



Developing the internationalization
of PhD studies in South Africa



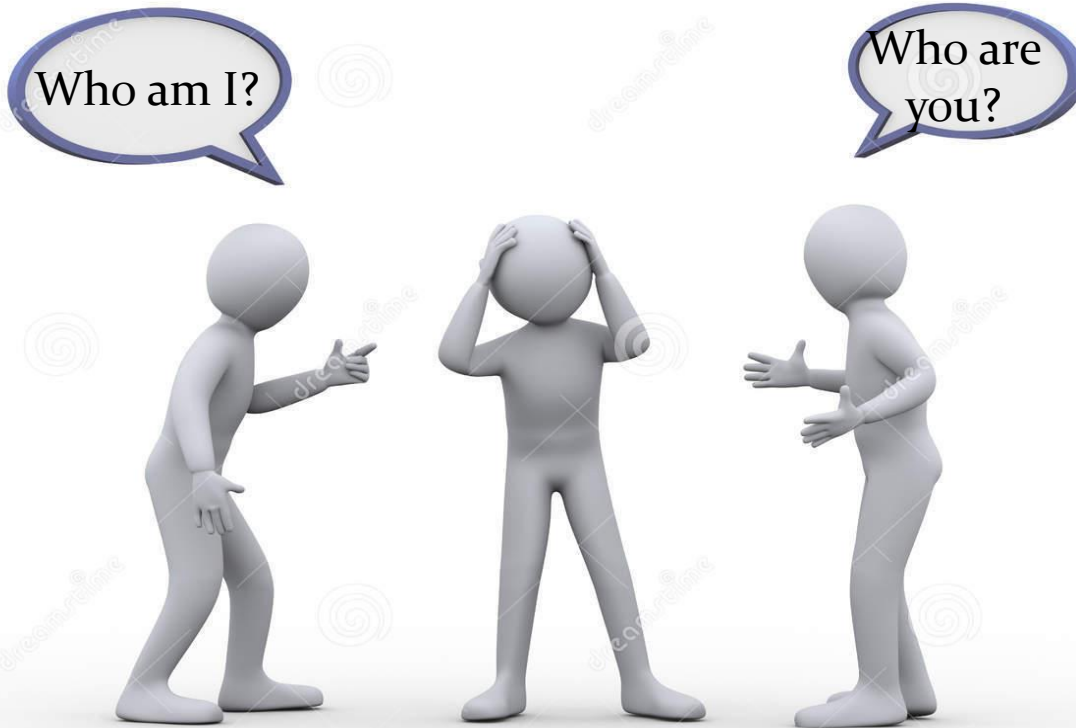
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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

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What does this mean for us?

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEMANDS THAT WE
GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (AND OUR STUDENTS)**

**MAKING SENSE OF "CULTURE"
IN INTERCULTURAL
POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION**



Introduction

- *There is no gold standard model of graduate supervision which can be applied in all situations, across all disciplines. For supervision to be effective, it must be an evolving process that concentrates on meeting the needs of different students, programmes and administrative structures.* (Egan et al. 2009: 338)
- Globally supervisors under pressure to supervise increasing numbers of diverse postgraduate students in challenging higher education contexts
- Research education varies among systems, countries, disciplines, and timing (e.g part-time vs full-time; coursework vs non-coursework)
- Traditional ways of supervising are increasingly challenged

Let's talk about culture!

- Culture is defined as the “learned and shared values, beliefs, and behavior of a group of interacting people” (Bennett, 2004)
- Communication, let alone supervisory communication, is never non-cultural!



The Culture Hippopotamus

A = Things you can recognise easily

- Food, music, architecture

B = Things that take some time to recognise

- Power distance, gender equality

C = Things you recognise only when you are familiar with a culture

- Humour, political system



Cultural identity

- Many factors contribute to an individual's cultural identity, including
 - *Personal cultural identity*, which determines lifestyle and behaviour
 - *Personal (social) factors*, which are mostly ascribed
 - *Psychological factors*, some of which are based on innate sources and all of which interact with the personal and social factors
 - *Social features* that are shared by group members
 - Socialization takes place in, and culture is transmitted or behaviours are sanctioned by, social institutions such as schools, government, and churches

- What might be some of the different cultures a doctoral student of yours might have participated in?
- Country of origin is clearly important here, but it might be worthwhile to think in terms of where you are a local from which will provide more information on the cultural habitus of the person
- The video by [Tayie Selasi](https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local?utm_campaign=tedspread-b&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare), “Don’t ask me where I’m from, ask me where I am a local”, might be useful
 - https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local?utm_campaign=tedspread-b&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Cultural difference (Manathunga, 2009: 169)

- The core business of researchers will increasingly become communicating and interacting across and between *many layers of cultural difference*
- These cultural layers include:
 - **ethnic cultures** within our multicultural local and national societies and within our globalised world
 - **disciplinary cultures** as the pressure grows to engage in interdisciplinary research
 - **university cultures**, which are becoming different combinations of corporate managerialist and collegial organisations (Lucas, 2006)
 - **industry cultures**, which are shaped by a range of commercial and other imperatives
 - **professional cultures**, which have particular discourses and values
 - **workplace cultures**, which have their own rituals and norms

Reflective questions (Manathunga, 2007: 112)

- How does your cultural identity and that of your students impact on your supervision relationship?
- In being supervised as a student, or in supervising students, have you experienced
 - moments of transculturation (creating new knowledge by blending your own cultural ways of thinking with those of other cultures)?
 - unhomeliness (uncertainty or uneasiness in working in a different environment or culture)?
 - What did it feel like?

To develop intercultural competence,
you need opportunities to reflect in an intentional way
on the very real shifts to your identities and
learn how to cope in a multicultural environment

Non-traditional students are not a homogenous group

(Grant, 2011; Naidoo, 2015: 342; Pilbeam & Denyer, 2009: 303; Yeatman, 1998: 23, 137)

- Non-traditional PhD students include all students who are marginalised by the dominant academic scholarly culture
 - Students, who by historical-cultural positioning do not imagine themselves 'as subjects of genius', and students who come from contexts where social and political oppression has framed their sense of self and their familiar orders of knowledge
 - Men and women who come from the non-dominant class, ethnic or race position
 - Part-time students
 - Impaired students
 - International students
 - Other?

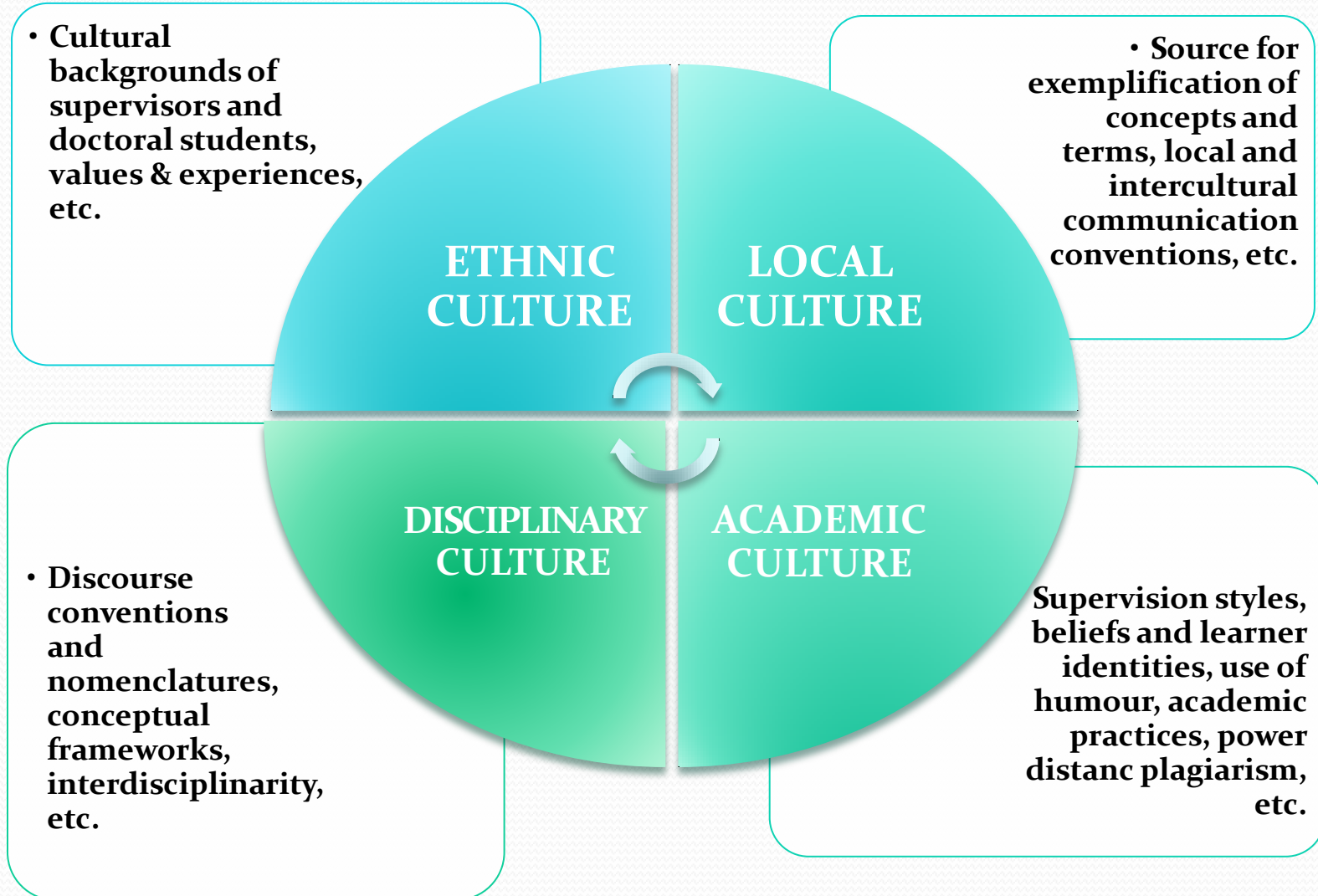
Diversity is not a deficit (Manathunga, 2017: 114)

- Many of the existing explorations of intercultural supervision take the form of practical guidebooks
- In the majority of cases, these texts offer helpful tips about how to work together
 - The ‘solution’ posed in these guidebooks to the ‘problem’ of working interculturally is clear and explicit communication and negotiation
- While these strategies are helpful, they tend to cast cultural difference as a ‘problem’; a deficit (usually on the part of the culturally diverse other) that must be ameliorated in some way

Managing student diversity

- Doctoral supervision as a “pedagogy in which our raced, classed and gendered bodies are present”, and when such supervision happens across ethnic cultures it “becomes a pedagogical site of rich possibility as well as, at times, a place of puzzling and confronting complexity” (Grant 2010:351)
- Supervisors embrace democratic justice in contributing to society by supervising students – using their expertise by taking care of students’ rights, enabling deliberative engagement and exposing them to critical learning (Vilakazi, 2016)
- Engaging with difference can bring about uncertainty, anxiety and other discomfort
 - Thinking ”this should be easy” can create problems
 - Managing anxiety and uncertainty is part of intercultural competence (Gudykunst, 2002)

A word about cultures and supervision



Engaging With Difference

- We engage with difference in all communication and all supervision
- Many of the same practices that are good in an intercultural setting, are useful in all supervision
 - Assuming that my assumptions may be wrong
 - Asking before explaining oneself
 - Asking open questions to elicit explanations
 - Creating a safe, open space for exploration
 - Being curious
 - Etc.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE STUDENT-SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP





- **Discussion**

- What are the qualities of a "good" (intercultural) supervisor?

(Some) Qualities of a good supervisor

(Manathunga, 2007:105, 109)

- In intercultural supervision, supervisors need to
 - Allow students to experiment with their independence and freedom
 - Provide scaffolding and support within which students can practice their independence
 - Include students in a supportive research culture
 - Treat each student differently according to their own learning styles and culture
 - Encourage international students to develop agency
 - Schedule regular formal and informal contact
 - Value cultural difference as a dynamic for growth for supervisors and students
 - Deal with personal issues if they arise

Common intercultural differences in supervision

- How do people in different hierarchical positions communicate with each other?
- How does one express yes and no?
- What is expected of a student vs. a supervisor?
 - Is a student expected to criticise, come up with suggestions, think critically and innovatively?
 - Who does what? What is expected of a student in terms of loyalty and service?
- What is intended as a recommendation and what is intended as a "must"?

Tasks and challenges in supervision

- Novice vs. Expert – Importance of communication
- Learning the tricks of the trade vs. Autonomy and emancipation
- Micromanagement vs. Laissez-faire
- A hierarchical relationship:
 - Does the student dare to say what she/ he really thinks? To ask questions? Show uncertainty? Take initiative?
 - "I thought I understood..."
 - Everyone wants to look smart!

Building a student-supervisor relationship (1)

(Carter et al., 2017: 6)

- Treat students as role models for undergraduate/Honours/MA students, rather than patronising them. They often come with significant work and life experience. They are often bilingual.
- Promote a culture of excellence in communication by articulating your expectations clearly, and encouraging transparency and accountability in your processes (e.g. having students circulate action points from meetings, etc.).
- Share meals with students, occasionally one-on-one, and also communally; encourage them to participate in departmental social events, forums etc.
- Foster cohort support groups for students, being aware of intra- and inter-departmental opportunities for this.
- Put aside some time in each supervision meeting for catching up with your student and what's happening in their life for example, births, deaths, marriages, family crises, financial woes (i.e. cost of living, cost of travel) Just listen, so that your students are aware that, even when assisting them is outside of the scope of your supervisory mandate, you see them as whole people with lives that are important.

Building a student-supervisor relationship (2)

(Carter et al., 2017: 6)

- Help to link students to counselling services, scholarship and hardship services available at your institution, Student Learning and Library support, etc. Often they will go with your recommendation but maybe won't otherwise.
- Be mostly firm with deadlines, but flexible and understanding where necessary. Talk about why deadlines matter so much for their success.
- Be an exemplar of diplomatic critique for your student – be encouraging and offer positive affirmation on students' writing, while crafting your criticisms constructively, with explicit recommendations of things the student could do.
- Check that you both share the same understanding of what is required to complete the project and what needs to be done next.
- Encourage students to employ culturally appropriate frameworks in their project where appropriate.

How do you discuss...

- The nature of the project?
- Expectations for supervision?
- The motivation and purpose of the doctorate?
- Uncomfortable aspects of the work?
 - for example working hours, administrative tasks, amount of lab work, balance between work and research, teaching duties...

Managing conflict situations

- Humans send and receive complex messages even in everyday conversations, most of which happens without much conscious attention
- Good communication is key to avoiding conflict situations, but it is a complex skill that not everyone is equally good at (but can develop!)
- Communication
 - Creates a common understanding of scientific content, methods, and procedures
 - Establishes an agreement on purpose, goals and action plan
 - Monitors progress, assess learning, and to help intervene
 - Activates student's own critical thinking, deep learning and problem solving
 - Enhances motivation and well-being
 - Communication entails both verbal and non-verbal cues, which influence the interpretation of scientific content, instructions and intentions

A word on non-verbal communication

- Communicating without words has many components
 - These include how we look, how we move, how we sound, how we smell, eye contact, the use of time and space, tone of voice, loudness, speed, facial expression, body posture, touching, and smiling (Samovar & Porter, 2004)
- Some non-verbal communication is culture-specific
 - For example, in some cultures, people shake their heads to indicate “yes,” while in other cultures people indicate “yes” by moving their heads from side to side like a pendulum
- Some non-verbal communication is general to all cultures
 - anger, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, and disgust
- BUT there are rules for displaying emotion that are culturally grounded and also context-sensitive

Discussion

- Find examples where non-verbal behaviour contributes to misunderstanding
- Discuss the different views of what constitutes acceptable non-verbal behaviour from different cultural perspectives
 - What are some South African norms? What are some Kenyan norms? What are some Argentinian norms? What are some British norms? What are some Indian norms? What are some Nigerian norms?
 - What kinds of messages are sent through non-verbal communication?
 - What are some of the non-verbal behaviours you have seen that differ from your norms?

PG students themselves need to develop

(Manathunga, 2009: 174)

- PG supervisors will be expected to specifically design learning experiences for students so that they enhance and practice intercultural skills including
 - intercultural knowledge and skills
 - abilities to work in interdisciplinary research teams
 - capabilities to work with industry and the professions as well as academe
 - abilities to cross intellectual, cultural, social and professional borders
 - competencies to deal with multiple identities, roles and responsibilities
 - abilities to deal with the simultaneous joy and discomfort of working across multiple spheres of cultural interaction

GROUP DISCUSSION:

What are feasible learning experiences you could incorporate to develop your postgraduate students' intercultural skills?

Some reflective comments (Mkhabela & Frick, 2016)

- The value of telling stories
- Building mutual kindness and trust
- Compassionate rigour: No compromises on quality
- Utilising experts

Concluding comments

- No two supervision situations are the same
- There is no shortcut
- We need to be present and attentive every time
- There is always something to learn – it never gets boring!

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