovered that you know much of the research skills are learned by doing, you learn skills by doing. (Student 11)

Student 11 contrasted this approach to a less helpful pedagogical approach taken by supervisors in his own country.

> I should say back in Africa our supervisors take lots of time with us as in they share in what you do they own a lot of it as in they really take lots of time to be with you and that kind of arrangement which takes away your independence. Here you are, our researchers one, most thing I like about it is how do I call it, self-guided discovery, nobody tells you as in your supervisor would not really tell you do this and this and this, you are given kind of an empire to manage and from this empire once you go through, you make your own discoveries.

Student 12's experience, however, demonstrated the need for at least some guidance during the process of discovery. She finally after much angst had her 'Eureka!' moment in terms of study direction, only to have it taken away when it did not meet her supervisors' approval. Like a number of the students, Student 12 was an experienced Master's supervisor, and when discussing her expectations of the supervision relationship she spoke from the point of view of the supervisor. She emphasised that the project was the student's and the student needed to drive it, with the supervisor there to offer direction if needed.

> I expect as a supervisor that as a student you take up your role and the project is yours. I am here to offer directions where you, you might, it might not be very clear with you and, and not really drive you because you're supposed to be your own driver but should there be some things that are not clear that's where I may come in maybe to, not to really create help cause you're the one knows exactly what you're doing but at least maybe I may you know may assist.

When Student 1's proposal shifted in a direction that he had little previous background in, he found it helpful to do the reading for, and attend a course his supervisor was teaching on this topic. He would talk with his supervisor as he walked to and from the classes.

> It's actually helpful to me sitting in the class, because that's a new area that I'm entering into, yes the literature side for me to read [different theoretical perspectives] so sitting in this class has actually opened me to a whole lot of issues that I would have taken for granted, or would not have taken it so seriously, and I think sitting in that class really helps me, or has helped me more than I would have than the research would.

Coming through the supervisor interviews was the view that the student needed to own the project. Supervisor 2 thought students should be in charge, but described the focus of his pedagogical approach as encouraging students towards "joined up thinking" described as "connecting random stuff from your background and from your reading and from conversations you've had and papers you've read and you think, oh I wonder if that's the same as this, how would I test that?" Alongside this he thought it important to give permission to students to critique the work of other academics, and he modelled the process in discussion with students.

> We spend quite some time with all our students reading the literature and first falling over laughing at the stupidities which are published in error and the mistakes that are made in all current published work. We all know that there are errors in most papers and just help them to be, to develop those critical faculties and to say it's okay life is full of mess and mistakes, your job is to do as good a job as possible and to still recognise your own limitations.

In a New Zealand academic context there is an espoused belief that argument, challenge, and willingness to confront ideas are desirable qualities. A number of the students discussed coming from social and academic cultures where qualities such as avoiding conflict, respect for elders and authorities were inculcated into young people and students. Examples were given of students remaining silent or using alternative strategies when they disagreed with their supervisors, or believed that their supervisors had misinterpreted

something. Similar instances emerged within interviews and perhaps came into greater focus when reading the transcripts. References to a country of origin seems relatively benign and uncontroversial information, but when in one of the interviews, the interviewer mistakenly refers to the student's country on more than one occasion as Tanzania rather than Kenya, the student first ignores this, then later appears to gently insert the correction.

Whilst developing a questioning and critical stance is a challenge to students from all backgrounds, Supervisor 2 suggested it is particularly challenging for his African students, who, although extremely intelligent, had grown up in cultural systems that encouraged respect and discouraged critique and questioning of authority.

> In the West we've had hundreds of years since the enlightenment where it's okay to challenge dogma, it's okay to challenge written papers, it's okay to challenge everything that your parents or yourself that you believed a minute ago, that's all okay. (Supervisor 2)

Expectations around how supervision works are shaped by prior experiences and constructions of roles. Many, but not all the students talked of the difficulty they had in adjusting to a different type of relationship with supervisors than they had previously experienced in Africa. Many referred to the importance of titles and positions in African contexts, and with this went the sense of respect for those in higher positions. A number explained that they would not have questioned or challenged a supervisor at home. In New Zealand they were required to move from a more passive to an active, questioning role, and one where they owned the doctoral project. The complexity of different constructions of the relationship is exemplified in Student 1's description of regular informal contact with his supervisor including talking with his supervisor as they walked to and from class and was clearly valuing the learning. Yet, at the same time because of the lack of formal meetings Student 1 was feeling as though he had been left on his own too long, and needed to be meeting formally with his supervisors who he was seeing informally in the department. He was waiting for the supervisors to realise that the time had come to meet with him.

> What is happening right now between me and my supervisors, they basically have left me on my own, but once they realise, no, this guy has been silent for a long time they will get in touch. They will get in touch and ask 'how is the work going?' So you don't also take it for granted that the student is, I mean silent for a long time and therefore he is okay.

Feedback

Feedback is an important dimension of doctoral pedagogy, and closely interwoven with, and shaped by the supervision relationship. Most, if not all feedback in doctoral supervision is in relation to written drafts for either the proposal or the thesis. Supervisors referred to discussing, negotiating and setting out their role in the thesis project early in the supervision relationship. Some talked about their typical approach to feedback, while others stressed how they adjusted their feedback approach to the student, for instance, being blunt with those for whom this was appropriate, but treating carefully those who might crumple at robust feedback, or spending more time on discussing feedback, or on

the mechanics of writing. Supervisors located their feedback approaches within the context of the production of a thesis that would be completed successfully and within three or so years, and this included framing the research.

The students reflected on different feedback approaches they had experienced including, as students in their home country, in previous overseas study, and in submitting articles to journals. A few discussed how they (as lecturers/supervisors) gave feedback to their own students.

Two supervisors described themselves as “strict” and made their expectations and ways of working explicit early in the process. These two supervisors referred to previous supervision experiences where students had not completed successfully in a timely fashion. They were conscious of the imperatives for students and their institutions of completing within the three funded years. In addition to her university’s application process for doctoral students, Supervisor 13 undertook her own vetting of the student, their skills and fit with her way of working. She had high expectations, and students were expected to meet agreed objectives.

> Because in my early days of supervision I had people who dropped out and who messed around and nowadays I’m very, very rigorous at the beginning and that means my students do finish in three years because I’m quite strict and I like to get them into quite a strict regime right from the start. (Supervisor 13)

These supervisors were thinking about the future examination process, and foreshadowed their changing role as supervisor.

> I’m sort of supporting and guiding and challenging her with her ideas but then I won’t have anything to do with the marking of it. So right at the start I did discuss the role but then I said, “Towards the end you will hate me; you should expect to hate me and that’s fine, because I’m trying to envisage... ‘cause I want you to pass. It’s like a parent with tough love, with a child. I want you to succeed and I’m going to try and imagine what three rigorous examiners are gonna say ‘cause I know what I say to other people’s theses and so I’m trying to imagine. So I will tell you what I think they’ll say. (Supervisor 13)

In a similar vein Supervisor 10 explained how, based on her past experiences with supervision, she had come to develop a supervision approach designed to have students complete in a timely way. Writing was a core component of this approach, and the expectation that students began writing early, and worked on their writing.

> But it is perhaps I feel if we have our research set up well early you get a good outcome. Other people with different, another supervision style is – to address it all in the write-up at the end, now I, that doesn’t, I refuse to work that approach, and if a student wants that approach they can’t, I won’t supervise them, they either come and work under my style or not at all.[..] And that is because it’s the only way I’ve seen students deliver in a timely way, I have tried it twice … doing it the other way and cause I’m quite experienced at supervision have picked up students from other people and the student’s hardly written a thing and you’re scrambling to get a thesis in at the end. (Supervisor 10)

A number of students discussed wanting to avoid situations they were aware of that fellow students had experienced where the thesis took longer than the three years of scholarship funding and where students were either left in dire situations in New Zealand or returned home to try and finish there. Coming through was the sense that supervisors needed to bear responsibility for this.

> Why they have not finished within the time, it is because of the nature of what they are trained or supervised here, it is not that the supervisors are not working with the students, they are working with the students but you find that there are a lot of this go back, bring, go back. So you may have this work, you get some feedback, you work with it, when you send it to the supervisor he or she may go through it and then it will be sent again. Can you, can you, I didn't understand this work can you maybe send to the editor, what, what, what? The thing that I've mentioned, you don't have money and your work is 200 pages, you need to send it to an editor so that your supervisor can read it and then once the supervisor has read it, you make corrections, you send again to the supervisor. (Student 14)

The challenge for supervisors was ensuring that the student had ownership of the project, and made decisions. Supervisor 11 described her role to her student as giving "advice on how to figure out what to do, not paint by numbers". In a different vein Supervisor 12 observed that her student's receptiveness to feedback, meant meeting monthly rather than more frequently was helpful for fostering independence. Likewise the students were clear about the importance of feedback approaches which nurtured their ownership of the thesis. Student 3 while recognizing the experience and expertise of his supervisors and valuing these, emphasized that he needed to own the research "So I would do more to listen to the guidance they provide, but I wanted to have some original drive of the project so that I own it." Student 11 categorised the approach as "guided discovery" and as the student being given their own world to explore.

> But under guided discovery … open ended you are guided, yes, but you are given your own world to venture, so you meet your supervisor, you discuss and from your discussions you pick from the arguments.

He went on to compare how the approaches followed can have a different impact on the student's motivation and ownership of the project. Some of the differences in approaches can be quite subtle.

> But as you discuss they have their way of putting things in ways even if it is something that really requires to be done their tone and their choice of terms with which idea this is framed is not one, is not in a way that it demotivates. You know elsewhere in Africa somebody writes here' I don't think,'' I'm worried about your reasoning' 'I don't see this', you know you feel really belittled and it is a demotivating factor. But here if something is missing somewhere you are enabled to centre on that on your own but under guided discovery until finally you own it, you gain your own understanding and then you move so it is very different. (Student 11)

Later he elaborates on how his supervisors raise issues in such a way that he is able to respond.

> So the difference is that my supervisors don't just block my idea but it's like they are asking me to say what is your argument? What is the reasoning behind? And in the process I think I've seen that this has given me more room to learn actually in terms of…

Students clearly thought about what type of feedback and questioning provoked the student's own thinking and developed their arguments. Like Student 11, Student 1 illustrated the type of questioning needed:

> Ok so I would ask himself telling the students do this, I'd rather ask the student do you have counter arguments to your own point, what are some of the things you think people raise, so in other words you are not telling students to change, I mean his or her opinion but you're asking him that are there possible challenges or counter argument, that you think people might raise, once a student is able to come up with alternative views, indirectly you are telling him that here should look at it differently, but you are not imposing your view. (Student 1)

Student 16 thought it was important that the student rather than the supervisor was working out what to do. So the supervisor might construct their feedback in a way that gave ownership to the student.

> The supervisor might think differently, he might say 'do you know what I am thinking? What if you look at this direction and then see, maybe if you look at this direction you can compare what you have here with what you have back there' then at the end of the day you may have a better solution at the end of the day. So that is the way that the supervisor, not that the supervisor is doing the work or not the supervisor working it out no, because if the supervisor is working it out for the student the student will not know anything**,** the student will not, his understanding will be limited because it is the supervisor that is working it out for him.

Supervisor 10 who described her feedback style as being an incremental, supportive and questioning one, noted that she varied the type of feedback according to what she was giving feedback on, that whether it was on notes, or polished piece of writing. She saw her role as helping students find themselves, and while she expected a written submission for each meeting, and provided written feedback for, she still liked to meet to discuss the work with the student. Her approach was to begin a meeting with students talking about their work, and what they were arguing. In her experience international students often verbalised their ideas in face-to-face meetings, while not always expressing these in their writing. So she would feed their ideas back to them.

> Even though I get writing in with supervision when the student comes I will always start with questions and talk and so tell me why you did this and what you thought because what I find, and this is particularly I'd say with the international students is they can verbalise their insights but not write their insights. […] Cause I use that because then I get them to talk about it and then often in my feedback back to them I will reinforce you know you were talking about this and this so what you need to do is make sure you reflect this in your writing. (Supervisor 10)

In discussing the development of the proposal, and providing feedback during the development stage, Supervisor 10 provided examples of how she used questioning to develop the student's thinking and writing about their research design.

> I probably send references but comment and yeah it's more probably, and if you lift the writing and if you have these sessions and you say well "actually tell me about the rigor of your research", you know "Tell me why that's going to work," "How are you going to do it?" "What's fair and reasonable there?" "You know how is that going to be good data? (Supervisor 10)

Nearly all the supervisors provided students with detailed written feedback, although the form this took varied depending on the nature of the submission. As they were writing the thesis some were emphasizing thinking:

> […] then she'll quickly get what I mean and then she'll take it further. So she can do it but she sort of needs that prompt. […] So I'm really looking to her to develop that more. And that might be the cultural thing, I don't know. It could be that she is used to… and she's more familiar with. She's used to being instructed and she's not so used to having an equal debate. I don't think she's very used to having an equal debate and that's something she's learning. (Supervisor 13)

Most supervisors emphasized the importance of face-to-face discussions with a student on the feedback and the student's response. Supervisor 7 saw face-to-face feedback as enabling the student to explain their thinking, and to ask questions. Another, (Supervisor 4) liked to draw models or pictures to illustrate what he was saying, and saw this as being helpful for students.

Interestingly students were divided in terms of preferences for written or face-to-face feedback with a combination of the two being the most popular. One of the two students who expressed a strong preference for face-to-face feedback, expressed feeling scared when faced with a lot of corrections that his supervisors would think of him as a careless student misusing the English language. He commented "Some words might be harsh to you but if you face the person you can find it was just normal things". He likened the approach they were following with supervision to the interview process:

> Sitting together looking at the words, sharing their ideas, so you can see a supervisor has made somewhere a comment then he or she will say okay you presented this information here, I didn't understand this, this and this and this, what you meant, they are now able to explain. I explained I meant this, I meant this, I meant this. And then the supervisor can add ideas, okay so if that's the case why didn't you go this way, why didn't you go this way? So that you will look good. (Student 14)

At times supervisors were travelling, and face-to-face meetings were not always possible. Student 14 suggested that maintaining contact through Skype or email could help. He again, highlighted how written feedback can seem harsh, but when people meet in person it can feel normal.

A. The kind of language written there you can, you can see some words that might be harsh to you but if you face the person you can find that it was just normal things. And some people are not tolerant for the little things they become angry then they can lose communication with you.

Q. Are you talking about students now, or supervisors?

A. Both, students and supervisors.

Those students who favoured a combination of written and face-to-face feedback, described distinct approaches. One was for the supervisors to bring written feedback on submitted work to a meeting where the draft and the preliminary feedback were discussed. Typically such meetings began with the students talking the supervisors through their work, and moving to discuss both the work and the feedback. Student 8's supervisor would open up an issue with wording such as "*Have you considered?"* which Student 8 felt gave her options. The student would take the written feedback away, and in writing a summary of the meeting would note what was agreed. This approach seemed to represent a sense of the student and the supervisors each bringing something to the table to discuss.

The other approach was one where the student received written feedback on their draft prior to the meeting, and then at the meeting the draft and the feedback were discussed. What students valued about this approach was that it gave them time to consider the feedback and think through its implications, and to have the opportunity to formulate 'counter arguments'. Student 11 favoured written feedback over face-to-face. This was interesting as he said *"In Africa it was always a must that you meet physically, you physically meet and discuss".* His supervisor would read his drafts and frame his questions in writing, which meant he was able "to sit and think how to respond. So when you meet you must own your arguments and so that becomes the basis for your onward work".

Challenges with feedback

A few supervisors expressed concerns in relation to feedback, two of whom talked about difficulties with students receiving feedback. One puzzled supervisor referred to feedback not appearing to be getting through to a highly intelligent student, who would indicate that the feedback was understood and would persist with whatever was being identified as an issue (Supervisor 7). In a different vein, a student who was "brimming with confidence" would express displeasure with feedback that she disagreed with, and the supervisor trod a fine line between not wanting to dampen the confidence, and wanting the student to take feedback onboard.

> That just meant that I had to learn very quickly with her to just give her time, and I talked with her about that, I said I'm not going to stop saying what I think because you don't like it, you don't have to change, it's your research it's your thesis, I'm just giving you good advice … She'd say … things like 'I don't like this '…' I don't agree with this', 'you're wrong'. I'd say ok I don't have to be right, but you need to know this is what I'm thinking, oh and the same with her, she'd write stuff for me sometimes and I wouldn't

> be saying to her you're wrong, I'd be saying I don't find this particularly convincing, but you know I'd be inclined to look at it from this point of view, but in the end it's going to be your decision so think about it. (Supervisor 11)

A greater weight on feedback

A different challenge was a tendency for the student being discussed to place a greater weight than intended on feedback provided. In the section on language and writing, we reported students being disturbed by comments such as "I don't understand" from supervisors. Supervisors were aware that such comments did not always have the intended result. Supervisor 2 referred to the student making changes to written work, not out of conviction but because the supervisor had questioned what was meant. In a similar vein another had this to say:

> But for my African students at the moment it seems to be more formal, they seem to think that because it's written it's kind of more solid than I'd intended it, you know, so 'what do you mean by this?" [Student Name] will see this as a terrible slight on his, you know, there's something, that sentence, his first response – I'm now channelling him, was that, that sentence is gone, and I'll say well actually I didn't ask you to remove it, I wanted to know what you meant by it. (Supervisor 9)

This supervisor went on to say that while he continues to use comments and track changes for himself on the students' work, he prefers to meet with the students face-to-face and discuss the feedback, a process he termed 'didactic engagement'.

> So I think that probably a personal verbal, sort of didactic engagement seems more productive than a written one, but also, if often takes time – it's an authority thing, I mean, we spend quite a lot of time in these fortnightly meetings with the student taking time to relax and be comfortable and then saying what they do think about things, but I talk a lot as you've probably guessed, but I need to deliberately create a space for them because otherwise it's, the two way requires a kind of warming up and I think that my expectations of the give and take, for them, often appears from the outside to be a more hierarchical relationship. (Supervisor 9)

A distaste for referral to learning support

Coming through in some, but not all of the student interviews was a distaste for the suggestion that students go to student learning support services for assistance with writing. This was perhaps seen as disrespectful or demeaning, suggesting that in the African context such assistance is not regarded as a regular part of developing academic skills.

Journal submissions and peer review

Two supervisors (Supervisor 3 and Supervisor 8) discussed the difficulties they had supporting their students through journal revision processes. In contrast students discussing the peer review process of submitting papers for academic journals framed these processes as constructive and part of being an academic (Student 1, Student 2 and Student 16), and experienced the feedback and revision processes as integral to this

process. Student 1 was aware that some students wondered if the critical comments they received from supervisors or proposal reviewers were because they were African. He managed to convey the sting that a barb in a journal review may carry, along with the realisation that peer review can be challenging.

> Say you are having a tough time, … so those ones I don't consider them to be an African issue, I mean if you send your proposal … he return it and they're giving you a lot of comments, … sometimes the temptation would be that why is this guy giving me this kind of comments is it because I'm Ghanaian? Or, no, I think it's because you're a PhD student.
>
> I've been sending a paper to a journal, and kind of call as I received one and it was so bad, one of the reviewers said he doesn't think I'm a Ghanaian, yeah and I'm like, no, I rather think he is not a Ghanaian too! …but would I assuming I knew who the reviewer was, and the person happened to be a westerner, would I call such a person racist because I'm a Ghanaian? No it's part of the academic conflict, so as I say, yes, supervisors but I think we, the students, also need to be aware of some of these tensions.

Supervision team feedback

The practice at both universities was for there to be supervision teams, rather than a sole supervisor, and although there were variations in how involved a second supervisor was in the meetings and feedback the typical pattern was for both to attend all meetings, and to provide feedback. The second supervisor appeared to often take a greater role in providing feedback on the mechanics of writing, and a lesser role on the development of ideas. Typically the students interviewed emphasized the role of the primary supervisor, and noted that the second supervisor deferred to the primary supervisor. One student discussed an experience during his Master's when his two supervisors disagreed and he did not want to create tension between them. He talked about having to carefully manage this situation as it was like coming between 'two big men'.

> A. Yes, like supervisors and all these things in terms of status; yes. So don't stand between them and be their problem. So that really, I would say it made it very, very difficult for me how to go round it. …, I think at that time I wouldn't say they were aware that I was going through that because I didn't bring it up in any of the meetings for the same reasons. So what I would do is I would turn it into a question and take it to the other person... …or my opinion, so that I find out whether good reason to get them to come to a common agreement. Depending on how I've received it, I would take one of the sides that was more key and closer to what I was working on and thinking about….and side with that and try to defend it.

Supervisor 12's student liked clear feedback and both supervisors provided detailed feedback with Supervisor 12 describing herself as taking the 'good cop' approach. One would use track changes and comments to provide feedback, then pass this to the other supervisor to add their feedback, so that the student was presented with one set of feedback.

Student 6 reflecting on her Master's supervision experiences described her American advisor's approach as cordial: "When he gives you feedback he will tell you the good side of what you have written, then he'll also draw your attention to the areas that you need to strengthen and all those things." This advisor was originally from her home country.

Additional viewpoints and feedback were provided to students from other academics through the proposal/confirmation processes, from group supervision arrangements, and in the case of one science department through a panel approach.

LESSONS FOR PRACTICE

The supervisors were asked what they had learnt from supervising students from Sub-Saharan Africa. A number emphasized that every student and relationship is different, so that this was not a straightforward question. "But it's your personality that then will either help you or sink you in your studies" (Supervisor 2). Another "each relationship is to a degree individual and I mean four of my PhD students right now are scholarship people, now these people are so bright, you know you have to run to keep up with them" (Supervisor 10). The supervisors' interviews suggest that they were talking about high achieving students and that they would not necessarily expect all students to be at this level. "Only a sample of one but my experience is they're jolly good" (Supervisor 6). Talking about her outstanding student Supervisor 13 commented, "I think I'd need to be careful not to assume that all African students are like her."

Six interviews included stories of significant issues or challenges during the doctoral process (Supervisors, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, and 12). Four focused on Sub-Saharan African students who had completed their doctorates by the time of the interviews. Interestingly these four included one white and one student of Indian ethnicity. The struggles these six supervisors experienced included: struggling with understanding, and helping develop the writing of students for whom English was a third or fourth language; how to ensure a student's thinking and writing was at doctoral level, a capable student who lost confidence and went off track while a supervisor was overseas, a student unwilling to accept guidance, and serious plagiarism. Three of the six would approach accepting a student more cautiously in future, including one who would avoid accepting a student without a scholarship because of the time expended on financial issues. One would want to independently assess the writing proficiency of students and agree on a support plan prior to commencement of supervision if there issues in this regard, and one would not take referees' reports at face-value. Three had learned not to make assumptions. Another had assumed a confident and capable student would have no difficulty coping while the supervisor was away discovered that the student "went to pieces" (Supervisor 8). The third would not assume that a PhD student understood about plagiarism and how to paraphrase.

A seventh supervisor had experienced a non-African student failing his doctorate, mainly due to the standard of the writing in the thesis. The supervisor had been relatively inexperienced at the time and was aware of the pressures on the student to submit from his funders, and against his better judgement had agreed to the submission despite thinking that the thesis needed further work. This experience had influenced his approach to supervision. Early in Supervisor 13's career she experienced students not completing

their doctorates, and this had led to her vetting prospective students very carefully, and expecting students to follow a strict regime, and she found this effective for completion in the three years. Supervisors were learning: “I think okay I wouldn’t do that again, or, and thing is too, I’m now five years into being an academic, some of the things I might have done initially with students has changed”. (Supervisor 14).

Supervisor 2 reflected that he has learned that written feedback comes too late in the process for international students, and that there needed to be two-way written exchanges earlier in the PhD process. “Although that is more painful for us. It’s just more work – it would better training for people to become more fluent in their writing, and more – doing joined up thinking but in writing”.

Students’ responses to the question as to what recommendations they had to enhance supervision practice were likely shaped by the issues they explored in the interviews. In a number of cases students had not only discussed their own experiences but also those of other African international students. Seven of the sixteen highlighted differences in culture and the ways this impacts on the supervision relationship (Students 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 15). Some considered what African students needed to be aware of, others focussed on supervisors’ knowledge and awareness, and some on both. A number called for staff and student inductions to cover culture, either to help staff understand African culture, and/or help students understand kiwi culture.

> African cultures are different from Western cultures, and so I think even the supervisor should learn at least a little bit about the culture of the students that will also help with their relationship, because we have our culture and we respect our culture. (Student 15)

Student 1 suggested that students need to be aware that context in New Zealand was different from their home country, and that they needed to be able to put their own point of view, in contrast to at home where the relationship with a supervisor was always formal and the students were expected to follow whatever the supervisor said. So Student 1 was calling for a change not only from the students but also from the New Zealand supervisors. He suggested the latter needed to be aware of the mentality of the African students, where

> You have this kind of cultural barrier. It’s very difficult to disagree with the supervisor because sometimes you make a suggestion, no matter how minor or big it is. I decide Ok. I will just listen and do whatever they want, and it comes to mind “No. This is New Zealand, this is not Ghana”.

He suggests supervisors need to use strategies for enabling the student to voice views that might be opposing those of the supervisor. “Ask the student, do you have your own point? What are some of the things you think people might raise?” In a related vein Student 3 described how his supervisors gave him room. When they disagreed with him they did not block his ideas, rather they asked, “What is your argument?”

Student 6 suggests that supervisors need to understand African culture, and to realise that sometimes students find it difficult to ask questions because they are afraid that their supervisor will think them stupid.

> So you let a student know that ‘’You know what, it’s all right to … it’s good to ask questions. We don’t think you are dumb if you have too many questions”.

Other suggestions related to the need for supervisors to be aware of the students as people (Students 3, 4, 12, 13, 13, and 15). Student 13 appreciated that his supervisors were interested in what was happening around him, and recognised that these things could impact on him negatively or positively. They were aware of his financial situations, and had made suggestions about accommodation. Student 4 referred to supervisors being human beings working with other human beings and being interested in how they were settling in, and whether they were okay. Student 3, thought it would be nice if just once in a while supervisors dropped in to see how students were doing. This suggests that situating students in their broader identities is sometimes neglected. Student 15 said:

> I think supervisors should know these students are not little kids, they have families, some are mothers like I am the mother of two children, I’m a wife, I’m an academic – so if they come here and they just treated like a little kid because they don’t know the language, they know nothing. I don’t think that is a good idea.

Three students stressed the need at the start for supervisors and students to sit together and work out what the student’s needs were (e.g., were there knowledge gaps, in content areas, or skills areas like statistics) and identify courses, and for there to be clear understandings about expectations of the work and the nature of the writing required (Students 7, 11, and 16). There was a sense that both the proposal writing stage, and the thesis writing process took longer than necessary due to misunderstandings or mismanagement of the process. Students drew on both their own experiences and those they had observed of others. There was a fear of scholarships or funding running out before the thesis was ready, and this was seen as a situation that could have been avoided by addressing writing and editing earlier in the process.

A call was made by three students for African expertise either through the appointment of lecturers or through close links with African universities or specialists (Students 6, 8, and 9). Other recommendations, each from one student were for there to be time added to scholarships to support writing for publication post the award of the doctorate; that provision be made for orientation for those arriving outside the standard orientation times; and that students be given time to settle in before supervision commenced.

CONCLUSION

Collectively, the student participants were a high achieving group, many having completed their Master’s degree at an overseas university, with scholarships awarded on academic merit to study in New Zealand. They came from a range of Sub-Saharan countries and different language backgrounds, with some having English as a third or fourth language, and eight of the 16 being employed in lecturing roles in universities in their home countries. The supervisors who participated were drawn from a range of disciplines, with supervision experience ranging from having not yet supervised a doctoral student to completion to having supervised more than 30 students to completion.

Our first research question was *how is teaching and learning affected by the supervisory relationship between African doctoral students and their supervisors including the challenges of intercultural communication, relationship management, learning needs and differing expectations?*

Culture, previous postgraduate education, English language usages, field and topic of study, and personality likely all impacted on teaching and learning for students and supervisors. There is a clear sense from the study that universities and most supervisors had limited knowledge of African countries and cultures, and that there would be value in expanding knowledge and awareness of African cultures. In a similar vein, some students saw value in helping students learn about New Zealand culture. Not surprisingly, given the focus of the study writing in the doctorate and feedback featured strongly across student and supervisor interviews. A number of students expressed a preference for having written feedback from supervisors on drafts prior to meetings in order to provide a chance to read and understand comments, and thus be prepared to discuss. The reaction of students to comments such as “I don’t understand”, “Please explain” “This does not make sense”, suggests there may be an unintended effect of students feeling “slighted” or disrespected. A similar response was evident for African students referred to student learning support services. These responses suggest a need to look closely at how such feedback is constructed, and how writing and other skills development is provided to doctoral students.

Our second question was: *How might the findings of this project be relevant for improving the supervision of all research students (especially those from diverse cultural backgrounds such as international students and Māori and Pasifika students)?*

The findings suggest that acknowledging that culture and personal histories influence the supervision experience and relationships may be something students and supervisors do early on, and throughout the supervision relationship. Students and supervisors emphasised relationships and understanding the context which students came from, and were returning to. Some students highlighted the importance of being recognised as a person, and a person with roles in society, and both explicitly or implicitly linked this to feeling respected.

The relationships with supervisors and having a sense of belonging within their departments were important to students. Both students and supervisors typically were reporting positive and productive relationships. A small number of supervisors actively worked to develop their students as academics, and their relationship to their disciplines, and this seemed to be a promising aspect of intercultural supervision. In a related vein, thesis groups appeared to provide valued connections akin to communities of learning, and learning from others. In a supervision setting, students identified the difficulties in moving from entrenched notions of students respecting and not questioning their supervisor’s views to learning how to argue, challenge, or ask questions. In their recommendations a number of students suggested how supervisors could assist students adjust to the new environment. Spending time on clarifying short-term and long-term expectations in terms of what was expected of the student, including the expectation of a questioning stance, standard of writing and timelines for the proposal and thesis were all seen as important.

One student recommendation was that in the absence of staff members with African expertise there would be value in New Zealand academics having close links with an African department. Similar links could be valuable for other groups of students. The relationships and connections forged during students' doctoral journeys have the potential to carry into the future and to provide collegial opportunities for consultation and collaboration.

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LINK TO OTHER DOCUMENT FROM THE PROJECT

Doyle, S., & Manathunga, C. (2017). *Sitting together: A supervision resource for doctoral supervisors and students*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa.

https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/sitting-together-a-supervision-resource-for-doctoral-supervisors-and-students.pdf

APPENDICES

Appendix A: AIS: Student Interview Questions

African International Students and Supervision: Enhancing Intercultural Supervision in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Indicative questions for semi-structured interviews with Students, which will have probes as appropriate:

Please tell me about:

1. Your reasons for enrolling in an Aotearoa/New Zealand university.
2. What your experiences of research education and supervision have been.
3. Your hopes in undertaking a PhD.
4. Your hopes and expectations of the supervision relationship and of your supervisor(s)
5. How do you learn best? *Particularly interested in identifying and responses to learning needs, receiving feedback (written and oral). Probes re feedback – examples of effective feedback, what was least effective? A key moment or break through when things made sense.*
6. How would you describe the approaches used (by self and/or supervisor) in managing the supervision "relationship"? What do think about these approaches?
7. What concerns have you about supervision or the thesis?
8. What have you valued about the supervision experience?
9. What recommendations do you have to enhance supervision practices?
10. Any other comments?

Appendix B: Supervisors' Interview Questions

African International Students and Supervision: Enhancing Intercultural Supervision in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Indicative questions for semi-structured interviews with supervisors

Note that our interest is in the experiences of supervising students from African countries, and the supervision relationships with African students. This will be the emphasis of each of the questions.

Please tell me about

1. How long have you been supervising doctoral students? How many have you supervised? How many of these have been from the countries in Africa? (which countries?)

2. A little about your African student (s)? Name*, topic, thesis status, occupation in home country, scholarship.

3. What hopes did/do you have for [Student Name] PhD journey? The supervision relationship?

4. Could you tell me about what supervision and related arrangements were in place to organise and support this student's doctoral journey? Frequency of meetings, who attends, how are decisions made? Handling conflict between supervisors? What happens when the student is confused? When you are confused about what the student is trying to do?

5. How you would describe the approaches used (by self and/or other supervisor and student) in managing the supervision relationship. What do you think of these approaches?

6. How your think [Name/s of student/s] learns best. Particularly interested in: identifying and responding to learning needs, giving feedback (written and oral). Probe feedback – examples of effective feedback, what hasn't worked. Were there any break-through moments for either student or supervisor(s)? (Ah Hah moments)

7. What concerns do/did you have re this supervision or the thesis?

8. What influence will this/these experiences have on your future supervision practice?

9. Any other comments?

NB: to focus the interview on specific supervision experiences use names and replace later.