

# The Constitution, Negotiation and Representation of Immigrant Student Identities in South African Schools



*'Think, instead of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation' (Hall, 2000).*

## Abstract

The easing of legal and unauthorized entry to South Africa has made the country a new destination for Black immigrants. As this population continues to grow, its children have begun to experience South African schools in an array of uniquely challenging ways. For these immigrant youth, forging a sense of identity may be their single greatest challenge. Accordingly, this study asks how do immigrant students construct, negotiate, and represent their identities within the South African schooling context. Findings were multifold in nature.

First, although immigrant students' ease of assimilation into the chosen reference group was to some degree sanctioned by their phenotypic racial features, their attempt at *'psychosocial passing'* was politically motivated. Second, immigrant students did not readily classify themselves according to skin pigmentocracy. Third, the majority of immigrant students heightened their ethnic self-awareness in forming their identity, but also assumed hyphenated identities. Fourth, immigrant students were not seen as having an identity, but rather as being *'plugged into a category with associated characteristics or features'*. Fifth, immigrant students forged a *'continental identity'*. And sixth, the selfagency of immigrant students was twofold in nature; not only did they want to improve their own condition, but there seemed to be an inherent drive to improve the human

condition of others.

## **Introduction**

The demise of formal apartheid has created new and as yet only partially understood opportunities for migration in South Africa. One of the most notable post-apartheid shifts is the sheer volume and diversity of human traffic now crossing South Africa's borders. South Africa is increasingly host to a truly pan-African and global constituency of legal and undocumented migrants.

Legal migration from other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, for example, increased almost tenfold since 1990 to over four million visitors per year. South Africa's (re)insertion into the global economy has also brought new streams of legal and undocumented migrants from outside the SADC region and new ethnic constellations within. The easing of legal and unauthorized entry to South Africa has made the country a new destination for African asylum-seekers, long-distance traders, entrepreneurs, students, and professionals (Bouillon 1996; Saasa 1996; Rogerson 1997a; de la Hunt 1998; Perbedy & Crush 1998b; Ramphela 1999; Klotz, 2000). Consequently, traditional forms of migration are being reconfigured and new forms of migrant linkage are emerging with traditional neighbours (Crush et al. 1991). These reconfigured and new forms of migrant linkages hold serious implications for immigrant children in South African schools as the dynamics of belonging is no where so harsh as it is as in the day-to-day activities on the classroom floor and in the schoolyard. Many scholars claim that the structure of immigrant students' journeys to their new homes follows multiple pathways that are motivated by a variety of factors, namely, relief from political, religious, or ethnic persecution; economic incentives; as well as the opportunity to be reunited with family members (Berry, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Furthermore, these scholars argue that immigrant students are stripped of many of their sustaining social relationships as well as the social roles that provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world, which often results in acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

'For these immigrant youth, forging a sense of identity may be their single greatest challenge. Do they feel comfortable in their homeland? Do they feel accepted by the "native-born" of the host country? What relationship do they have with their parents' country of origin? Is their sense of identity rooted "here",

“there”, “everywhere”, or “nowhere” (Suarez-Orozco, 2001:176)? How do they forge collective identities that honour both their parents’ culture of origin as well as their new home in South Africa? How can they develop a sense of belonging while coping with the dissonance of ‘excluded citizenship’ (Suarez-Orozco, 2004)?

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, most public schools in South Africa in addition to opening their doors to all South African children irrespective of race, colour, or creed, have also opened their doors to a number of [black] immigrant children. There is however, very little research on the ways in which immigrant student identities<sup>2</sup> are framed, challenged, asserted, and negotiated within the *dominant institutional cultures* of schools. Accordingly, this study asks how do immigrant students construct, negotiate, and represent their identities within the South African schooling context. Are new forms of immigrant students’ self-identities beginning to emerge? The argument is presented as follows. I begin by sketching the background context of the study. This is followed by a review of the literature that informs research on immigrant students’ identities. Conceptual markers and theoretical groundings of this research study are subsequently presented. I then describe the design and sampling of this research study. Findings in the form of emergent themes from interviews and observations of immigrant students are then presented. I conclude with an analysis and discussion of findings, and examine ways in which immigrant students’ identities are constituted, negotiated, and represented within the South African schooling context.

## **Background Context**

To date, studies in this field have focused mainly on the black and white dynamics of South African students. There is very little, if any, research on the experiences of [black] immigrant students within South African schools. In much of the research on hybridity and transculturalisation, the important role of schooling as a mediating force in identity-making processes has also received little attention. Schools, through both formal and informal relationships, represent powerful interpretations of what it means to be ‘South African’, ‘Mozambican’, or ‘Zimbabwean’, that is, of belonging and nonbelonging. This research study sets out to explore how [black] immigrant students construct, mediate, and negotiate their identity within South African schools. The context of this study was limited

to the Gauteng<sup>3</sup> province of South Africa.

The central cities of Gauteng have some of the largest numbers of Black immigrants, who are diverse not only in terms of national origin, but by ethnic affiliation, cultural tradition, and generational status. The majority of Black immigrants in the Gauteng province of South Africa are from Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Swaziland, Botswana, Angola, and Malawi, but substantial numbers of immigrants also come from Zambia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Namibia, India, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Mauritius (Gauteng Department of Education, Ten day statistics – 2008). As this population continues to grow, its children have begun to experience South African schools in an array of uniquely challenging ways. As a result of these demographic trends, researchers have increased their focus on how Black immigrant youth fare once in South African schools. Some of the data capture of this research study occurred during the height of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Hassim, Kupe, & Worby, 2008). Larger societal tension fuelled by sensationalistic media attention had much more saliency in the formation of immigrant student identities, and in everyday interactions between South African and immigrant students at schools. The perpetrators of the violence in May explicitly targeted the *makwerekwere*.<sup>4</sup> These xenophobic attacks illustrated violent verbal and physical acts being directed towards Black immigrants by their Black South African counterparts who often erroneously perceived their Black immigrant peers' lack of familiarity with so-called 'South African norms' as intentionally distancing themselves from Black South Africans and related anti-Black South African arrogance. This 'shack on shack violence' (Hassim, Kupe, & Worby, 2008:16) was distinctive in several respects (Verryn, 2008). First, the attacks were on black foreign nationals. There is no record as far as any whites or Indians being caught up in these attacks. Second, it was mainly the poorer and more vulnerable foreign nationals that were exposed to the most vicious onslaught. Third, at least a third of the people killed were South African. And fourth, the violence was visited on the particularly marginalised of society, taking on ethnic and xenophobic connotations.

## **The Architecture of Identity**

### *Theorizing Identity*

A number of scholars claim that identity goes through a variety of permutations during adolescence as the individual experiments with different identity strategies (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Suarez-Orozco, 2004; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Murrell, 1999; Marcia et al., 1993; Marcia 1980; Parham 1989). Some argue that all youth move steadily from a stage of ethnic or 'racial unawareness' to one of 'exploration' to a final stage of an 'achieved' sense of racial or ethnic identity (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1968). Others point out that the process of identity formation is, rather than linear, more accurately described as 'spiralling' back to revisit previous stages, each time from a different vantage point (Parham, 1989). Yet, others claim that identity is 'an internal selfconstructed, dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history' (Marcia, 1980:159), which facilitates psychological differentiation from others. A sense of emerging identity characterised by 'a flexible unity', that makes an individual less likely to rely on others views and expectations for self-definition.

Suarez-Orozco (2004:177) challenges the view held by Erikson and argues that identity formation is not simply a process, by which one passes through a variety of stages on the way to achieving a stable identity. Rather it is a process that is fluid and contextually driven. The social context is essential in predicting which identity is constructed (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Many immigrant youth today are articulating and performing complex multiple identifications that involve bringing together disparate cultural streams. Immigrant students are constantly reinventing and rediscovering themselves through interactions in social structures, particularly peer reference groups and institutionally circumscribed roles, values, and ideologies. Among these social worlds, inconsistencies in the codes, values, roles, or expectations add to the difficulty of identity development (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). Identity is thus 'socially constructed'. It is an interaction between an internal psychological process and an external process of categorisation and evaluation imposed by others. The social context is thus essential in predicting which identity is constructed (Suarez-Orozco, 2000).

### *Negotiating the Currents of a Complex Society*

Negotiating the currents of identities for immigrant students can be particularly complex. The pathways they take, and the identities they form are determined in multiple ways. Resources, experiences, stresses, and trauma, as well as the coping strategies that immigrant students bring with them, play a key role. Critical to the formation of their identities is the structural and attitudinal

environment, within which they find themselves (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Taylor, 1994). Immigrant students must not only deal with aspects of personal development shared by all adolescents (relationships, work choices, examining values) but also often confront culture-related differences concerning these choices. They must also seek to create a sense of identity through personal choices surrounding relationships, occupation, worldviews, and values, which sometimes may conflict with parental and other family expectations (Murrell, 1999; Dion, 2006).

The single greatest developmental task of adolescence is to forge a coherent sense of identity (Erickson, 1964). Erickson (1964) argued that for optimal development, there needs to be a certain amount of complementarity between the individual's sense of self and the varied social milieus he or she must traverse. However, in an increasingly fractured, heterogeneous, transnational world, there is much less complementarity between social spaces (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). The ethos of reception plays a critical role in the adaptation of immigrant students (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Although the structural exclusion suffered by immigrants and their children is tangibly detrimental to their ability to participate in the opportunity structure, prejudicial attitudes and psychological violence also play a toxic role (Taylor, 1994). One of the ways in which this plays out is that of the social mirror (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). When the reflected image is generally positive, the individual is able to feel that she is worthwhile and competent. When the reflection is generally negative, it is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth. The social mirror creates the fertile conditions for what Du Bois (1903/1989) termed 'double-consciousness' to thrive.

*'Double-consciousness' is a complex and constant play between the exclusionary conditions of social structure marked by race and the psychological and cultural strategies employed by the racially excluded and marginalised to accommodate themselves to every indignities as well as to resist them (Essed & Goldberg, 2002).*

One way of overcoming the effects of the social mirror is that of psychosocial passing. 'Psychosocial passing' refers to people who seek to render invisible the visible differences between themselves and a desired or chosen reference group. By behaving in ways that are consistent with other group members, they subconsciously seek to avoid having their differences noticed. Phenotypic racial features have considerable implications for the ease of assimilation. In this era of

globalisation immigrants, ability to 'pass' or be fully assimilated unnoticed is no longer possible for most new arrivals and this can lead to undue stress (Berry, 1997; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Identities of immigrant students manifest themselves within the context of social worlds in numerous and multiple forms, namely Achieved or an Ascribed [imposed] Identities (Suarez-Orozco, 2004; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Helms, 1990; DeVos, 1980); Performing Identities (Maestes, 2000; Waters, 1886); Global Identity (Arnett, 2002); Dominating Identities (Murrell, 1999); Ethnic Identities (Phinney & Ong, 2007); and Hyphenating and Perforating Identities (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Furthermore the identity pathways or styles of adaptation of immigrant students differ. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) noted that youth attempting to traverse discontinuous cultural, political, and economic spaces tended to gravitate towards one of the dominant styles of adaptation: 'ethnic flight', 'adversarial', 'bi-cultural', and 'transcultural'. These styles are not fixed or mutually exclusive. '*Ethnic flight*' is characterised by immigrant students who willingly attempt to symbolically and psychologically dissemble and gain distance from their families and ethnic groups. The '*adversarial style*' is characterised by immigrant students who structure their identities around a process of rejection by institutions of the dominant culture. These youths respond to negative social mirroring by developing a defensively oppositional attitude and are likely to act out behaviourally (Aronowitz, 1984; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). The '*bi-cultural style*' deploys what is termed 'transnational strategies'. These children typically emerge as 'cultural brokers', mediating the often conflicting cultural currents of home culture and host culture (Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). The '*transcultural style*' is characterised by youth who creatively fuse aspects of two or more cultures - the parental tradition and the new cultures. In so doing, they synthesize an identity that does not require them to choose between cultures but rather allows them to incorporate traits of different cultures while fusing additive elements (Falicov, 2002).

## **Theoretical Moorings**

The problem of identity has been theorised through different competing paradigms. The two most relevant theoretical frameworks that have a bearing on this research study are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Hall's (Grossberg, 1996) figures of identification. CRT provides a theoretical framework, through which

individually and institutionally motivated racist acts can be highlighted, critiqued, and corrected (Tate, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Lynn, 1999; Tyson, 2003). It distinguishes between individual racism and institutional racism. CRT is an important construct for understanding Black immigrants who have made South Africa their home. It sheds light on the fact that Black immigrants are racialised as Black in South Africa, despite their varied self-identification on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, language, and other cultural signifiers, and are therefore subjected to the same racial prejudices and discrimination as their native Black counterparts. The concern of critical race theory is to re-narrativise the globalisation story in a way that places historically marginalised parts of the world at the centre rather than the periphery of the education and globalisation debate, and, thus, ultimately to bring about social change (Amnesty International, 2000). Scholars across disciplines have identified several dominant and unifying themes that describe the basic tenets of CRT (Velez et al., 2008; Yosso, 2006; Tyson, 2003; Lynn, 1999; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Tate, 1993).

First, race is a social construct, not a biological phenomenon. It is not rooted in biology or genetics but is instead a product of social contexts and social organisations. The construct of races involves categories that society creates, revises, and retires as needed. Second, racism is endemic to life and should not be regarded as an aberration. Socially constructed racial categorisations are a fundamental organising principle of society. Individual, cultural, and institutional expressions of racism reflect the racial stratification that is part of the fabric of society. Race and racism is part of the dominant cultural ideology that manifests in multiple contexts, and are central and defining factors to consider in understanding individual and group experience. Third, racism benefits those who are privileged and serves the interests of the powerful to maintain the status quo with respect to racial stratification. Fourth, CRT represents a challenge to the dominant social ideology of colour-blindness and meritocracy. Race neutrality and the myth of equal opportunity ignore the reality of the deeply embedded racial stratification in society and the impact it has on the quality of life. Fifth, racial identity and racial identification are influenced by the racial stratification that permeates society. The perceived salience of race, the significance of racial and ethnic group membership to the self-concept, the degree to which racial and ethnic heritage and practices are embraced or rejected, and the affiliations and identifications that are made within and outside of one's own racial and ethnic

group are all influenced by the dominant cultural narrative of superiority. Sixth, assimilation and racial integration are not always in the best interests of the subordinated group. Seven, CRT considers the significance of within-group heterogeneity and the existence of simultaneous, multiple, and intersecting identities. This is often referred to as anti-essentialism or inter-sectionality. All people have overlapping identities and multiple lenses through which the world is experienced.

CRT challenges the idea that any person has a uni-dimensional identity within a single category (e.g., race or ethnicity) or that racial groups are monolithic entities. Eight, CRT argues for the centrality, legitimacy, and appropriateness of the lived experience of racial or ethnic minorities in any analysis of racial stratification. CRT has advocated for marginalised people to tell their often unheard and unacknowledged stories, and for these perspectives to be applied to the existing dominant narratives that influence the law. Ninth, CRT insists on a contextual analysis by placing race and racism in a cultural and historical context, as well as a contemporary socio-political context. And, tenth, the ultimate goals of CRT are to inform social justice efforts and the elimination of racial oppression. The figures of identification as propounded by Hall (1996) comprise *Difference*, *Fragmentation*, *Hybridity*, *Border*, and *Diaspora*. The figure of *Difference* is constituted by the logic of difference through which the subject is constructed as an 'adversarial space' living in 'anxiety of contamination by its other' (Huyssen, 1986: vii). The figure of *Fragmentation* emphasises the multiplicity of identities and of positions within any apparent identity (Haraway, 1991).

*Identities can, therefore, be contradictory and are always situational... we are all involved in a series of political games around fractured or decentered identities... since black signifies a range of experiences, the act of representation becomes not just about decentering the subject but actually exploring the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness (Hall, 1992:21).*

The figure of *Hybridity* is used synonymously with the other figures. Hall (1996) uses it to describe three images of border existences of subaltern identities existing between two competing identities. Images of a '*third space*' (Bhabha), literally of defining an 'in-between place inhabited by the subaltern'. Images of '*liminality*' collapse the geography of the third space into the border itself, the subaltern lives, as it were, on the border. Images of '*bordercrossing*' mark an image of 'between-ness' out of which identities are produced. The *Diaspora*

experience is defined by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; and by *hybridity*. *Diaspora* identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

## **Research Strategy**

The research study was both exploratory and descriptive in nature. The overall school environment with particular reference to how immigrant students construct, negotiate, and represent their identity within the schooling context of South Africa was the unit of analysis. Particular emphasis was placed on the dynamics of institutional culture, and the climate of the school and the classroom. The research design was qualitative in nature, and the narrative method and case study approach was used. Three secondary schools located in the Gauteng province of South Africa provide the research sites for this study; a former white Model C school, a former Indian school, and an inner city school that had a majority of black immigrant learners. The rationale for selecting secondary school students is that these students are at the adolescent stage of their lives, where the selfcreation of one's identity, which is often triggered by biological changes associated with puberty, the maturation of cognitive abilities and changing societal expectations, and the process of simultaneous reflection and observation is commonly experienced (Tatum, 1999). Criteria used in the selection of students were based on racial background and gender.

The data-gathering techniques that were used in this study included a mix of semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of immigrant students to determine how their identities are constituted, negotiated, and represented in schools. The researcher selected approximately fifteen [black] immigrant students (Lesotho, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Congo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) across Grades 8 to 10 at each school. The selection of immigrant students depended on the mixture that was found at each of the identified schools. An attempt was made to include both Anglophone and Francophone immigrant students in this study. A total of 45 students were interviewed. These interviews were conducted in 2008 over a period of six months. Questions comprised five to six broad categories and were openended.

The duration of interviews ranged between 1½ to 2 hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, the School Management Team, the School Governing Body, selected teachers of these Grades (8 -10), and parents of immigrant children at each of the three research sites to explore the phenomenon of immigrant student identities. Observations were conducted to coincide with the interview period. Researchers observed immigrant students over a period of six weeks at each school with a focus on their experiences of school life, and how it plays out on the classroom floor and on the school grounds. Observations of classroom practice, activities, and associations during the break sessions, assemblies, and other activities of the school, including after school activities, were captured. It must, however, be noted that there are advantages and limitations of observations at a small number of schools. The advantages of such a technique is that it provides a lens into the 'lived experiences' of classroom life over a period of time that allows for in-depth study and creates the opportunity for patterns (if any) to emerge. The limitation is that the small number of schools observations could be seen as instructive and illustrative, and not as representative of all schools.

In order to get a better feel of the schooling and learning environment, various field notes were written, based on informal observations of these schools (ethos, culture, and practices of the school). Informal conversations were conducted with some teachers. Attention was also given to the physical appearance of the school, which included observations of artefacts such as paintings, décor, photographs, portraits, and school magazines to provide a sense of the institutional culture of the school. Do immigrant students feel a sense of belonging and being at home at the school? Particular emphasis was on the experiences of immigrant students, and how they constructed, negotiated, and represented their identities within these schooling contexts, and how these contexts influenced their identity formation.

Data was analysed utilising qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Sandelowski, 2000). Codes were generated from the data and continuously modified by the researcher's treatment of the data 'to accommodate new data and new insights about those data' (Sandelowski, 2000:338). This was a reflexive and an interactive process that yielded extensive codes and themes. The extensive codes were further analyzed to identify data related to key concepts in the research question, theoretical frameworks, and literature review (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). Multiple readings of the data were conducted, organizing codes and themes into higher levels of categories within and across the interviews, observations, and other sources of data (Merriam, 1998).

## **Findings**

Major findings that contrasted with what was found in the voluminous literature in this field were multifold in nature. First, although immigrant students' ease of assimilation into the chosen reference group was to some degree sanctioned by their phenotypic racial features, their attempt at '*psychosocial passing*' (Robinson, 1999) was politically motivated. They claimed that because of the political status of the host country, it was in their interest to '*pass*' as local blacks, but they wanted to do this in terms of appearance only and nothing else. For many immigrant students, the behaviour and code of conduct of their local black peers in the host country represented a site of contamination and shame. The concept of '*passing*' within the black community in the western world traditionally referred to blacks who pass for white because of their light skin colour (Wu, 2002). However, in the South African context this concept refers to black immigrant students who '*pass*' for local black students because of similar phenotypic racialised features.

*I can honestly say, I have not once noticed that the girls treat them any differently to a South African Zulu girl or a South African Xhosa girl or a South African Sotho girl, they look the same. It is really difficult to tell them apart physically (Ms Wilson, Grade 10 teacher).*

*They don't really react badly because they say I look mostly like a South African, like a Venda. I don't look like a foreigner. I mean I look like a Venda. So when I tell them I am from another country they actually get surprised (Effi, Zambia).*

*I fit in well, like the other South African Indians in this school. I speak English well, I don't really have an 'Indian' accent so I am like one of them (Jeet, Pakistan).*

*Well they didn't really see me as an immigrant; I was just like one of them. So I just let them go on believing that I am one of them. I don't let them know that I am really an immigrant (Vena, Zimbabwean).*

The ability to join the mainstream unnoticed is more challenging when one is racially marked. However, in the South African context the most discernible marker among black immigrant students was not one of race, but that of language and accent. In the case of black [African] immigrant students it was their lack of proficiency in indigenous languages that signalled their '*foreignness*'. Whereas with black [Indian] immigrant students, it was their lack of proficiency in English that made them conspicuous as foreigners. In both cases '*accent*' in the use of the English language was the critical signifier of the '*Other*'. A secondary instantaneous indicator was that of '*shades of blackness*'. Indigenous black students could immediately recognise black [African] immigrant students by the '*blackness of their skin pigmentation*'. Wu (2002) argues that immigrants ability to '*pass*' or be fully assimilated unnoticed is no longer possible for most new arrivals in this era of globalisation. Kevin who could physically identify with the local black students because of a similar '*shade of blackness*', tried to desperately '*pass*' as one of them by addressing his shortcoming in terms of learning an indigenous language.

He claims: *I do not want to be identified by my culture. I look like South African black people. I have made an effort to learn Sepedi to try to fit in and to communicate with the local blacks so that they do not say I am a makwerekwere.*

Immigrant students chose varied ways to present and orientate themselves in relation to others in the host country. What is important to note is that although the phenotypic features of many immigrant students allowed them to '*pass*' for one of the local blacks, all immigrant students were resolute in maintaining their sense of moral integrity. Second, immigrant students did not readily classify themselves according to skin pigmentocracy. They initially identified themselves in terms of personality traits and subsequently in terms of ethnicity linked to culture, traditions, language, and country of origin. The label of 'Black' was something that was ascribed to them on entry into the host country and something that they learnt to incorporate as part of their identity, given that they shared similar phenotype features as indigenous black students, as evident from this vignette.

*Interviewer:* Would you class yourself according to colour?

*Immigrant:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Who would you say you are?

*Immigrant:* I'm black; I'm African.

*Interviewer:* Why do you say you are an African?

*Immigrant:* Because I originate from Africa.

*Interviewer:* And why do you call yourself black?

*Immigrant:* Because that's how we're classified by the South African government.

*Interviewer:* And are you happy with that?

*Immigrant:* Not really, because I've heard so many people complain about being called black because our skin colour is naturally black.

*Interviewer:* So you won't classify yourself as black in Zambia?

*Immigrant:* Me, no, no, no definitely not! I was not identified as 'black' in Zambia, but here I am told that I am 'black' because I look more like the local black Africans than like the Indians and whites.

*Interviewer:* In Zambia, how would you classify yourself?

*Immigrant:* As African.

*Interviewer:* Just African?

*Immigrant:* Yes. It is only when I came to South Africa that I realized that I've got another label, now I am a black African.

*Interviewer:* How does this make you feel?

*Immigrant:* I feel bad because I am not 'black' I am 'African'... because I come from Africa. 'I am not happy about being called black. I prefer being called African'. Also, my culture is totally different from theirs [black South Africans] and in my culture we are taught to respect and behave well. We also dress differently. There are so many differences with them, so how can people see me like one of them? I am just an African student in South Africa from Zambia... all these other labels; black and all that doesn't get into my identity.

And another student's response:

*In Burundi we just say our culture and language, but when I came to South Africa I learnt that I am now 'black' (Andrew).*

*I am Zimbabwean and I'm black and I speak Kalanga...I say I am 'black' because when I came to South Africa I was told by the learners, teachers and the principal that I am black and I could also see that I look like the 'black South Africans'. No, in Zimbabwe I was not 'black'. I was just from the Kalanga tribe (Vena).*

Third, the majority of immigrant students heightened their ethnic self-awareness in forming their identity, but also assumed hyphenated identities, as much as the hyphen was heavily skewed in favour of the country of origin. Immigrant students negotiated the balance and contours of the hyphen as they navigated their way through the social contexts of the host country:

*I am Rwandan, but I am living now for 12 years in South Africa, so I'd say I am Rwandan but also becoming South African. I am a Rwandan-South African. [Sighs] I don't... I wouldn't say I'm a foreigner, no. I am a Congolese-South African, yes. I'm... who I am is two different cultures that play a huge, huge, impact on me and sadly I'm going say it's more South African than Congolese people that have made me who I am. But because culture means a lot to me, I have to say I am Congolese-South African (Vanessa, DRC).*

Fourth, immigrant students were not seen as having an identity, but rather as being 'cast into a category with associated characteristics or features'. In terms of 'Othering' they were ascribed the group categorisation of 'makwerekwere'. A further sub-categorisation process occurred within this group category and was based on 'Shades of Blackness', which further negatively influenced many immigrant students' formation of social identities and their sense of belonging to groups. Students who come from Congo, Zambia, Somalia, and Malawi are naturally darker skinned than indigenous African learners. According to one of the principals:

*They say this is a terrible thing which is part of our country, how dark the person is, because now South African students identify and discriminate against black immigrant students on the basis of darkness of skin colour because they say that person's too dark to be South African. This places the immigrant child under much stress and the child feels isolated.*

Some immigrant student responses in this regard:

*They use my surname Dakkar to mock at me and they say I am dark. I am a makwerekwere and I must go back to Zambia. They say you are black, like you are black more than other learners; you must be Congolese or maybe you from Somalia? There was this one time we were arguing with some other people. So they were dissing me [slang: insult someone] and so I also dissed them and they say I'm dark. I must go back to Malawi and stuff.*

Fifth, in order to counteract the social representation of being a foreigner, and to seek a sense of inclusion, many black [African] immigrant students forged a 'continental identity' to create a sense of solidarity with local black students. Thus, their identities became subjected to a process of evolution and modification within the new social context. There seemed to be an increasing emphasis on an 'African' identity:

*In Zimbabwe, I was a Zimbabwean, but now they say Unapa is a makwerekwere. That's not who I am. I am an African from Zimbabwe. I'm a Congolese girl from the DRC. They say I am a foreigner; a makwerekwere and they push me and say 'Go back to your country'. I don't see myself as a foreigner. I am an African from Africa (Jeanette, DRC).*

Andrew was resolute in his thinking and preferred to present himself in relation to others in terms of a continental perspective. Since the context within which he now found himself forced him to be classified according to colour, he vehemently denied being 'black', instead he argued:

*I do not classify myself as 'black' according to South African racial categories. I am 'coffee brown'. I am an African since like them [South Africans] I too am from the continent of Africa. How can they [South Africans] call me a makwerekwere? (Andrew, Ghana).*

And sixth, immigrant student self-agency was twofold in nature. They not only wanted to improve their own condition, as much of the literature in the field reports, but there seemed to be an inherent drive to improve the human condition of others. There was genuine concern and a form of empathy. They wanted to assist indigenous black students in the spirit of 'brotherhood' [we are the same we are all 'Africans'] to improve the moral, academic, and social fibre of South

African society.

*I see a kind of deficiency in the attitude of learners. For me, this is something that I can use to build the school into a better school and make the learners see that what they are doing is wrong. The South African government is giving the youth too many rights. I mean like already at the age of 12 you can have an abortion. That is just wrong in the Bible and it is wrong as a person (Chanda, Zambia). I can't say we really different, we look more or less the same except I am slightly lighter in colour then them but where we are different is in the attitude. The only difference is attitude. I'll change them. I will want them to understand what education is really about and how to treat elders. They must really get to understand that (Kevin, Zimbabwe).*

*The black people the way they treat people. I don't think we treat people the same way. I'd like to teach them about respect and how to treat people well (Athailiah, Mozambique).*

## **Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

The influence of race and the effects of racism on black immigrant students were glaringly visible in this research study. Black immigrants were racialized as Black and were, therefore, subjected to the same racial prejudices and discrimination as their indigenous black counterparts. The homogeneous categorization of Blacks ignores the important national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, political, and even racial differences that exist within the population. In particular, homogenous descriptions ignore the fact that for many Black immigrant youth, racial and ethnic identities are fluid and complex; thus many do not strictly identify with the rigid and dichotomous Black/White constructs, through which racial and ethnic identities are based in South Africa. However, within the stream of 'Blackness' prejudices against particular nationalities and ethnicities were clearly evident. Indigenous Black students demonstrated little incentive to eliminate racism. From a CRT analysis, this feature is known as 'interest convergence' or material determinism (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Efforts to eliminate racism occur only when the change will benefit the privileged group in some way. Both Black and Indian students did not perceive any benefit from the Black immigrant students, but viewed them as a threat. This tenet encourages an exploration of the role of societal need and power interests in a way that specific

qualities are associated with particular racial groups.

In addition, many Black immigrant students experienced challenges in forming their identity in their very different home and school environments. They experienced difficulty in reconciling the expectations placed upon them by their traditional culture and those that hailed from South Africa, or the Eurocentric culture generally found in South African school settings. They thus took on hybrid and hyphenated identities as a measure of reconciling these disparate cultural streams. However, the hyphen assumed a skewed formation, as many black immigrant students leaned heavily on their ethnic identities that provided the foundation of their cultural and moral mores. This seemed to comply with Hall's figure of *Difference* where the black immigrant student was constructed as an 'adversarial space' living in 'anxiety of contamination by its other' (Huyssen, 1986: vii). The multiplicity of identities and of positions within any apparent identity as characteristic of Hall's figure of *fragmentation* was evident in the manner in which immigrant student identities manifested themselves. Black immigrant students were ascribed identities, namely 'makwerekwere', 'black', and were further cast into categories according to 'Shades of Blackness'. Furthermore, they were ascribed identities according to the country of origin, namely Nigerians were categorised as thieves, womanisers, drug lords, and people who were unhygienic. Zimbabweans were ostracised because of the perception that they came from a poverty-stricken country that lacked resources and a country that would seem to be 'uncivilised' and 'backward'. Dominating identities of immigrant students were very much in the form of an ethnic identity.

While at the same time there was overwhelming evidence of hyphenating and perforating identities. There was also a very strong association with a 'Continental identity'. The emphasis on a 'Continental identity' by Black immigrant students was one way of counteracting the social representation of being a foreigner, and seeking a sense of belonging. Images of a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1990), literally of defining an 'inbetween place inhabited by immigrant students'. And, images of 'bordercrossing', that mark an image of 'between-ness' out of which identities are produced, seemed to be the favoured options. The identity pathways of immigrant students leaned more towards the bicultural and transcultural styles of adaptation. None of the black immigrant students chose to willingly attempt to symbolically and psychologically dissemble and gain distance from their families and ethnic groups, nor did they opt for an adversarial style

that centred on rejecting institutions of the dominant culture. They, however, rejected norms and values of South African culture; they just did not actively act out against it. In contrast, there seemed to be genuine empathy and a collective sense of '*brotherhood*' with indigenous students, as evident from the manner in which their self-agency unfolded. Hence, the *Diaspora* experience was very much evident in the way immigrant students recognised the necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; and by *hybridity*. Through this *Diaspora* experience, immigrant students constantly produced and reproduced themselves anew, through transformation and difference by subjecting their identities to a process of evolution and modification within the new social context, as evident from their increasing emphasis on an '*African*' identity.

## **Conclusion**

Reactions of indigenous students to Black immigrant students reflect the racial stratification that is part of the fabric of South Africa. In a CRT analysis, this endorses the tenet that races are categories society creates and that individual, cultural, and institutional expressions of racism are part of the dominant cultural ideology that manifests in multiple contexts. Current manifestations of racial stratification occur within a broader historical landscape that has shaped the present forms and expressions of racism. This research study uncovered both similarities and differences with what was found in the literature review. The similarities are that immigrant students in the South African context also have to contend with discrimination and harassment, but this is largely in terms of intra-black dynamics, while they struggle with issues of language, curriculum, and instructional strategies that do not address their cultural or linguistic background, and they feel a sense of alienation rather than one of belonging. These findings are in significant contrast with the literature in terms of the aspects of psychosocial passing, agency, identity, and language as a tool of exclusion. Black immigrant students have different stories to tell regarding the way race affects their life experiences. These stories have not had as significant an influence on policies, practices, and opinions as have the dominant cultural narratives about race. Black immigrant students have unique perspectives on racial matters and their voices speak of experiences involving marginalisation, devaluation, and stigmatisation. It becomes clear from these narratives that 'South Africanness' is not just a question of citizenship in official documentation.

It is also about contests over the more concrete (and often mundane) daily requirements of life, and the territoriality and space that accompany them. It becomes imperative to not only acknowledge and recognise the heterogeneous constitution of black groups in South Africa but to incorporate the linguistic and cultural capital of these differing groups into the very fabric of schooling so as to ensure that all students feel a sense of belonging and feeling at home. It is only in this way that all students can truly become 'cosmopolitan citizens' of the world, guided by common human values. Research from the CRT framework should contribute to efforts to facilitate the empowerment of marginalised and disenfranchised groups, and to inform strategies for eliminating racism and other forms of oppression.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter stems from a broader SANPAD-funded project on Immigrant student identities in South African schools. Parts of this chapter have already been published in *Education Inquiry*. Vol. 1 (4):347-365 and the *Journal of Educational Development*.

<sup>2</sup> *Identities* – In this chapter the '*multiple*' and '*fluid*' identities that are addressed are those of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and related identifications; not class and gender.

<sup>3</sup> *Gauteng* – One of the nine provinces of South Africa.

<sup>4</sup> *Makwerekwere* – people who were identified as not properly belonging to the South African nation. Makwerekwere is the derogatory term used by Black South Africans to describe non-South African blacks. It refers to Black immigrants from the rest of Africa.

—

### **About the Authors:**

*Saloshna Vandeyar* is an NRF C rated scientist and the recent award-winning scholar on intercultural education from the prestigious international BMW Awards in the category: theory. Her work has also received national recognition as evident from the other awards she has received, namely, Winner in the

National Science and Technology Forum Award 2007 in the *Category H: NRF Sponsored T W Kambule Award: Senior Black Researcher over the last 5 to 10 years*; finalist in the category Education of the Shoprite Checkers/ SABC 2 Woman of the Year 2006; Exceptional Young Researcher's award from the University of Pretoria; Gold medal for Research, Excellence and Achievement, University of Pretoria, and two Community awards for Excellence in Education and Research (2007/2009). She was also nominated for the social justice award (American Education Research Association) in 2009. She has authored and co-authored several books, journal articles and chapters in books. Her scholarly book, *Diversity High: Class, Color, Culture and Character in a South African school* was nominated for the outstanding book award (AERA) in 2009 and her paper that was published in an international journal was nominated for the Joyce Cain award (2009). Her specialist areas and the foci of her research encompass Race, Identities, Social/cultural Justice, Diversity Education, Teacher Professionalism as well as Assessment Practices. She serves on the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Early Child Care and Development*; *International Journal of Learning for Democracy*; *Perspectives in Education* (2004-2006). She is particularly interested in the implications of teacher and student identities in constructing classrooms inclusive of racial, linguistic and ethnic identities and in promoting Intercultural and Peace Education.

*Thirusellvan Vandeyar (Thiru)* is a lecturer in the department of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He commenced his career as an educator in 1981. His teaching experience includes being a head of department for mathematics, deputy principal, principal and a lecturer at a teacher training college. During his extensive teaching career, he obtained a BA degree and a Diploma in Datamatrixs. He currently holds a Masters and Phd degree in Computer Integrated Education. His main research interests include e-learning; ICT and teacher professionalism.

*This essay has been published as Chapter One in:*

Saloshna Vandeyar (Ed.) *Hyphenated Selves - Immigrant Identities within Education Contexts* - 2011

---

# Household Governance and Time Allocation - Four Studies on the Combination of Work and Care



One isn't enough, but both is too much; these words by a female blue-collar worker express the current dilemma of many employees in combining work and care. In all modern societies couples face an increasing need to arrange the combination of work and care in a new way.

The traditional household model with a male breadwinner who is responsible for paid work, career and income, and his wife, who takes care of all household obligations, is losing its relevance, and fits

the values and preferences of the majority of couples less and less well. Over the past decades women have increasingly entered the labour market and the number of two-earner couples has been growing. Gender differences in educational achievements and earning capacities have decreased. The values and preferences of couples put great weight on an egalitarian relationship and equal engagement of both partners in work and care.

Besides the traditional male breadwinner model, a wide variety of different earning models and household constellations has emerged. In some countries, like the Netherlands or Germany, the majority of couples are two-earner couples.

Current research provides evidence that a considerable number of these couples are not able to achieve the work-life balance desired. Several studies report an increase in hours of paid work and a high overall work load in the household (Breedveld et al., 2006; TNO Arbeid, 2003), persistent gender differences in the division of paid and unpaid work (Van der Broek & Breedveld, 2004; Plantenga, Schippers, & Siegers 1999), a widespread mismatch between actual and desired hours of paid work (SCP, 2000; Reynolds & Aletraris, 2006; Fagan, Tracey, & McAllister, 2005), and a high level of perceived time pressure (Garhammer, 2007; Breedveld, 2001). This also holds true for the Netherlands, a country that is known for its part-time culture and far-reaching legal working-time options. The majority of Dutch couples are not satisfied with the distribution of paid and unpaid work: Couples who practice a more equal division of paid work in the household face cumulative work loads, loss of free time and high time pressure, even more so when care and job demands are high. Couples in more traditional arrangements report a desire for a more equal distribution of paid work in the household.

### **1.1 The disregarded role of governance strategies in the household**

One would expect households to develop structural and organizational arrangements to cope with these challenges. However, the role and impact of such arrangements have not yet received much attention in existing accounts dealing with household time allocation. The standard microeconomic model of labour supply ignores the organization of the household. It treats leisure as a consumer good and assumes that spouses will somehow choose their working hours according to given preferences and wage rates (see, e.g., Cahuc & Zylberberg, 2004). Sociological household research stresses that these choices are not made in a social vacuum, and emphasizes the impact of gender norms and role expectations that commit women to a higher extent than men to care and household duties (Bittman et al., 2003; Van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994). Organizational research is mainly concerned with the influence that work arrangements have on time use and work-family life. It has discovered several features of organizations that induce employees to work long hours and sacrifice

family time (see Van Echtelt, 2007; Anger, 2006; Campbell, 2002, 2004). However, to the best of our knowledge, how households can organize themselves to deal with these pressures has not received proper attention. Apart from popular self-help books about time management and household efficiency, there is still a gap in the scientific work-family literature concerning the influence that varying regulation practices have on the household and their interplay with workplace arrangements. It is the main goal of this book to fill this gap.

A number of recent household studies provide a starting point for our quest. These studies provide evidence that couples apply very different solutions in order to cope with competing claims on work and family life. A Dutch study discovered that spouses had different “allocation rules” governing the division of work in the household and influencing their perception of a fair division of tasks in the household (Van der Vinne, 1998). Two German studies distinguished characteristic types of “family-life conduct” (Jürgens, 2001) or basic “family arrangements” (Klenner & Pfahl, 2005). Within relatively homogenous work and household settings, they found considerable differences with regard to gender roles, equality concepts, and the way spouses used time routines, planning, help from third parties (outsourcing) or how they referred to time negotiation and conflict-handling strategies (see Kluwer, 1998). Similarly, an Australian study stressed different “interaction orders” of households for combining work and household demands (Gill, 1998; see also Eberling et al., 2004). In contrast to traditional arrangements in so-called “rigid households,” flexible time arrangements in so-called “trade-off households” are characterized by flexible ends, role sharing, lowered standards and equal sharing of household responsibilities. The study concluded that “trade-off households” were better off when it came to coping with competing work and household demands. Finally, a US study emphasized the role of the partner in the household’s time use by using the term “boundary control” (Perlow, 1998). The study distinguished between “resister spouses,” on the one hand, and “acceptor spouses,” on the other, and showed that the male employees in the same company spent fewer hours on paid work when they were married to a “resister spouse.”

Summing up, there is quite a sizable amount of evidence that couples differ considerably in the way they regulate or “govern” the combination of work and care in the household, and that these differences are likely to influence household time allocation. We want to approach these differences and explore their role in household time allocation using the concept of “household governance.”

## **1.2 The concept of “household governance”**

The term “household governance” has not been chosen coincidentally. It refers directly to transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1975), which occupies a prominent place in organizational theory. Originally, this theory was introduced to explain the make-or-buy decisions of organizations. Modern households also face make-or-buy decisions, for instance, with regard to outsourcing of care and household tasks. Yet, the underlying idea of the concept of household governance is a more fundamental one: It acknowledges the fact that couples face risks in exchange relationships, and aim to reduce risks and costs by means of efficient forms of governance. The idea of a unit preference structure does not fit the reality of the private household (Beblo, 2001). Since the household consists of two individuals with particular interests and goals (e.g., with regard to career, income, care or family), cooperation and coordination problems arise. The couple needs to reduce the risk of interpersonal conflict and opportunistic behaviour in order to initiate successful household production. In the view of transaction cost theory, these risks can be minimized by means of a shared, institutionalized arrangement (or structure) on the part of both partners that “governs” the division of tasks in the household and defines the expected contributions of each partner. We have termed this institutional arrangement “household governance.” At this point in time, the importance of governance structures in work organizations has been recognized by organizational research (see Williamson, 1975); however, despite some rather sporadic attempts to apply the idea to the household sphere (see Pollack, 1985), the governance practices of couples have not yet become a focus of the existing accounts of household time allocation.

## **1.3 The main elements of household governance**

Building on findings from recent household studies (Klenner & Pfahl, 2005; De Ruijter, 2005; Eberling et al., 2004; Moen & Sweet, 2003; Jürgens, 2001; Gill, 1998; Perlow, 1998, Kluwer, 1998), we can identify three layers of household governance.

### **(1) The earner model**

By choosing the earner model, the couple determines the fundamental division of paid work in the household. Spouses can either establish a model of equal engagement in paid work (dual-earner household) or practice a partly (one-and-a-half earner model) or fully specialized model (breadwinner household).

## (2) Outsourcing of care and household tasks

By means of make-or-buy decisions spouses determine to what extent they will allocate certain household chores to third parties (e.g., cleaning or childcare) and to what extent they will keep these tasks within the household. By outsourcing care and household tasks, spouses can reduce the total workload of the household and gain more time for other activities like paid work, leisure or relaxation.

## (3) Household rules and quality standards

By the term “household rules” we refer to the informal agreements of the spouses that govern time use in the household on a day-to-day base. In order to guarantee that there is sufficient time for unpaid work and joint activities, spouses can make agreements concerning the time investment and coordination of household activities required on a day-to-day basis. In this respect household rules are rather input oriented. By using household rules spouses increase the degree of regulation and institutionalization of the household’s time use. Such rules may define the required time input of spouses (time claims), distribute the responsibilities or fixed tasks in the household (division of tasks), or set times for the performance of household activities (time routines). Quality standards for household tasks define the expected quality of household chores. In this respect they are output oriented. The higher these standards, the more time and effort are required to achieve them.

In addition to the three layers of household governance outlined, we have included a fourth related element of household governance in our analysis: conflict handling of couples in situations of interpersonal work-household conflict. We do not regard this element as a part of the household’s governance structure. Yet, it is of importance in situations where work-household conflict is not prevented by the household’s governance structure (layer 1-3). It is evident that even the best rules and agreements are not able to prevent all kinds of conflict of interest between spouses. In such cases, which strategies are used by the partners to solve the conflict are important. In our opinion, two characteristic conflict-handling strategies can be distinguished: “agentic” and “communal” strategies (Eagly, 1987). Communal strategies are defined as primarily describing a concern with the welfare of other people, whereas agentic strategies are described by behaviour showing a low concern with the welfare of other people (Eagly & Karau, 2002: 574). It is likely that (differences in) these strategies will influence the choices of couples with regard to the division of work in the

household. In this respect they form an important supplement to the institutionalized regulation by household governance structures.

#### **1.4 How we investigate the role of household governance**

My book *Household Governance and Time Allocation* is guided by four separate studies that address the different layers of household governance and investigate their role in household time allocation. Leading it are the following research questions:

(1) How do couples “govern” the combination of work and care in the household? This study will explore how couples cope with high care and job demands by using household rules and strategies to handle interpersonal work-household conflicts. As such, it is oriented towards the two lowest levels of the structure we presented above.

(2) How do differences in household governance influence the labour supply of employees? This study will focus on the third layer of household governance. It will investigate how the labour supply of male and female employees changes with the presence of household rules and higher quality standards at home.

(3) How do differences in household governance influence the work-life balance of couples? This study will focus on all three layers of household governance. It will explore in which way the choice of the earner model, the outsourcing of care and household tasks, and the use of household rules and quality standards all contribute to the realization of a desired time allocation within the household.

(4) How do differences in handling interpersonal work-household conflicts influence the labour supply of employees? This study will focus on the conflict-handling strategies of couples. The study will investigate from a gender perspective how different conflict-handling strategies of couples account for differences in the labour supply of male and female employees.

#### *Overview of the four studies:*

To investigate the role of household governance in the time allocation patterns of employees, we designed and carried out parts of the Time Competition Survey (Van der Lippe & Glebbeek, 2003; Glebbeek & Van der Lippe, 2004; Van der Lippe & Peters, 2007). The data were collected by means of a multi-stage sample of 1,114 Dutch employees within 89 function groups in 30 organizations in the Netherlands. Our analyses were based on a sub-sample of 542 cohabiting employees (304 male and 238 female employees) from 79 different occupational groups in 30 companies. (See Chapter 2 for a detailed overview of the research

design). The following section offers a short summary of the four studies collected in this book. It discusses how the studies try to contribute to filling in the gaps in the existing literature and reports on the main findings of each chapter.

## **1.5 Overview on the four studies on household governance and main findings**

### ***1.5.1 How couples “govern” the combination of work and care in the household***

Due to the growing number of two-earner households and the high work demands of organizations, households face an increasing challenge in coping with competing job and household time claims. Our study will raise the question of how couples govern the combination of work and care through informal agreements and conflict-handling strategies. We hypothesize that couples will increase the degree of regulation of task distribution in the household when high care demands (due to young children or others in the household needing care) or high employer demands make cooperation and coordination problems more costly for the couple. This hypothesis has only partly been confirmed. Results based on the Time Competition Survey have confirmed, on the one hand, the importance of household governance in the combination of work and care. A broad variety of informal agreements and conflict-handling strategies are applied, which govern the division of tasks in the household as well as the time investment, timing and quality of domestic activities. On the other hand, we found evidence that this variation exists to a large extent independently from job and household characteristics, underlining the individual character of differences in household governance: Couples apply individual solutions of household governance depending on their preferences, and the given work and family context. High employer demands were to a large extent accepted by the couples in our sample. In situations of work-household conflict only a few spouses resisted the desire of their employed partners to work long hours. The high importance of the work sphere for variations in household governance was also indicated by the following finding: High unpredictability of work schedules and low working time autonomy of employees limit the room for household governance. This makes it more difficult for couples to regulate the combination of work and care by means of informal rules and agreements.

### ***1.5.2 How differences in household governance influence the labour supply of employees***

Given the high average level of time demands made by work organizations, and the growing number of hours of paid work and overtime, the question arises as to whether variations in household governance make a difference in terms of whether employees conform to or resist high work demands. Our study addresses the following research questions: How do household rules and quality standards for household tasks influence the labour supply of male and female employees? Are they able to weaken the impact of high employer demands? We hypothesize (1) that a higher degree of regulation within the household by means of household rules and informal agreements concerning the division of tasks will diminish the influence of work incentives and time demands made by the work organization. For (2) the impact of quality standards, we expect a gender specific pattern: Since women still face the majority of care and household responsibilities, high quality standards for household tasks will increase their time investment in unpaid work and reduce their time investment in paid work. In contrast, the amount of working hours of male employees will not (or only to a minor extent) change with high quality standards in the household.

Results based on the Time Competition Survey do not confirm the first hypothesis. Whether or not couples regulate the division of tasks in the household through rules and informal agreements does not cause a significant difference in terms of their labour supply. Our explanation for this finding lies in the twofold nature of household rules, which leads to opposite effects: household rules can either “facilitate” or “restrict” long working hours for employees. By defining fixed moments and time routines for household activities, these rules make it easier for employees to adjust and organize their long working hours in line with the household’s time requests. By setting boundaries for paid work and defining the time investment required for household chores, they can make it more difficult for employees to work long hours. Our second hypothesis concerning the relationship between quality standards in the household and the labour supply of female employees is confirmed by our data: Women spend fewer hours on paid work when quality standards for household tasks are higher. The study concludes that differences in household governance play a mediating role in the labour supply of employees. Yet, the time demands of work organizations, the earning capacities of the spouses and the presence of young children account for most of the variation in the labour supply of male and female employees.

### ***1.5.3 How differences in household governance influence the work-life balance of couples***

Various studies have reported a widespread desire among employees to spend fewer hours on paid work. Some of these studies point out that high employer demands are an important determinant of long working hours. Our study addresses the question of how the achievement of a desired time allocation is additionally influenced (that is supported or restricted) by different types of household governance. Following the existing literature in the field, we have distinguished between flexible and regulative regimes of household governance. In our view, a flexible regime of household governance leaves more room for high work demands. It is characterized by flexible role patterns (first layer of household governance), outsourcing of care and household tasks (second layer of household governance), and the absence of fixed household rules or high quality standards (third layer of household governance). We hypothesize that none of the two regimes is a priori superior: Couples will choose flexible or regulative regimes of household governance according to their work and family preferences, and the given job and household context. When long working hours are a key to desired goals (such as a higher income, more status or better career chances), couples will be better off choosing more flexible regimes of household governance. When long working hours are seen as a threat to desired goals (such as family life, care or activities outside work), couples will be better off choosing more regulative regimes of household governance.

Results based on the Time Competition Survey confirm this hypothesis for the most part. There is no evidence for a superior type of household governance regime that would enable couples to come closer to the desired amount of working hours. In contrast, the mismatch between actual and desired working hours is to a large extent caused by high employer demands and high earning capacities in the household. Yet, differences in household governance influence the mismatch between actual and desired working hours in two ways: (1) Dual earners (both spouses work full time) report the biggest gap between actual and desired working hours, indicating a failure to adopt the appropriate earner model. This may point towards a coordination problem. The choice for a breadwinner or one-half earner model may be very attractive for the household as a whole, but the difficult question of which of the two partners is to cut back their hours then poses itself. The difficulty in calculating the future costs, benefits and risks is accentuated by the potential threat of opportunism in the relationship (a transaction cost problem). (2) Spouses with young children (12 years or younger) are not able to prevent loss of free time or severe time pressure, even when they make use of childcare facilities or informal help. This finding points to a lack of

sufficient supply of childcare facilities (limited access to childcare facilities), financial restrictions (limited resources to pay for childcare or to reduce working hours), or employer restrictions (institutional barriers to the reduction of working hours).

#### ***1.5.4 How conflict-handling patterns of couples influence the labour supply of employees***

Given the fact that women still spend on average fewer hours on paid work than men do (despite similar educational achievements), the question arises as to how the amount of working hours is influenced by differences in the conflict-handling strategies of couples. The study will address the following research question: How do differences in the handling of interpersonal work-household conflict influence the labour supply of male and female employees? In line with asymmetric conflict theory (Kluwer, 1998), we assume that due to the asymmetric structure of the traditional division of work in the household, female employees who want to work more hours will need to challenge the status quo. Building on role-congruity theory (Eagly, 1987), we can distinguish between two types of conflict management behaviour in the household: “Agentic” strategies are characterized by low concern for the other conflict party and are usually ascribed to a male gender role; and “communal” strategies are characterized by a high concern for the other conflict party and are usually ascribed to a female gender role. Following this theory, we can assume that traditional role expectations will still guide the conflict-handling behaviour of male and female employees and affect its outcomes. We hypothesize then (1) that working women relying on “communal” strategies to resolve time-allocation conflicts with their male partners will be more successful in achieving their objective of working more hours, and (2) that labour supply of working men increases with their use of “agentic” strategies.

Results on the basis of the Time Competition Survey confirm both hypotheses. Strategies that are congruent with the gender role of the employed person using them are clearly more likely to be successful than strategies that are incongruent with gender expectations. These findings confirm at the same time the expectation of asymmetric conflict theory (Kluwer, 1998): Female employees are more likely to succeed in changing the traditional division of paid work when they use “communal” conflict strategies that trigger the cooperativeness of their male spouse. Male employees, in contrast, can successfully reinforce the status quo by using “agentic” conflict strategies.

## **1.6 Discussion: Is the concept of “household governance” a useful contribution?**

“One isn’t enough, but both is too much”. This statement at the beginning of our study expresses the feeling of many employees with regard to the combination of work and care. Now, at the end of our study, comes the time to recapitulate what the “household governances” approach has contributed to our understanding of current problems in combining work and care. We can draw the following conclusions.

(1) Couples need household governance structures. We found evidence that conflicts concerning the division of work and allocation of time are a reality in many households. Modern couples have to cope with a fundamental transaction problem with regard to the combination of work and care. When the needs of the household require a reduction in the total time engaged in paid work, the question arises as to which of the spouses is willing to spend fewer hours on the job, and to give up the individual benefits and protection that are related to paid work and career. A reduction would be beneficial to the household as a whole. But from an individual point of view such an investment is risky, since it is related to unforeseeable negative consequences in the long run. This holds particularly true when we take into account that the future of the relationship cannot be taken for granted. So, the coordination problems of running a common household on a day-to-day basis are complicated by the future interests and uncertainties of each of the partners. In addition to the negotiation strategies we discovered, couples adopt structural devices to contain this conflict. These diminish the need for struggling and bargaining on a day-to-day basis.

(2) Household governance structures are not uniform. Our research showed interesting differences in the solutions which households apply. In all three layers of household governance we found considerable empirical variations, ranging from the earner model, in terms of the outsourcing of care and household tasks, to the use of household rules. Some couples use more regulative regimes of household governance that set clear boundaries for the household’s labour supply. Other couples apply more flexible regimes of household governance that blur the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, and leave more room for high labour supply. There clearly is no standard solution to the aforementioned coordination and transaction problems.

(3) Household governance structures are only to a small extent determined by job and household characteristics. Whether more regulative or more flexible regimes

of household governance are applied by the couple is to a large extent independent from their given job or household situation. In contrast, within similar job and household situations couples vary considerably in their use of household governance structures. How they react to job and household constraints depends on their individual priorities and interests with regard to career and family. In this regard, our study has suggested that couples have quite a bit of freedom in their choice of a household governance structure. Or, alternatively, we were not able to find the right determinants, which may differ from the conventional work and family characteristics that we included into our analyses.

(4) There is no “one best way” of household governance. Neither a regulative regime of household governance nor a flexible regime of household governance is superior. For the most part, couples are quite successful in finding household governance structures which fit their specific preferences and circumstances. Yet, with regard to the earner model we find that a considerable number of households do not succeed in choosing an optimal solution. A majority of couples in our sample spent more hours on paid work than they would actually have liked to. Their failure to achieve a desired time allocation in the household is indicative of the underlying transaction problem we referred to above. In addition, with regard to the use of childcare facilities (or the use of informal help), we found that many families were not able to prevent negative effects on their work-life balance.

These four conclusions represent the main findings of our research. In considering them, what should be our final judgment about the usefulness and significance of the concept of the household governance structure?

First, we have to acknowledge a number of open questions in our study. We found strong empirical variations in household governance structures, but we were not able to explain these differences in a satisfying way. Simple job and household circumstances, such as a demanding job or the presence of young children in the household, did not have a big impact. What does this imply for our theoretical approach? In other fields of research, such as organizational science, transaction cost theory does much better in predicting different outcomes (for instance, about the make-or-buy decisions of organizations). It might be possible that the choice of governance structures in the household is of a more complex nature and follows a specific logic. Maybe our study missed some important determinants of this logic. The kind of relationship the spouses have, biographical experiences, trust relations or the given opportunity structure of the household might be more

important in the choice of the governance regime than simple job or household circumstances. It is also likely that the household governance regime is highly dependant on individual preferences and normative factors like values and norms of the household environment (see Van der Lippe, 1993). Couples in similar job and household circumstances may choose different governance structures according to their normative baggage or personal tastes about how to manage a household and their individual priorities with regard to career and family. Such emphasis on personal preferences is also a tenet of boundary theory (Clark, 2000; Kreiner, 2006). Correct as this may be, it does not add to the explanatory power of the concept.

In addition, there remain other open questions. Our research design was not able to investigate how household governance structures emerged, and changed or persisted over time. We received a detailed picture of the given work and household organization, but only for one moment in time. Based on this picture we were able to assess whether differences in household governance were related to optimal or suboptimal outcomes with regard to the desired combination of work and care. However, processes of change – that is, reactions to suboptimal outcomes or adjustment to new circumstances – remained beyond our focus. The capability or incapability of couples to adapt the household's governance regime might serve as an important additional explanation for optimal and suboptimal outcomes, respectively. In this view, the failure to achieve desired outcomes would be the result of another source of inflexibility, namely, ingrained habits or resistance to change from one or both of the spouses. We found evidence for this “status-quo effect” in the conflict-handling patterns of spouses, which fosters a traditional division of paid work in the household. Proper research on this issue would require a longitudinal design covering a longer period of time.

Moreover, it was a hidden assumption of our concept that household governance structures work similarly for both spouses. Yet, with regard to household rules we can easily imagine that the household governance regime defines different contributions for each spouse or that it varies in the “strictness” of the rules. We could not control for such differences in our study. Still, we found that women more often reported having rules in the household than did men. Is this just due to a different perception or definition of rules? Or does it mean that women are in fact exposed to a greater extent to household rules? If the latter holds true, we might well have identified an additional factor that accounts for the gender gap in labour supply. Further research should focus more attention on these differences. This would give us new and deeper insights into the functioning and

consequences of household governance regimes. Our study has only provided the first steps on this path.

Nevertheless, on balance, we believe the concept is useful in steering our attention and guiding future research. It provides a systematic way of studying how couples cope with cooperation and coordination problems by using various layers of household governance. It also helps us to establish in what respect couples are successful or unsuccessful in their coping efforts. Previous research has repeatedly shown that problems in the combination of work and care emerge due to institutional barriers, high employer demands or financial restrictions. Our study has shown that these problems probably also emerge due to transaction problems. We saw how couples were creative in developing and inventing tailor-made solutions for household governance, and that these solutions helped them to a great extent in overcoming their cooperation and coordination challenges, and in achieving desired outcomes. Yet, we also had to note that they did not always succeed. A considerable number of them were not able to achieve a desired combination of work and care. Our new concept helps us to explain why, and it makes it possible to identify the layers of household governance where suboptimal outcomes occur. We found that many couples were “caught” in a dilemma: They either needed to expose the household to extreme work loads or they had to expose themselves (or, respectively, just one of them) to the unforeseeable risks and costs that are related to a reduced career engagement. We saw that a large number of them chose the first option.

—

#### *About the author*

Philip Wotschack studied Sociology at the Free University Berlin. The present study was conducted at the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS) in Groningen.

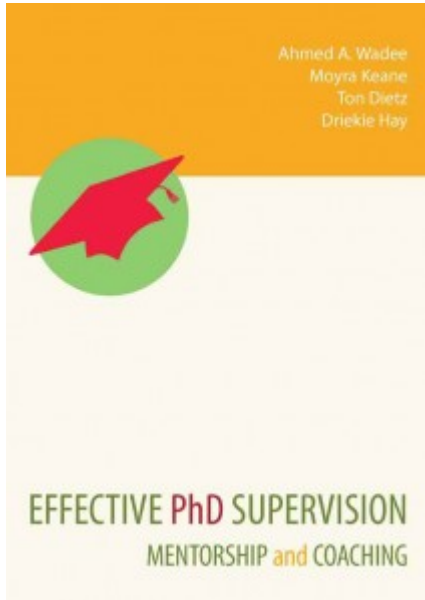
—

Philip Wotschack - [Household Governance and Time Allocation](#) - Four studies on the combination of work and care

Dutch University Press - ICS dissertation series - ISBN 978 90 3610 139 4 - 2009

---

# Effective PhD Supervision - Mentorship and Coaching



The complete book online

[Chapter One: Chapter One: Introduction](#)

[Chapter Two: Guidelines for Supervisors](#)

[Chapter Three: Guidelines for Mentors](#)

[Chapter Four: Coaching: Charting your own Path](#)

[Chapter Five: The Relationship between PhD Candidate and Supervisor](#)

[Chapter Six: A Holistic Approach to PhD Support](#)

[Chapter Seven: Bibliography and Recommended Reading](#)

[Appendices and Acknowledgments](#)

---

## Effective PhD Supervision - Chapter One: Introduction



## **Foreword by Ms. M. Metcalfe**

I am very pleased to present this second edition of the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) Supervision Workbook.

The Workbook is yet another contribution by SANPAD towards improving the quality of supervision of doctoral students in South Africa. The Department of Higher Education and Training is particularly encouraged by these efforts, as they continue to enhance the overall quality of our PhD graduates and future academics. PhD qualifications are generally considered to be the first real entry points into the rigorous world of research. As a result, the focus on improving the academic experience of students at this level through improved supervision and mentoring will go a long way towards increasing the overall numbers of PhD graduates at our institutions.

It has become clear that although the number of students enrolling for PhD studies in South Africa has increased over the years, a large proportion of these students do not complete their studies. The reasons for this are many, among them the relationships between supervisors and their students and the overall quality of supervision. The difficulties often stem from the fact that not all supervisors have been properly trained for supervision duties. The mistake that is often made in higher education institutions across the globe is to assume that every academic, by virtue of his or her experience in teaching or research, knows what is required to supervise postgraduate students. Studies show that this is not usually the case and, in fact, academics need proper training and support if they are to effectively carry out their supervision responsibilities. This Workbook will provide a useful guide for both supervisors and PhD candidates on how to

structure their working relationships into better interaction and supervision experiences.

This book sets out to serve as a challenge for improving PhD supervision, mentoring and coaching both in South Africa and in the Netherlands. It can be utilised as a training manual for supervisors in both countries. The book is also easy to use, as it provides practical examples and scenarios. Moreover, it provides strategies on how to deal with some of the challenges commonly experienced by both supervisors and candidates during PhD supervision, mentoring and coaching. For these reasons, I offer my support for this publication.

Finally, I would like to thank the individual authors of each section of this book for their hard work in putting together such an important text. My sincere thanks also go to the people and institutions that have provided support for the production of this book. I really hope that this resource will stimulate and inform. In this way it will contribute positively to the improvement of our postgraduate students and research system.

MS M. METCALFE

DG: HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## **Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to this Workbook**

SANPAD (South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development) has had a proud history of over ten years in providing a platform for promoting a research culture in South Africa in partnership with the Netherlands. SANPAD's flagship programme has been its research capacity building programme for pre-doctoral candidates. Two hundred and thirty candidates were selected for the RCI programme during the period of 2002-2008; all candidates registered for their PhD degrees. Of these, 125 have graduated from their respective universities, and the remaining 105 candidates who registered between 2005 and 2008 are expected to complete their PhDs and graduate by the end of 2010.

Following the first edition, the approaches to supervision and mentoring have evolved over time (with some new facilitators), but the essence of running the

workshops from which this publication emanates has essentially remained the same. However, in this second edition, as implied by the revised title, we have included coaching as an important means of promoting graduate student success. This expands the coverage and includes numerous improvements to the original material. The first edition of this workbook filled an obvious gap at the time and met with gratifying reception from the academic community both in the Netherlands and Southern Africa, but there were areas that required further expansion and new information needed to be included. The PhD candidates, their supervisors and the facilitators in the Research Capacity programme (RCI) were a valuable source of information that motivated the authors to revise the first edition. Hence, the second addition was born. The changes in the second edition respond to the experiences of both the students and the facilitators in the SANPAD pre-doctoral programme and the input that we received from the broader academic community in South Africa over the last five years. More importantly, the book engages readers in dialogue and active reflection on the strategies of effective supervision of PhDs. Accessibly written, it encourages supervisors to reflect on and enhance their research supervision practice with a diversity of students on a variety of research projects. There is a special focus on research skills development and on supporting students through and beyond the examination process.

High quality postgraduate education is of central importance to the creation of the ever more highly skilled workforce that is necessary if our country and continent is to flourish in an increasingly complex and competitive world. It also brings great benefit to individuals and, through them, to society as a whole. Over the past decade we have witnessed some really quite dramatic and challenging changes in the shape, nature and volume of education at this level; changes that not only support our immediate needs for the workforce and knowledge-based economy but also reflect today's remarkable and rapidly advancing technology. Of course, such changes don't come for free and I am only too well aware of the various pressures to which postgraduate education is subject, pressures that in turn impact upon staff and students alike. It is against this backdrop that we present this comprehensive workbook on supervision and mentorship.

The first edition was immensely successful, as is so evident from the positive feedback that we received. The book has been most notably recommended as reading for many postgraduate programmes on the African Continent and so has

had a much wider remit. I am convinced that this new edition will be even more successful than the first, successful with both postgraduate students and their supervisors.

*'If only this book had been available when I was a PhD student'*

## **1.2 South African Perspectives on the PhD**

Since 1994, South African higher education has experienced a major transformation – particularly in redressing the educational backlogs and needs of previously disadvantaged students. A lot has been achieved in widening access for black students at the undergraduate level, specifically. However, with regard to postgraduate students and research output, the system is not yet making the progress desired, since insufficient numbers of black and women postgraduate students obtain doctoral degrees. Subsequently, institutions find it hard to reach staff equity targets and not enough black supervisors exist to serve as role models for black students. The Education White Paper 3 sounds the alert about the 'insufficient research capacity in higher education that is amongst others poorly coordinated and inadequately linked to postgraduate studies.'[\[1\]](#) This paper has also prioritised the access of black and women students to master's, doctoral and postdoctoral programmes. These race and gender imbalances are found in the demographic composition of researchers in higher education, research councils and private-sector research establishments.

The participation and completion rates of black postgraduate students are crucial in order to deal with employment equity targets and the creation of a new generation of scholars/academics in South Africa. Although progress has been made in terms of the staff compilation of higher education institutions and black academics now constitute approximately 30% of the higher education workforce, they still produce less than 10% of all peer-reviewed articles in the latter part of the previous decade. In terms of equity, black students constitute about 30% of all master's and doctoral enrolments in higher education. However, they only constitute about 20% of the postgraduate enrolments at the historically white universities. It thus seems that in the case of research, which includes master's and doctoral degrees, it has been more difficult to break down the apartheid legacy than it has in terms of student access, research funding and staffing.[\[2\]](#)

The training of supervisors and promoters is becoming increasingly important as

is the need to change dated ways of providing supervision. We need to consider how cultures meet, what kind of interactions should take place, and how applicable and acceptable the methods are for postgraduate students. The realities of a complex supervisory relationship, where colonial/West and African, the scholastically advantaged and disadvantaged, and a number of different cultures and languages interact, often with conflicting and deviating political and worldviews coming together, have not yet been researched sufficiently within the new higher education dispensation.

### **1.2.1 Complexities in postgraduate supervision**

The predominant assumptions and values that have characterised postgraduate supervisory practices in the South African higher education system are mainly derived from aspects of European culture. However, higher education is a narrow culture that rewards specific ways of knowing and instinctively discounts other ways of knowing (nonverbal, empathetic, visual, symbolic or nuanced communication are often not valued, for example). Accepted postgraduate supervisory practices usually conform to the traditional ways of knowledge creation, research paradigms and worldviews, and utilise one specific methodology to oversee postgraduate research. What has thus emerged in the South African higher education system is a lack of conscious cultural identity among postgraduate students in higher education, since in most cases a single common norm is advocated and the culture-conscious postgraduate student is viewed as frivolous.

### **1.2.2 Supervisory challenges in the Southern African context**

An array of challenges still face postgraduate supervision in the South African context, amongst them, inadequate academic literacy and writing skills, power relations, and inadequate preparation in research methodology.

#### **1.2.2.1 Academic literacy skills**

A great area of concern is the inadequate academic literacy levels of postgraduate students whose mother tongue is not English, as it is expected from them to write and articulate their ideas at the level at which they are working and thinking. Working in another language clearly hinders this. Often students need to

translate what they hear and read. This slows down postgraduate students' thinking and expression, impeding thought processes.

### **1.2.3 Power relations in postgraduate supervision**

Power relations between supervisors and students usually emanate from the authority position of the supervisor, exacerbated in the case of non-traditional postgraduate students who work in English as a second (third, fourth or fifth) language. In a multi-cultural supervisory relationship, it is imperative to reflect on whether pedagogical approaches to supervision and research, and the suggested values and outcomes underpinning these, are themselves culture- and value-free or a product of cultural ideologies. In the South African context non-traditional postgraduate students and those representing first generation postgraduate students are expected to fit into the culture and practices of historically advantaged (predominantly white) higher education institutions and are expected to assimilate into these institutions' beliefs and practices. This needs to be done with great sensitivity and to be built on a relationship of trust and respect. One way of achieving this, is to draw on Vygotsky's work on mediated learning experiences.[\[3\]](#)

Vygotsky, a founding theorist on socio-cultural learning issues, reminds us that all uniquely human or higher mental functions are transformed social relationships which emerge and are shaped in the course of joint activities with others. The crux of the matter is that what people come to know, that is, how they learn to learn, to think and to act in particular contexts, is constituted in a relationship between their existing cognitive schemes, knowledge, skills and dispositions, the functional demands of the activities they participate in, and the forms of mediation they are afforded in such activities.[\[4\]](#) The implication is that, regardless of how much potential postgraduate students have, if they do not have opportunities to participate in activities that develop specialised forms of knowledge and functioning and/or are not afforded sufficient opportunities of mediation by others experienced in those activities, they are unlikely to develop such forms of functioning. Consequently, the notion of mediated postgraduate learning experiences and how they should be brought into supervisory practices is becoming increasingly important for transforming the typical South African postgraduate context. This should be viewed against the fact that the gap in many of our postgraduate students' educational backgrounds and in their limited research training at undergraduate and honours degree levels needs to be closed

by helping students along their way, in other words, closing the gap between what is known and what is to be known.

The following guidelines, drawing on the actual experiences and observations of exemplary supervisory practices within South African universities, should be considered when attempting to improve the practice of supervision: - Applying appropriate selection measurements which could include instruments that will assess the student's level of readiness to engage in rigorous postgraduate work.

- Considering the training of supervisors as a serious matter, since underprepared supervisors can hamper the quality of postgraduate work, retention and success rates. Training should include aspects such as technical, personal, legal, ethical, administrative and professional aspects of supervision.

- In addition, an induction programme for new supervisors in the field should be designed so that they gradually learn to supervise, ideally under a mentor, starting initially as a co-supervisor.

- Creating reporting opportunities for new supervisors in the field, so that they can receive constructive feedback on emerging problems and take corrective action before serious problems surface.

- Offering structured and regular opportunities for students to provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of supervisors and on their experiences of the overall supervisory process. Such a practice will ensure that students at risk can be identified early so that necessary and timely interventions can be brought to bear.

- Ensuring that universities, faculties and departments have an updateable Handbook for Supervision which outlines the code of conduct for all involved. This will ensure that every supervisor and student is aware of and familiar with the often complex administrative regulations, requirements and deadlines that accompany this process.

- Holding supervisors accountable for the progress of supervision by requiring regular reports on each student. A 'logbook' is often very helpful, as it keeps a record of all the meetings and interactions between student and supervisor as well as what should be done in terms of follow-up action and preparations for the next meeting.

- Looking carefully at the workload of supervisors and preventing a novice supervisor from supervising more than one or two students.
- Getting to know the postgraduate student early on. Although this is hard for cases of supervision at a distance, for those students who are nearby and on-campus, it is important to get to know the students.
- Building the confidence of the postgraduate student: students should be encouraged to put ideas on paper. This will help the supervisor to judge whether the student understands the nature of the doctorate and will provide opportunities for positive feedback.
- Dealing effectively with pressures in the supervisory relationship: there are the pressures of the developing relationship and pressures to get the student completed in the designated timeframe. Students need to understand that they must work hard early on and have regular meetings. At the end of a meeting, the next meeting needs to be scheduled.
- Keeping to timeframes. Supervisors have a responsibility to get students to stick to timelines. Establishing this habit early on in candidacy is crucial.
- Monitoring student focus. The supervisor needs to keep one step ahead of the student to keep the student from being sidetracked. If the student is going off in different directions, pull them back into focus.
- Encouraging publications from the beginning. Supervisors should encourage students to publish, although this will depend on the student and the topic. If a student is able to be published in a good journal, this will help the examination. But getting published needs to be balanced with getting the thesis written. Writing the thesis should be the first priority.

—

Next Chapter: Chapter Two - <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1863>

---

[1] The Education White Paper 3 (DoE 1997)

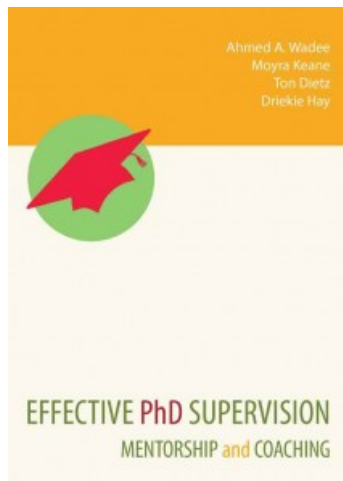
[2] Bawa & Mouton (2002): 320, 328

[3] Vygotsky (1978)

[4] Bradbury (1993)

---

# Effective PhD Supervision - Chapter Two - Guidelines for Supervisors



## 2.1 Introduction

It is well recognised that despite the fact that support for postgraduate students at various levels is available in South Africa, a large and unacceptable proportion of such postgraduate students do not complete their studies. Some of the reasons for this have been ascribed to:

- A lack of understanding by the students and a failure to communicate by the institution as to the standard of work required for a particular degree
- Allocation by the institutions of supervisors who are generally not interested in the topic but are forced to supervise as part of their academic commitments
- Difficulties in conceptualising the programme the student is in and a lack of clear guides - generally replaced by vague requirements

- Differences between supervisors and their approaches to supervision
- Lack of supervisory policy or standards at the departmental, faculty or institutional level
- A general lack of training for supervisors - institutions do not have a formal or informal supervisor training programme
- Time pressures and interruptions placed on supervisors by their institutions, which prevent optimal interaction with postgraduate students
- Poor record-keeping concerning supervision - supervisors do not formalise their interactions with students
- Unclear or the absence of any agreements between supervisors and students and the institution.

Other contributing factors have been identified as poor planning and management (both student and supervisor), vague and unfocused problem formulations, the collection of irrelevant data and inappropriate data analysis. Methodological difficulties may emanate from inadequate knowledge of research methodologies, lack of formal training in research and naive research skills. The inability to formulate scientific arguments, to provide a logical structure, to synthesize and to formulate research problems, and to identify the essence in information and data also influence completion rates. In all of these cases it is tempting to point fingers at students, but the responsibility and the provision of training at all levels must be taken up by the institution.

It is thus important for the supervisor to be acutely aware of factors that may impact on postgraduate studies and supervision. Apart from acquainting oneself with the issues in supervision, it is imperative that supervisors are familiar with the requirements for a PhD degree. Entry requirements, mode of study, academic and discipline-specific demands, holding full or part time jobs, and having family responsibilities are all demanding on the doctoral student. In addition, personal circumstances, integration into a department, and entering a new environment and institutional culture could lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The primary expectation of supervisors by their institutions is familiarisation with all administrative and procedural requirements from registration to final

acceptance of the thesis. Each university has its own rules and codes of practice, and supervisors are expected to be familiar with the procedures of their institutions. What follows here are generic suggestions on the operational issues relating to these procedures.

## **2.2 Procedures and Practices for the Admission and Approval of PhD Degrees**

An array of procedures and practices exist and are in place in universities in South African and abroad for the admission and approval of PhD degrees. The process requires approval by a formalised ethics, postgraduate and/or university graduate studies committee with specific individuals indentified to oversee the quality and scholarship of the proposed research project. The kind of structures and committees overseeing this process may differ from university to university, but in essence their task is to ensure the university's academic integrity and the integrity of the research publications emanating from the research and the development of the individual postgraduate student. Regardless of the institution, it is the responsibility of the department/postgraduate coordinator to ensure that the highest practice is maintained.

### **2.2.1 Admission requirements for a PhD degree**

In general the PhD by research is perceived as the most scholarly/authentic PhD leading to an academic career. However, in keeping with international trends, universities in South Africa are moving towards awarding of the degree based on publications in peer-reviewed journals within a specified time period.

Typically the following admission requirements are applicable to prospective candidates wishing to register for a PhD degree:

1. i. a recognised master's degree, recognised four-year bachelor's degree, plus at least one year's registration for an approved master's degree (in some instances)
2. ii. a recognised three-year bachelor's degree plus at least two years' registration for an approved master's degree with submissions of scholarly work in the research area in peer-reviewed journals
3. iii. in special circumstances, at the discretion of the Senate, an approved bachelor's degree or qualification recognised by the Senate as equivalent, as per many universities that recognise prior learning in the area of the

research work.

PhD candidates are generally expected to renew their registration annually. It is generally accepted that the duration for the completion of a PhD is five years.

### **2.2.2 The nature of obtaining a PhD**

There are at least two perceptions of how a PhD may be obtained. The first is that the PhD is fundamentally a training in research (an apprenticeship) resulting in small steps forward in the understanding of the subject. The second is that the PhD is a period of scholastic and research endeavour culminating in a major contribution to the understanding of the discipline. The former perception is common in the natural sciences and the latter in the humanities. Clearly individual supervisors' perceptions will lie at different positions between these perceptions.

It has been normal in many countries for different institutions and different departments to offer a range of structures or routes through to a doctoral degree. Certain levels of attendance may be expected for taught courses, but performance in these courses is not generally assessed. Consideration is now being given to practices which will assess components including taught courses, publication records and work experience.

### **2.3 Some Considerations for Supervisors**

A supervisor may take the following into consideration when assessing the quality of the thesis from the conceptual stage and reflect on the extent to which it adheres to the following criteria:

- Application of conventional research instruments in a new field of investigation
- Combining disparate concepts in new ways to investigate a conventional issue
- Creating different conceptual awareness of existing issues
- Designing and applying existing and new field instruments in a contemporary setting
- Extending the work of others by a variety of methodologies including the use of

the original methodology and innovative thinking; identification of new and emerging issues worthy of investigation; and identification of gaps in the existing knowledge and viewing these as challenges

- Demonstration of evidence that the scope and possibilities of the topic were grasped academically
- The thesis provides a systematic account of the research problem, and in formulating specific research questions, demonstrates this
- A conceptual framework has been devised such that the ultimate conclusions can be drawn.

The list is not exhaustive nor does it intend to be prescriptive but may be used as a guide.

Amongst other characteristics used to define a 'good' thesis, evidence of the following is generally sought:

- Critical analysis and argument
- Confidence and a rigorous, self-critical approach
- A contribution to knowledge
- Originality, creativity and a degree of risk taking
- Comprehensiveness and scholarly approach
- Appropriate use of methodology with ample evidence of research validity and reliability; presentation and structure of data and thesis; and valid, logical reasoning for the conclusions drawn.

### **2.3.1 Objectivity and reliability**

Objective and reliable (repeatable) findings are clearly more impressive than those which are vague or inconclusive. This poses difficulties in disciplines where the research utilises small sample sizes and is difficult to measure quantitatively. This non-quantitative work is generally recorded and presented in a valid acceptable format. This problem does not exist where the data is quantitative, and where the variables are relatively few and may be identified and measured - as is

invariably the case in research in the natural sciences or in quantitative research methodologies.

### **2.3.2 The significance of a PhD**

All universities require doctoral work to be 'significant'. However, what passes as 'significant' depends on the norms of the discipline. It can be argued that knowledge is 'significant' for its own sake, irrespective of how useless it may appear to those in other disciplines. In the social sciences and some natural sciences, 'significance' is widely regarded as being of help to society in some way and a contribution to knowledge.

### **2.3.3 Assessing a PhD thesis**

Universities appoint a committee of assessors, though its composition differs among institutions. This committee normally nominates three examiners with appropriate skills or expertise in the area in which the research is undertaken. In all instances external examiners are an essential component of the process. The examiners' reports are considered by the postgraduate committee and the institution for approval. Examiners are expected to recommend the awarding of the degree in accordance with regulations set by each university. (Please refer to the individual institution's guidelines for such information.)

## **2.4 Supervisory Practices**

### **2.4.1 Traditional models of supervision**

The focus of the traditional model of supervision is usually on the technical aspects of the research, the requirements of the discipline, content knowledge and on the production of a thesis, and can be done by means of:

- Supervision by a single supervisor where one candidate works with a single supervisor on one thesis/dissertation. This model seems to work well in most disciplines. The postgraduate student and supervisor get to know and trust each other; the student feels more comfortable and knows what is expected.
- Supervision by multiple supervisors - where one candidate has two or more supervisors, one supervisor assumes the principle responsibility for supervising the candidate, but is assisted by colleagues with knowledge in other research fields. The group can have several postgraduate students under their supervision.

### **2.4.2 Workshop model for initiating student awareness**

At the beginning of postgraduate study, students usually feel lost and confused. A workshop with other postgraduate students, presented by the academics involved, may provide guidance and training on issues such as the research proposal, academic writing skills, literature searches and reviews, research methodologies, and presentation styles and skills. In this way the postgraduate initiate is brought into the academic environment and may become familiar with various individuals offering specific support. Students would then be expected to have some of the basic skills and could progress to interacting with their supervisors more efficiently.

### **2.4.3 Directed team**

In this model, one individual supervises a small group of students working on related topics or projects, using the same or similar methodology, in the supervisor's area of expertise. These individuals support each other in collecting material, formulating ideas and maintaining a specific schedule. The supervisor is an expert in the specific field and will be able to focus on the details of each student's research and work. A methodology group refers to students all using the same methodology, although they may be from different disciplines. The exchange of knowledge and experience in the methodology provides postgraduate students with an in-depth knowledge of the area. This model works well in the early stages of the postgraduate study process when students are still preparing their research proposals. Subsequently, aspects of each piece of work are carved out from the broad data collected and thereafter pursued on an individual basis with the supervisor.

### **2.4.4 Conference group**

Conferences where postgraduate students may present their research findings and share their problems with each other are highly recommended. During such conferences supervisors and students are able to exchange ideas, learn from each other and network. This is particularly useful in national research projects which could develop into significant collaborative research undertakings.

## **2.5 The Supervisory Process and Tasks**

In summary, supervision normally follows a process that includes statement(s) of

purpose, research questions, study rationale, literature review, conceptual/theoretical framework, methodology/design, data analysis, validation, significance of the study, limitations of the study, work plan and references. These points are designed to engage the PhD candidate in his/her assessment by asking:

(a) Does the question address a crucial deficiency (silence, contradictions, gap) within the knowledge base on the topic and hold together around that tightly defined topic, and does the question convey intellectual panache?

(b) Does the question hold the potential for broader intellectual import beyond the specific locale of study?

The importance of the initial conceptualisation of the research cannot be stressed enough! Many research projects are set up for failure from the beginning, as not enough intellectual capacity, thought and expertise have been worked through in the initial planning phase. Obviously the styles/models used may differ and there is no one-size-fits-all supervisor. What is presented here are models which may be used independently or collectively vis-à-vis various supervisory opportunities.

### **2.5.1 Supervision goes beyond the thesis**

Effective supervision goes beyond the thesis – it is attending to the broader intellectual development of a PhD candidate. Subsequently, it is important that a supervisor identifies conferences and seminars in which they can present jointly, that they travel together to serious research events, that they write together from an early stage, that they publish together and are always on the lookout for development opportunities that might advance the PhD student, that they inform the student of/direct the student towards the formation of doctoral peer support groups and encourage this formation, and that they identify resources that the student could tap into.

An effective supervisor will always attempt to facilitate connections and network the PhD student to the experts in the field within which he/she has decided to work. Therefore, it is important for the supervisor to introduce the PhD candidate to the leading thinkers in his/her field as much as possible, and to send the best work of the PhD candidate to leading thinkers/scholars who are in the same area of research – thus consciously promoting the PhD student at all times.

### **2.5.2 Ensuring the PhD candidate becomes independent**

Although initially a PhD student depends a lot on his/her supervisor, it is incumbent on the supervisor to attempt to move the student gradually towards greater independence and to know when the candidate is ready to assume more and more responsibility for directing their own work. This implies that the supervisor should avoid making the student a clone of him/herself, but should guide the student towards a topic, theory and method that reflects his/her own ingenuity, desire and voice. It is thus necessary to expose the student, amongst other things, to the work of the supervisor's opponents or to counter-theories on the work of the supervisor. Therefore, it is always a good idea to encourage the student to critique his/her own work. By doing so, the candidate will get used to the game of scholarly and critical ways of thinking – exactly the attributes one would like to develop within a PhD student.

### **2.5.3 The importance of effective feedback by the supervisor**

It is desirable that the supervisor's feedback on written submissions should be direct, fast, clear, honest and consistent. Responsiveness to the students' work is therefore very important and should include:

- Standardisation of performance for academic delivery
- Feedback on the work's academic coherence
- Intellectual and relevant advice as to the production of the thesis.

It is suggested that the supervisor keep records of all decisions taken during a contact/feedback session in order to ensure follow-up/continuity of the process until completion/submission (and beyond).

### **2.5.4 Reflecting on one's supervisory practice**

Feedback on supervision goes some ways towards levelling the playing field in a very hierarchical relationship and assists the supervisor in adjusting his/her strategy to meet the needs of particular students. It furthermore provides the base data for critical scholarship on doctoral supervision. Hard as it may be, supervisors should learn and change their styles based on feedback from their students. It may not be what supervisors wish to hear, but there is a clear benefit and there are always opportunities to do better!

## 2.6 Sources Consulted

- Lategan, L.O.K. 2008. *An introduction to postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- Pearson, M. 2000. Flexible postgraduate research supervision in an open system. In Kiley, M. And Mullins, G. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 2000 Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference*. Adelaide. Pp 165 -177.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. and Knight, N. 1992a. Helping postgraduate students overcome barriers to dissertation writing. In Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed). *Starting Research: Supervision and Training*. University of Queensland: The Tertiary Education Institute.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. And Knight, N. 1992b. Problem definition and thesis writing: workshops for the postgraduate student. In Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed). *Starting Research: Supervision and Training*. University of Queensland: The Tertiary Education Institute.
- Jansen, JD. 2009. 20 Tips for effective supervision. Workshop presented at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 20 November 2009

—

Next Chapter – Chapter Three: <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1873>

---

# Effective PhD Supervision - Chapter Three - Guidelines for Mentors



### 3.1 Introduction

The supervision of postgraduate students generally follows institutional guidelines such that policies or procedures (sometimes confusing and contradictory) are in place to produce PhD graduates. From the students' perspective, on the other hand, the path leading to the doctorate is unclear and filled with all kinds of hurdles and uncertainties. Most importantly, and especially at the early stages of the degree, support at all levels is a necessity.

The concept of mentoring is a universal phenomenon and certainly not a new one! In almost all cases the challenges faced by post-graduate students appear to be dealt with more effectively, or rather with a greater sense of personal satisfaction, when such individuals have someone to rely on. During the course of their postgraduate studies, and particularly in the early stages, students are required to make an intellectual and, more importantly, an emotional leap from being Bachelor's and Master's students to becoming PhD candidates. In some instances, as with individuals with professional qualifications, the primary degree is earned without much exposure to formal instruction in research, ethics and knowledge of the requirements for proceeding towards a doctoral qualification. Primary degree supervision typically consists of structured courses, with the student enjoying direct instruction and regular contact with the team of lecturers concerned. PhD candidates are, however, expected to be more independent, self-sustaining, with little access to their supervisor and less structured than in their prior degree. For the PhD student, contact and feedback with supervisors depend very much on the rate of progress of the individual student concerned and on the commitment of the supervisor to the process.

The mental leap required by students who find themselves in a PhD programme is enormous, and for some the gap between prior qualifications and the doctorate

may appear insurmountable. While in earlier endeavours in a student's academic career, advice and guidance (even at the proposal level) was relatively easy to obtain, this is not necessarily the case for PhD candidates. The expectations are that the student will now have greater insight into areas of research design, techniques and methodology. A familiar but unsettling comment from a supervisor, subtly or not so subtly suggesting that the new student should be in a position to find out for him/herself, is not always easy to accept. Often, however, students' expectations about asking the supervisor for 'advice' is hidden within an agenda of finding a quick solution to the proposal, project or ideas originally generated in the planning phases of the project. The student's perception is one where the supervisor seems to expect a switch will be turned on in the student's head such that the information required will be instantly at hand. Some students find this bewildering, confusing and frustrating, whilst others rise to the challenge. Often students look towards others to share their experiences and to seek emotional and intellectual support. In some cases, students arrive on campus without confirmation of residence, or any knowledge of the new environment or without even having a clear PhD topic in mind. The entire experience of undertaking doctoral training can therefore be very unsettling. So, to whom should the student turn to? Affirmation is a high priority! In this sense the student may have expectations of 'someone' being available to assist. That 'someone' is often targeted as the supervisor or course coordinator, and disillusionment based on expectations may set in very early.

The challenges for new doctoral students are not only to engage in academic work but to become familiar with the environment and to build new relationships. The engagement in the required academic commitments is an expectation of supervisors and faculty staff who often ignore or are unaware of the student not having resolved the initial appropriate social (non-academic) requirements. Thus, instead of focussing on the academic expectations of the PhD programme, the student is floundering and focussed on the former practical needs of facing a new environment. One possible negative aspect of this is the initial discordance between the two foci, which could be the seed for mistrust and unhappiness. This then becomes the focus of the student. The Faculty, with its academic and non-academic staff and more experienced students, should set its sights on assisting the new recruit in adapting to and managing life over the next few years in what may be perceived as an inhospitable environment.

In an ideal situation the supervisor is thought to be an outstanding and patient teacher, a superb researcher in his or her own right, and one who could, depending on the needs of the student, be a facilitator, mentor, and coach, including being the initial nucleus of knowledge around which postgraduate students would want to be. This could allow the student possibilities of growth limited only by the student's own ability and interests.

Not all individuals, be they staff members or senior students, have the makings of a mentor. Individuals who enjoy supporting others and sharing knowledge and time are far more suited to being mentors. The success of the programme rests crucially on the supportive nature and academic capacity of the prospective mentor.

Mentors, be they volunteers or faculty appointed to support new students, need some basic knowledge of the requirements for effective mentorship. To this end, workshops on mentoring at the faculty level are recommended to assist in identifying the requisites for mentoring. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will focus on identifying some of these issues and will build on the previous publication based on experiences shared by many supervisors, students and staff members at various institutions within the Netherlands and South Africa. The contributions made by all are gratefully acknowledged (see acknowledgements).

## **3.2 Central Aspects of Mentoring**

### **3.2.1 The functions of mentorship**

The challenges faced by mentors, supervisors and host institutions include providing direction and motivation to achieve common objectives (ultimately, the PhD degree); assisting with research conception, design and methods; providing a perspective on the project and research environment; and, finally, starting the process of providing guidance, support and structure to the new doctoral student.

Central to the idea of mentoring is the development of a relationship such that the helping nature of the interaction is focussed on longer-term and broadly defined academic and social achievement. In this context both the mentor and student should gain intellectual, emotional and personal achievement from the experience. The starting point nevertheless is that the mentor initially comes from a background of having had previous exposure to various aspects of the programme and can share this experience with the new recruit. From this

starting point, the interaction has huge potential to become a lifelong relationship. Indeed a common saying emanating from workshops has been 'once a mentor, always a mentor' and the implication, rather than being literal, is actually about the lifelong relationships built over the time the student spends with the mentor. This then develops into a closer relationship entering realms other than supervising a PhD! Whilst mentors may be the supervisors, there can be others who are interested individuals who share commonality of purpose with the student or colleague.

Some of the core functions of being a mentor include:

- A primary personal relationship between the mentor and student
- Provision of emotional, psychological and moral support
- Direct assistance and guidance with the student's career and professional development
- Role modelling to the point of 'showing the way'
- Development of trust, confidence and mutual respect between the student and mentor
- Reciprocity within the relationship in terms of derived benefits.

### **3.2.2 Who needs a mentor?**

Everybody needs a mentor! This may not be applicable all of the time, but throughout life, and particularly in academic life, a mentor of some sort is necessary. Most, if not all, individuals have had role models but not all have had the privilege of a personal mentor who guided them through some maze, difficulty or challenge at some time. Indeed, almost everyone has had a mentor in some form or another during their lives. Their lives could be varied from little interaction to major involvement or to advice/support on anything minor or major.

Students thrive with the right mentor at their side. It does not stop there, though; mentors are sorely needed for individuals at all levels in the academic arena and in teaching. Even Deans and Vice-chancellors require a coach or mentor at some point in their careers. This is also true in the business world where leaders lend support to their juniors and gain insight from those who have undertaken similar

tasks, shouldered the emotional burdens and have lessons to share with new entrants to the corporate enterprise.

The need for a mentor varies from individual to individual and from circumstance to circumstance, but decision making and looking towards the future is often clearer with support from those who have walked that road before. Most often it is not the advice but the sheer knowledge of affirmation and back up (if required) that tips the balance to a favourable outcome for the individual seeking support.

### **3.2.3 The benefits of the mentoring process**

There are a variety of benefits for both the mentor and the student. While mentors benefit from the experience on a more personal level, the student's benefits are more far-reaching.

Potential benefit to the student:

- Increased knowledge of the research programme, discipline, department and faculty/university culture
- Acquisition of skills and 'street-wise' knowledge that will be useful at a postgraduate level and in future careers
- Easier adjustment to the programme, department and environment
- Increased self-confidence and greater independence
- A channel for airing problems
- Desire to pursue an academic career and possibly mentoring future careers
- The difference between success and failure, if mentored early enough in the career.

Potential benefits to the mentor include and are not limited to:

- Tolerance and empathy with students, colleagues and associates
- An ability to identify problems that students/colleagues may not voice or even be aware of
- Life and leadership skills, interactive skills and limited coping mechanisms

within the mentor's own sphere of events

- A sense of increased personal self-esteem based on the student's successes: 'parental/protégé pride'.

### **3.2.4 Requirements of mentorship**

The more obvious requirements or expectations of the mentor in academia are to:

- Be aware of all the academic requirements for the programme
- Ensure the new student is made aware of all requirements, and possibilities for funding support and other opportunities
- Provide personal one-on-one support to the PG student
- Be aware of the needs of the student
- Have the capacity to refer the student to appropriate personnel for specialised academic or psycho-social support.

Other procedures common to both individuals and to the institution/department should be put into place to make the mentoring process a functional and a rewarding experience. The institution can play an important role in the process by providing an enabling environment for mentor-student meetings and by supporting the mentor. Often, the mentor may not have the knowledge or be unable to provide adequate support. It is important that the mentor has access to a Faculty-appointed mentor coordinator or supervisor to turn to for such support.

It is generally thought that mentorship should be voluntary and only those individuals wishing to take on the responsibility make the process successful. Reluctant mentors or those with expectations of perverse incentives such as payment or career advancement rarely make good mentors. Relationships between such mentors and students almost always break down, leaving all concerned disillusioned, and this may at times contribute to academic failure.

The stakeholders in this process are the institutions, departments, supervisor, mentor and the student. Some believe that a formal contract should exist to define each stakeholder's role and that it should be duly signed, etc. This however adds to the bureaucratic environment and is not necessarily conducive to the

spirit of mentorship, viz., camaraderie, a helping hand and a socially interactive process.

### **3.2.5 Training of mentors**

Training, providing funding resources and clarifying the role of the mentor are vital to the success of the mentoring process.

Training should include partnership responsibilities, knowledge of important campus sites such as offices of residence, financial aid, student administration, banks, restaurants, entertainment areas, safety and security measures, officers and offices, campus health offices, resources for guidance and counselling, sources for books (new and used), libraries and study areas. Experience with such training has demonstrated that, sadly, few students who had already been in the system for some time were aware of the range of available facilities.

An important component is the provision of skill training for mentors in order to be able to identify the warning signs of depression, anxiety and the need for psycho-social support. At no time should mentors take on the role of psychological counsellors but rather should refer the student to professionals appropriately trained for such support.

### **3.2.6 Stress: seeing the signs**

Mentors, coordinators and supervisors must be able to identify signs of stress in a student. Stressed individuals in the course of their tenure may exhibit variable patterns of behaviour. The cause of the stress may be academic, personal or social, and it is important to recognise stress regardless of the cause.

Stress may become apparent as behavioural, cognitive or physiological symptoms. Behavioural stress is seen as performance inefficiency, irritability, reduction in social sensitivity, pacing or hyperactive behaviour; cognitive disturbances are evidenced by anticipatory anxiety and fearful or worrisome thinking; while physiological symptoms may be seen in the form of mood swings, muscle tension, frequent headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and cardiovascular symptoms (increased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration).

Obviously these are not all of the warning signs. That said, it is important to be on the lookout for any telltale signs. Once the situation has been identified, the

student should be referred for appropriate treatment or counselling.

### **3.2.7 Reverse mentoring**

In this situation, as is seen more and more with the advance of the electronic era, the student has greater exposure to and knowledge of a particular area. This has great potential as the roles can be reversed and the mentor may now find him/herself in the opposite position. The role reversal can be advantageous to both. Not only is the experience an educational one for the mentor, but one where the mentor's reversed role opens an avenue for observing him/herself as reflected by the student who, in the reversed role, is now the mentor. Negative aspects such as impatience and irritability or the positive sides of mentoring such as understanding and an ability to transfer knowledge come to the fore acutely. Consequently, both parties are brought centre stage in playing out each other's roles and can only benefit from the experience.

## **3.3 Organisational Mentorship Structures**

Whereas the following sections provide suggestions on setting up formalised mentoring structures, experience has shown that the most successful mentoring relationships have been those where the informal situation came into effect due to various situations, be they social or academic interactions.

Faculties should be encouraged to consider specific strategies to create opportunities to provide quality mentoring for doctoral students. The professionalization of mentoring could include sponsorship for research programmes into mentoring, continual mentoring-education seminars and workshops, and the provision of specific training in the professional and ethical conduct of mentoring. Since most supervisors in the current era have not necessarily been exposed to formal mentoring programmes, it is important to highlight the need for strategic practice, ethical guidelines and operational procedures to formalise the structure and management of the mentoring programme. This could be beneficial and ensure the integrity of the process for both parties. The upshot of this would be to avoid exploitation (at all levels) of or by either individual. Factors that could be avoided are emotional interdependence and emotional/academic exploitation.

A strategy that could be harnessed by faculties is one whereby a culture of mentoring is created, nurtured and supported financially as well as being

recognised as part of the academic process. In this facilitated mentor environment, staff mentoring students would be valued and rewarded. Some of the strategies that could be used to entrench mentoring in the university culture might be:

- Orientation of staff towards mentoring: *Mentoring workshops, supervision of mentors (hierarchy), defined mentor functions*
- Rewards for mentoring: *Include mentoring in peer evaluations, awards and the assessments that contribute towards promotions*
- Tailoring mentoring programmes to suit the needs of the students and staff/mentor
- Preparing the student to accept the role of mentee or protégé
- Continuously assessing the mentoring programme and adjusting with changing student/mentor needs.

Depending on the structures within departments and available human resources, mentors may be the supervisors themselves, heads of research units, divisions or departments, and senior students (who have been in the post-graduate programme for at least one year and who are familiar with the environment and post-graduate programme). The basic scenario is one where the supervisor also becomes the mentor because of the lack of personnel. A further step may be afforded when a senior student, who is also under the supervision of the project leader (in the same area of research as the student), is asked to mentor the new incumbent. In those cases where no such senior student is available and/or the supervisor is unable to mentor, a senior student in a similar or parallel project may be asked to mentor. Even though this approach may not necessarily be ideally conducive to the academic support of the student, it could potentially provide many of the benefits of mentoring.

In large units with many staff members, an individual (normally a senior member of staff) is asked to become a mentor coordinator. This individual could act as the head of the programme to which mentors in the department may refer. The coordinator's role is to ensure that mentors are trained and have the necessary knowledge and support to fulfil the duties of a mentor. The coordinator may also be the initiator of the programme and generally obtain donor or departmental

funding for the mentor programme. Where such hierarchies do not exist, the supervisor/head of department usually takes on the responsibility of funding and providing the back-up for mentor consultation.

### **3.4 Setting up Mentoring Systems**

Successful mentoring depends on:

#### *a) Selecting appropriate mentors*

Selection of mentors should depend on the demonstration of sound academic performance in the past, an appropriate personality profile and temperament, leadership potential and a willingness to mentor. Empathy, patience and commitment to the programme should be uppermost.

#### *b) Appointing a mentor coordinator*

The institution should provide an individual who would be the contact person to whom mentors may refer and be a source of information for student and mentor needs. The coordinator also should provide an avenue for successful reporting and feedback processes. The role of the coordinator is also to ensure support being made available from outside sources such as counsellors and academic programmes, and to engage in fund raising for the programme.

#### *c) Training mentors*

Once mentors have been selected, it is the institution's responsibility to provide training in stress management, listening skills, time management, resource availability, leadership skills and the art of social mentoring, as well as to orientate both mentors and students towards how to achieve rewarding partnerships. A certificate or some form of formal award at the end of the programme is desirable and will provide both staff and student mentors with a sense of accomplishment.

### **3.5 Requirements for Effective Mentoring**

#### **3.5.1 Linking students to mentors**

This is not an easy task. Merely linking a senior student to a newly enrolled individual may be problematical. Likewise, because the two are in the same field

of study or live in the same residence should not be the only reason for the partnership. Senior students should be asked to mentor. It is advisable, however, to allow new students a short independent settling-in time in which some (though superficial) liaisons may be made. The role of the mentor coordinator or supervisor in this instance is to be able to identify likely suitable mentors. Thereafter, the prospective mentor should be solicited or asked for his/her interest in mentoring, followed by suggesting the possibility of mentoring the new student. If affirmative, the individual should then be offered the opportunity to mentor and be introduced to the student. At that point, the social mentoring process should be allowed to take its course.

In essence, mentoring is a two-way commitment between individuals based on honesty, realistic expectations, and an understanding and appreciation of each other.

### **3.5.2 Mentors fulfilling students' needs**

From the perspective of the student, the mentor should:

- be committed to the mentoring process
- provide guidance and academic support
- promote effective time management (This implies knowledge of the student's academic schedule so as to be mindful of important lectures, seminars and journal clubs, etc.)
- encourage the student to be well prepared for relevant courses
- encourage self-study and preparation for research meetings
- assist in the setting up of study groups and self-support units with the student's peers
- furnish referrals to academic staff for specific academic problems and to relevant personnel for psycho-social support
- render limited personal counselling and have a positive attitude towards the process
- encourage participation in academic and non-academic matters

- be available to regularly review the student's progress in both academic and non-academic areas
- identify needs and provide avenues from which support may be obtained. These include offices of administration, financial aid, accommodation, libraries, study rooms, campus health, counsellors, banks and automatic teller machines, recreation and student societies
- encourage familiarisation with the department, the faculty and the university environment
- assist the student in adjusting and coping with the stresses of the environment
- facilitate an enabling environment
- actively address tutoring or supplemental instruction as required for the student's success (appropriate referral).

### **3.5.3 The student's commitment to the process**

For the mentoring process to be successful, the student should be willing to:

- commit to the mentoring process
- commit time and energy
- establish clear research goals and work with the mentor to develop a pathway for achieving these goals
- accept constructive criticism
- meet regularly with the supervisor and/or mentor to discuss progress and review assignments, projects and progress
- respect and be mindful of the mentor's time, commitment to his/her own studies and responsibilities
- seek advice when required but not become overly dependent on the mentor
- review research progress regularly both independently and with the mentor
- raise issues of concern (academic and non-academic) in a timely fashion

- be unafraid to ask for assistance.

### **3.5.4 Academic milestones**

With regard to the academic component, mentors should be able to support the students by ensuring that the student is prepared or able to meet the deadlines for submission of:

- Applications (at all levels)
- Timely submission of applications such as ethics proposals, data collection (time management)
- Timely submission of protocols, data and write-ups - from drafts to the final stage - to the supervisor
- Registration
- Approval of research protocols
- Submission of research for examination.

Achievement of all of the above is very dependent on practical hurdles such as social interactions, accommodation, adequate funding, etc.

## **3.6 Problems and Dangers Associated with Mentoring**

Having set out the expectations of both parties in the mentoring process, it is important to identify boundaries and to be aware of pitfalls. Mentoring is personal and intimate, and the process could come unstuck due to a number of factors. These include, in the first instance, a lack of motivation and commitment to mentoring. The mentor and/or the student may not be prepared to invest the time and energy required to facilitate the success of the undertaking. The lack of commitment could result in hurried and superficial interactions and very little (if any) constructive interactions. Worse still, it could evolve into resentment and acrimonious interactions.

A situation may exist where the mentor may feel coerced into mentoring the student due to not being able to say no to the coordinator, needing to save face or for fear of a negative impact on his/her own career prospects. This would obviously lead to a reluctant mentor simply going through the motions, thereby

depriving the student of the required commitment.

The student's failure to communicate his/her needs due to awkwardness or embarrassment or even lack of appropriate knowledge could lead to misunderstandings or even major hurdles. It is important that both the student and the mentor clearly state the goals and objectives of the partnership. Added to this is the failure on both sides to discuss problems or potential problems at the outset. The breakdown in communication or understanding may become obvious at the initial meeting or only during later interactions where personal and academic pressures are not being conveyed. It is possible that meetings would then lose their focus and become secondary to the current crises. This could lead to both parties becoming defensive and lead to acrimonious meetings.

Another area of concern is the student's inability to interpret the mentor's intentions correctly. In these instances, the student may become overly dependent on the mentor both emotionally and academically.

A large risk to be guarded against is harassment, be it sexual, religious, academic or social (class distinctions). Harassment could begin with emotional over-dependence, and incorrect or inappropriate interpretation of the mentor's intentions or vice versa. The consequences of such could lead to the academic failure of the student and mentor as these become the focus rather than the challenge of the academic pursuit.

There is also the risk of conspiracy theories, superstition and general mistrust of the system or academic institution. In these situations the thought process deals mainly with these overriding perceptions. Consequently, the students find themselves being suspicious of the advice given and spending time evaluating the 'hidden messages'.

Important factors to be considered are those of language and past experiences. Failure of the mentoring process could be due to a lack of understanding or the misinterpretation of what is being communicated. In the majority of these situations, it is desirable for either or both parties to communicate honestly in order to highlight the situation. Resolution may be a direct one-on-one discussion or referrals to appropriate individuals such that where possible corrective action may be put into place or the problems overcome by a simple understanding of the needs of both the mentor and student. The coordinator or mechanisms set up to

address difficulties may play important roles in resolving the distrustful, misjudged or undesirable situation. The latter should be a role played by the coordinator and institution.

It is desirable that there be regular interactions between the student, mentor and coordinator (or supervisor) to monitor the mentoring process. Institutions may take a more formal approach and request monthly independent reports from both the student and mentor that would go to the coordinator, supervisor or department head. Sensitive and diplomatic handling of any negative events is essential.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Obviously not every scenario or event in the mentoring process is mentioned here. The intention of this chapter is to provide insight into the major difficulties and possibilities during study towards a postgraduate degree based on individual experiences shared and gleaned from workshops. The principles remain a useful guide towards a successful mentoring programme.

Situations differ from institution to institution and this would dictate the format of the programmes suited to their needs: it is important to note the adage of 'different strokes for different folks'. Adaptation of a mentoring system is highly dependent on the environment and on the mentor-student relationship as well as the hierarchy and expectations of the department. This having been said, by applying the recommendations outlined here, all institutions initiating a mentor programme should be able to ensure a pleasant and rewarding experience for their students, who would then be able to achieve their goals.

Mentors should be aware of and recognise that graduate students new to the system are generally anxious, insecure and initially very dependent. Mentors that stand out are typically experienced, generally confident and competent professionals in their own right. Their interest in the mentoring process is the personal and professional development of their students/protégés. They should generally be aware of the mentoring process and offer career/professional and psychosocial support. Most often these individuals create opportunities for their students, allow them some leeway in their work and generally set higher performance standards for them. In the end, they become very accepting of their students, are unafraid of promoting their students to share positions of authority

or even senior authorship in publications, and generally open up to their students. This is the essence of the long-standing, lifelong relationship referred to at the beginning of this chapter.

—

Next Chapter - Chapter Four - <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1888>