Crossing borders in preparing doctoral candidates and supervisors for global research contexts

Internationalisation of best practices in doctoral education: A longitudinal perspective

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Changing needs and challenges regarding doctoral education (DE)

- Common knowledge that many supervisors base their supervisory approaches on own, often untested, experiences (Bartlett & Mercer 2001; Manathunga 2007; Grant 2009)

- Also known that professional reflection on DE practices is essential in promoting doctoral quality (Deucher 2008)

- Standard setting for doctorates and DE is more likely to happen when exposed to multiple practices (Pearson & Kayrooz 2004)

- The concept of doctoral and research education encompasses the development of both candidates and supervisors (De Beer & Mason 2009; Bitzer & Albertyn 2011)

- Participation in international networks across disciplines may improve the quality of supervision and doctoral education (Trafford & Leshem 2011)

Becoming doctorate

'… the doctorate represents a level of knowledge, skills and attitudes that involve intellectualizing, conceptualizing and contributing to knowledge. Candidates and supervisors also have to understand the scholarly nature of the doctoral degree by appreciating the connection between doing research, writing a doctoral thesis and defending a thesis in a doctoral viva. When these criteria for a doctoral degree are achieved synergistically, then doctorateness is demonstrated' (Trafford & Leshem, 2011:52)
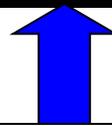
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE NATURE OF THE DOCTORAL DEGREE

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

International, national and market
demands/influences on quality,
plus the functions of doctoral
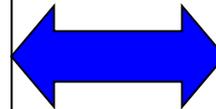education and career projections.

The doctoral degree

ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS

Contexts in which the degree
is offered/conducted/undertaken
and all the arrangements that
apply to every stage of it.

ACADEMIC FACTORS

Scholarly/research considerations
that should be self-evident
in theses that are submitted
and examined.

SCHOLARLY COMPONENTS OF THE DOCTORATE

Contribution to knowledge	Stated gap in knowledge	Explicit research questions	Conceptual framework
Conceptual conclusions	**SYNERGY and perceived DOCTORATENESS**		Explicit research design
Research questions answered			Appropriate methodology
Coherent argument	Engagement with theory	Clear/concise presentation	'Correct' fieldwork

(Trafford and Leshem, 2011: *Stepping stones to achieving your doctorate.* Open University Press)

What seemed appealing were …

- A focus on both a substantive product ('doctorateness') as well as critical processes elements (doctoral studies and their supervision);

- Addressing the issue of candidates and their studies, rather than supervisors and their practices;

- Possible trends emerging from examiners' questions in the viva (demonstrating elements of 'doctorateness') by analysing examination processes (what examiners want…) to determine doctoral processes (what needs to be done…);

- Building a programme of mutually beneficial development around the (threshold?) concept of 'doctorateness'

- 'Mixing' participants (candidates, supervisors, levels of experience…)

Professional development of supervisors (2009 - 2014)

Phase 1 Awareness of developmental needs	• Local (SA) workshops and conferences since 2005 • Published work in 2008
Phase 2 Development of the format and activities (2009)	• Collaboration and discussion of important DE issues • Challenges involving 'doctorateness' and scholarship • Topics planned • Studied and discussed the SA context thoroughly • Obtained critical feedback • Made adjustments
Phase 3 Piloting, evaluation and changes (2010)	• Presented first pilot workshops (April 2010) • 3 Pilots over 5 days (2 + 1 + 2) • 25 supervisors and candidates per workshop • Formative assessment and adjustments
Phase 4 Implementation, evaluation and refinement (2011 - 2014)	• Two workshops in September 2011 and repeated in April 2012, February 2013 and February 2014 (2 days each) • 224 supervisors and candidates involved • Feedback and evaluation • Joint papers and research.

Topics: PGS pilot phase (2010: 75 particiants)

Topic	Description
Topic 1: The nature of 'doctorateness' and its significance	• The components of 'doctorateness' • How supervisors can guide their candidates to include these features in their research and writing their thesis • Examples of how examiners view the presence or absence of 'doctorateness' and how this influences their judgement of scholarly merit in theses.
Topic 2: Levels of thinking	• 'Doctorateness' emerges when researchers raise their level of conceptual thinking about research • How to approach research in a scholarly manner moving from the descriptive to the conceptual and so display understanding of scholarship.

PGS pilot phase (2010)

Topic	Description
Topic 3: The importance of conceptual frameworks	• Appreciating how conceptual frameworks emerge from theoretical perspectives, influence research design and aid drawing conclusions represent theoretical and empirical consistency • Examples of 'good' and 'poor' doctoral research
Topic 4: Thinking like researchers	• Examiners judge doctoral theses against criteria for doctoral candidates to become competent researchers. This topic explains how supervisors enable candidates to 'think like researchers' and thus provide evidence of that in their theses.

PGS pilot phase (2010)

Topic	Description
Topic 5: How to conclude a thesis in one chapter	• Since the conclusions chapter is usually the last piece of significant text that examiners read, it is important that it conveys justifiable and positive impressions about the thesis and its scholarly merit.
Topic 6: Using the 'magic circle' model to audit a thesis	• Explains how auditing the text of a thesis can ensure that methodological rigour and scholarship are appropriately demonstrated • By viewing research as cyclical rather than linear, this model offers practical ways for supervisors and candidates to audit doctoral research before submitting a thesis.

PGS pilot phase (2010)

Topic	Description
Topic 7: Polishing protocols: guiding candidates to better academic practices	• Drafting a thesis includes acknowledging administrative and academic protocols that are frameworks of rules which readers expect to see in the text of theses • Evidence shows that examiners give particular attention to how candidates ~ and by implication supervisors ~ ensure that the protocols are self-evident in doctoral text.

Participant feedback (Pilot phase, 2010, n=75)

In which respects did this workshop contribute to make you more critical towards your own work? (Examples of typical comments)
"International perspectives on the doctorate are very empowering. It will definitely help me to steer and manage my own research and learning processes" (Candidate)
"The criteria for doctorateness were made visible and helped me to see explicitly what I should be doing. It will assist me in communicating the doctoral process to my students and to others" (Novice supervisor)
"The doctoral education guidelines which were provided made a lot of sense to me. I am going to apply them in my supervision. Indeed, there seems to be a difference between narrow research training and a broader doctoral education" (More experienced Supervisor).

Participant feedback (Implementation phase, 2011–2014; n=224)

Category	Participant (S = supervisor; C = candidate)
Opening up of opportunities	*"For me this workshop pointed to the many opportunities available in the supervisory relationship to empower a candidate. It suggested a generic benchmark for doctoral studies and supervision which I will definitely use"* (S) *"This workshop came at exactly the right time for my PhD studies and covered aspects that very relevant to the question of becoming doctorate. I must admit, I did not think about my studies in this way before"* (C)

Participant feedback

Category	Participant (S = supervisor; C = candidate)
Thinking like a researcher	*"This workshop was an eye-opener for me into approaching my doctoral studies with insight. It has helped me to be sensitive towards raising my level of thinking (as a researcher) with a critical analytic attitude"* (C) *"The models suggested and provided (the magic circle in particular) really made sense. My supervision activities will include them to assist my students to think like researchers"* (S)

Participant feedback

Category	Participant (S = supervisor; C = candidate)
Providing tools and guidelines	*"Three things stood out for me: Firstly, the magic circle, which represents a holistic approach to research and linking the components by looking at their relationships. Secondly, guidelines on concluding a thesis have highlighted that there is no need to repeat what has been said already. Thirdly, the designing architecture as a working document should be a priority for discussion between candidate and supervisor"* (S)

Participant feedback

Category	Participant (S = supervisor; C = candidate)
Structuring supervision	*"Although the workshop did not attend to very specific issues in my field of expertise, I am very fortunate to have been exposed to generic international expectations and standards for the doctorate'"*(S) *"Beginning with the end in mind opened up new opportunities and also provided sound ideas for future supervision. One thing that I would have liked to see in the workshop, however, is ideas on how doctoral research results (a thesis) may be disseminated for wider scholarly use'"*(C)

Did you benefit from participation and if so, how?
Feedback rendered in 2013, two years after participation in 2011
(n = 14)

Respondent	Extract from comments
Candidate, Unisa	*"It helped me to make my supervisor's expectations for doctoral work more explicit. It succeeded in capturing the 'size' and 'depth' of doctoral work – something I found very valuable and could use to good effect. Two days were a bit short, though"*
Candidate, Stellenbosch	*"…[T]he development of the theory of my field – the so-called 'scholarship' or 'conceptual' aspects of my work. It definitely facilitated the writing of my thesis – I graduated in March 2012!"*
Supervisor, CPUT	*"It made me much more aware of how I should try to raise my candidates' level of conceptual thinking about research and move from descriptive to conceptual conclusions. Added to that was the importance of creating and using conceptual frameworks in doctoral theses and how they fit into research projects. However, both these issues remain challenging ones"*

Implications and observations

1. The professional development of supervisors preferably need to include (a) international indicators for 'doctorateness', (b) the shared perspectives and experiences of doctoral candidates and (c) the shared experiences of novice and seasoned supervisors.

2. Supervisors' (and candidates') conceptions of 'doctorateness', scholarship and doctoral education seem to importantly shape supervisory practices. As in the case of doctoral candidates, a move from dependency (on own supervisory knowledge and experience) to independency (i.e. learning from the experiences of others, particularly from an international perspective) may be more productive.

Implications and observations

3. New supervisory challenges require new strategies for supervision. Research- and experience-based development opportunities, oriented towards international contexts and practices, but sensitive to local constraints and challenges, may provide some answers to supervisory and doctoral education quality (rather than merely offering localised and institutional supervisory developmental opportunities).

4. Discrepancies in doctoral quality among institutions need to be looked into as some doctoral candidates may not be exposed to quality research education at all.

- Questions/ Comments?

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