Committee of Deans of Postgraduate Schools in Nigerian Universities

CDPGS AT 25

Perspectives on Higher Education in Nigeria

CDPGS at 25: PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
Published for
The Committee of Deans of Postgraduate Schools (CDPGS) in Nigeria Universities
c/o Honorary Secretary, CDPGS &
Dean School of Postgraduate Studies
University of Lagos
Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria.
E-mail: cdpgsecretariat@yahoo.co.uk
lchukwu@unilag.edu.ng
deanspgs@unilagspgs.edu.ng.
by
Concept Publications Limited
77, Shipeolu Street, Palmgrove,
Lagos, Nigeria.
e-mail: conceptpublications@gmail.com
deleconcept@yahoo.co.uk
Phone: 0802 309 4010 & 0805 259 4490
Website: www.conceptpublications.com

ISBN 978-978-51445-5-0

Designed, printed and bound in Nigeria by
Concept Publications (Press Division), Lagos.
Phone: 0805 259 4490 & 0703 057 2604

D

Strategies for Effective Postgraduate Supervision

By

Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu
Department of Science and Technology Education
Bayero University, Kano

Introduction

The postgraduate degree has become the new goal post in social mobility (or social status index) in the Nigerian public culture. With an overwhelming number of applicants for all varieties of postgraduate programmes, Nigerian universities are rapidly turning into degree mills with clients eager to acquire a little edge over the vast horde and therefore increase their social potentiality, if not employability. Under normal circumstances this is good for academic development; for not only does that ensure relevance for postgraduate programs in Nigerian universities, it also creates opportunities for new areas of research, and consequently creates new challenges for supervision. Thus the huge number of students applying for postgraduate programmes most likely is expected to mean a greater variety of new topics for research, and therefore a greater potential to contribution to knowledge.

Since the universities in Nigeria are themselves patterned on European universities, or to be more precise, Lord Ashby of Brandon's conception of the British 'gold standard' (1965:82), it is therefore natural that the values that characterize the way supervision is conducted in Nigerian universities uses a British template. This was based on a 'tutoring mechanism' that sees a one-on-one dialogue between the student and the supervisor — as against the American strategies of 'group supervision' that sees a student attached to a committee of two or more individuals.

Different disciplines call for different approaches not only in their individual methodologies, but also in the strategies that could be adopted in guiding students in advancing the cause of knowledge in that discipline. The changing nature of higher education, with its focus on knowledge-driven economy and instant distribution of such knowledge, has created a need for further scrutiny of the nature of the relationship between supervisors and supervised in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This is more so in the current climates where a supervisor is expected to be a first-rate scholar in that particular field, having extensive experience in the area in terms of publications, presentations, grant management, and so on. An inexperienced supervisor would not be able to effectively guide his student.

No matter the disciplines and approaches, however, there are commonalities in supervising these students. These commonalities are reflected in the following basic elements:

(a) Negotiating/guiding the move from dependence to independence which involves different degrees of direction at different stages—that is, it can become very directional in the final stage to force a student to complete, or if a student is floundering and losing confidence the supervisor may break the task down for them, and there is an effort to get them to write up their research to full advantage—so that the student's move to independence is coupled with a bi-modal pattern of time allocation from the supervisor;
(b) Varying the supervisory approach to suit the individual student's needs and personality, disciplinary differences and so on;
(c) Recognizing that a key to the process is the formulation of the problem/topic/question because it is that which ensures focus and engagement. The tension comes from providing enough direction to stop students going down

paths which are non-productive (which is a problematic judgment in itself), without taking over. In other words the student has to 'own' their thesis.

From an extensive review of the literature as well as practices in real-life situations, Angelito Calma (2007) was able to also come up with a typology of supervision which he says the literature broadly categorizes into three approaches. These are supervisor-related variables (which include area expertise, guidance, management skills, adaptability, research workload, research track record, and interpersonal communication), candidate-related variables (higher degree study experience, age, gender, family concerns, duration of study, funding, etc.) and institution-related variables (research outputs, research culture, research thrusts, research capacity building initiatives, etc.). These key variables associated with postgraduate supervision are encoded in Fig. 1.

It is clear, therefore, these three groups of variables form the fulcrum around which debates and discussions about postgraduate supervision can take place. Thus both the supervisor and the students have distinct roles to play. Let us take a closer look at the relationships.

Role of the Supervisor

Supervision means to provide direction or oversee the performance of a particular operation within a particular context. Perhaps not surprisingly, within this broad definition, the role of a research supervisor and the nature of the supervision relationship are interpreted very widely and very differently. For instance, the role of a supervisor has been seen as:

(a) An authority on the particular topic being researched (Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, 1994: 9);
(b) A guardian of standards (Cryer, 1997.: 7);
(c) A mentor (Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, 1994: 9);
(d) A research role model (Wisker & Brown, 2001: 143);
(e) A manager (Vilkinas, 2002: 129);

(f) And even a "coach" (Rochford, 2003: 217).

Thus, a supervisor can have many roles. Not only can these roles change during the research study but they may be influenced by disciplinary cultures. In simple terms, differences are apparent, for example, between the Arts and the Sciences. The supervision style adopted in the Arts and Sciences - hands off as opposed to hands on - mimics the communication style of the disciplines where academics in the Arts tend to be more individualistic and less likely to work in teams than their Science colleagues.

Consequently, there is evidence that supervision styles differ according to the discipline. The diversity of the disciplines and the resources available in each naturally leads to fairly individualistic styles of supervision. These styles are in turn connected to the communication styles between the large clusters of disciplines. Whittle (1992), for instance, mapped out the supervision styles of many supervisors she engaged in Australian universities with and came up with the following typology:

Table 1 Communication Styles in the Arts and the Sciences

Arts	Sciences
Ad hoc, formal	Regular, informal
Emphasis on written form	Both written and spoken form
Plain everyday language	Specialized language symbols
Wide range of journals	Narrow range of journals
High publication rate	Low publication rate
Low level of joint publication	High level of joint publication
Low conference participation	High conference participation

Table 2: Supervision Styles in the Arts and the Sciences

	Arts	Sciences
Style:	Hands off	Close
Meetings:	Irregular, infrequent	Regular, frequent
Project:	Individual	Collaborative
Relation to supervisor's research:	Unrelated	Closely related
Joint Publication:	Uncommon	The norm
Mentorship:	Rare	The norm

Thus the different frequencies and regularities of supervisory meetings between academics and students in the Arts and the Sciences match the mode of communication between academics in those disciplines. The publication rates of students and the extent to which students publish jointly with their supervisors also differ between the Arts and the Sciences and these differences again mimic the practice of academics in these subject areas. Many academics consider it important for supervision to be seen as a teaching as well as a research role. Within this teaching role, giving criticism is one of the main activities that a supervisor has to undertake. Apart from being specific about what precisely is wrong with a student's performance, it is also necessary to know what kind of criticism is appropriate at a given point in a student's research career. The reason for giving criticism effectively is that, through it, students can eventually learn how to evaluate their own work and thus undergo self-development. Also, helping students become academically independent by introducing such a process of weaning is fundamental to the supervisory process.

These styles and disciplinary cultures are quite universal and therefore provide a generalized template against which individual practices could be judged. But no matter the style and typology the end product of supervisory role is to ensure the continuity of scholars who are engaged in the process of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, for as Brew (2001) argues, the changing context of higher education provides an

urgent reason for developing a systematic understanding of the nature of research as it is experienced. Questions about what counts as knowledge, and what counts as an appropriate method for generating it, are now known to be bound up with questions about the ownership and control of knowledge, including questions of power.

The Student-Supervisor Relationship

This relationship has always been fundamental to research degree study, yet received little attention in the literature until recently. However, growing scrutiny of this area has meant that the supervisory relationship has developed a higher research profile. A review of supervisory practices by Dryden and Jones (1991) has indicated a number of criticisms such as:

Lack of attention to process issues: It has been argued that supervisors have tended to neglect issues related to the process of research degree study. There has been a need for attention to writing skills, and the need to demystify all aspects of research degree study, and to facilitate students' acquisition of skills, such as the ability to manage time and seek realistic goals and the ability to communicate both verbally and in writing. It has also been pointed out that it is unlikely that supervisors will easily be able to facilitate such developments in their students unless supervisors themselves receive some form of training in these areas.

Confusion over roles: Another major area relating to problems with supervision involves lack of clarity between staff and students concerning their respective roles. For example, both student and supervisor can harbour differing perceptions of what each should be doing and problems can ensue as a consequence. To clarify this, there has been emphasis on the importance of agreeing at the outset of a study an explicit formal contract that identifies respective rights and obligations.

Interpersonal problems. Isolation has been identified on a number of occasions as a major problem for research students, especially in certain subject areas. Ethnic and racial divides can also present an interpersonal dimension to a supervisory relationship.

Problems with the traditional supervisory model. Finally, criticisms have been made of the narrowness of the traditional one-to-one supervision relationship, although increasingly supervisory teams are more commonly seen. To help remedy this, there has been emphasis on the educational importance of providing opportunities for students to participate in workshop-based activities with other students and the intellectual and social importance of developing collegiality within doctoral study. Perhaps the student-supervisor relationship should be necessarily asymmetrical and the ultimate aim should be to see the power imbalance reduce and level out as the student moves gradually from the position of apprentice to one of colleague.

It has been suggested that most supervisors seem to find for themselves an optimum level of involvement and interaction, although this may not be ideal for the student (Eley and Jennings 2005). Moreover, this optimum level may take years of experience to achieve and could be problematic to students during this supervisor learning period.

Consequently, if students are to do well, they must understand what their supervisors expect of them. According to Delamont et al. (2004) and Phillips and Pugh (2000), the following set of expectations are probably fairly general among supervisors. Supervisors expect:

- Their students to be independent;
- Their students to produce good quality written work;
- To have regular meetings with their research students;
- Their research students to be honest when reporting on their progress;

- Their research students to follow the advice that they give, when it has been at the request of the student;
- Their students to be enthusiastic about their work.

It is equally important to supervisors to know what students expect of them. According to Phillips & Pugh (2000), students expect supervisors to do the following:

- To read work well in advance;
- To be available when needed;
- To be friendly, open and supportive;
- To be constructively critical;
- To have a good knowledge of the research area;
- To structure meetings so that it is relatively easy to exchange ideas;
- To have sufficient interest in their research to guide the student towards more information;
- To act as a role model;
- To help their academic role development.

As Eley & Jennings (2005) further pointed out, if supervisors are aware of the above and students understand what supervisors expect of them, then there will be a basis for the development of a successful student-supervisor relationship.

Based on these, there is therefore a series of steps one needs to take in order to provide an effective supervisory role for research students. These steps, distilled from various guides from many universities with more established research traditions (e.g. McAlpine and Amundsen 2011, Stack 2008, Lee 2007, Kamler and Thomson 2006, and James and Baldwin 1999), include, but are by no means restricted only to, the following:

1. Right Partnership

A crucial factor in ensuring successful and effective supervision is getting the synergy right between the student and the supervisors. Theirs is not a mere academic relationship, it can eventually be personal because for the next minimum of two

years they will be in constant contact with each other. The precise research topic at this stage is sketchy - with both the student and the tutor trying to understand precisely where each is going.

While the students often come with a hazy idea of the specific topics they want to work on, the best practice at this stage - and also the most ethical - is to avoid allocating a topic to a student. There are many reasons for this. First the student may not have the acumen and experience to explore that particular topic. Secondly, he may not be interested and therefore might feel 'pushed' into it. A third reason is that some supervisors often use this to get free data through their students—thus their students act as drones, strenuously collecting fieldwork data for them to polish up and publish, often without acknowledging the joint-authorship rights of the student. This is not to say that students will not benefit from listening to suggestions and from reassurance about their ideas - particularly if the topic is especially important to their career advancement. But they must not be pushed into a particular direction they may not be really interested in; for the end result would be frustrating for both the student and the supervisor.

To ensure the 'mix is right' in this initial crucial stage, the following soul-searching needs to be done by the potential supervisor:

- Do I have personal issues with the student on the basis of one factor or other - religion, ethnicity, gender, ideology - even appearance? If there are, ask the Department to change supervisors for him.
- Am I interested in the topic - and the student - or was he randomly assigned to me (especially during my absence from the PG Committee meeting of the Department?)
- If the student assigned is working in an area new to me, can I effectively learn first before guiding him into a new territory?

- Am I strong enough in research methodology - aware of all issues of research designs, conceptual and analytical frameworks - for me to do justice to the supervision?
- Can I put aside the numerous consultancies, workshops, travels, responsibilities and devote quality time to the student?
- Can the university support the resource requirements of the student in this particular topic?

2. Know the Student and Assess Their Needs

Once the initial hurdle has been crossed, and it is agreed that there is a right partnership, the next thing to consider are two related factors: academic and psychological.

Academically, as a supervisor, you need to know
(a) What knowledge, experiences and skills students bring to their project;
(b) The areas in which they will need special assistance; and
(c) How they are likely to approach their research.

The last is determined by a complex mixture of factors, both personal (motives for doing the research, preferred learning style, confidence, past experiences, ideological perspective) and social (cultural background and gender)

Try exploring these matters in your early discussions with students. Many supervisors do so intuitively, but there is something to be said for a more systematic approach - it makes sense to work with a mental checklist appropriate to your discipline.

An important point to remember is that, while your immediate concern is the development of the knowledge and skills the student will need for this particular project, you also have a responsibility to provide research training. By the end of the project students should have developed the core attributes of competent researchers in the discipline. So your

initial assessment of where they are starting from needs to be quite broad. Some of the areas that should be probed are:

(i) Knowledge of the relevant theoretical base
(ii) Understanding of methodological procedures and
(iii) Undergraduate work
(iv) Necessary technical skills (for example, statistical equipment)
(v) Necessary computing skills
(vi) Writing skills.
(vi) Options-based on previous analysis or use of laboratory

It is the responsibility of the supervisors also to draw attention of the students to fundamental university policy regarding research – and these go beyond the PG Students' Handbook. Students must be made familiar with issues such as intellectual property, research ethics for projects involving human or animal subjects. Deans of PG Schools that do not have clearly defined policies that go beyond the structure of the thesis and its examination should seriously consider expanding their requirements.

Psychologically, it is more difficult to identify student's needs. A student who looks and exudes confidence may be masking a crippling lack of confidence, until after you have gone far - then it manifests itself. In the end, the success of the relationship depends on sensitivity and tact, but should not lead to a dependency syndrome where the student becomes psychologically attached to the Supervisor. But there are things to look out for - areas where misunderstanding is common and where an empathetic reflection on the student's position can go a long way towards resolving problems before they grow too large.

One such area is that of gender, particularly in fields where women are not well-represented. Tricky is also a situation where a married woman would have to work in isolation with another man for many hours. Women also face peculiar

problems of their own families, and in some cases, husbands are not supportive of the demands of advanced research - leading to complicated relationships with an understanding supervisor.

Another area concerns different cultural expectations about the respective roles of supervisors and students and the appropriate protocols for conducting the relationship. However, here are some broad issues where cultural differences may emerge, such as:

(a) The authority of the teacher and the appropriate respect to be shown by students
(b) The significance of direct disagreement
(c) The use of published authorities.

3. Establish Reasonable, Agreed Expectations

The most rewarding supervisory relationships are those in which the lines of communication between student and supervisor are established early and clearly. At the same time, the most frustrating are those in which supervisor and student are working at cross-purposes. In this case, messages are misinterpreted; the student becomes confused and resentful about not knowing what the supervisor really wants; the supervisor in turn becomes disappointed with the student's work and 'attitude'.

This common problem - produced by a mismatch of expectations about the appropriate degree of direction - is not easy to solve, but one thing is clear: expectations need to be articulated before they can be reconciled. Students new to research may not realize that this form of learning is quite different from structured coursework - that it requires more independence and much less certainty about knowledge. The answer does not lie in a one-way explanation of the supervisor's expectations of the student. Of course the supervisor has more experience and more understanding of the nature of research, but the relationship is a partnership

which requires a sharing of perspectives and views continually throughout the candidature.

It is important to provide a structured opportunity for such an exchange of views about how the partnership is going to work. This might start with relatively straightforward matters, such as how *frequently* students should submit something in writing and how often meetings should be held. The supervisor may have very clear views about what is desirable, but will also need to take into account the student's circumstances and preferred habits of work. It is a matter for negotiation, although the supervisor obviously has greater experience.

Some of the areas in which expectations need to be articulated and negotiated are:

- The extent and nature of direction from the supervisor—thus establishing boundaries and limits
- The degree of independence of the student
- Procedures for consultation—frequency, preparation, conduct—including, where appropriate, the degree of support in the laboratory
- The submission of written work—progress reports, literature reviews, drafts
- The nature and timing of response from the supervisor
- The appropriate role of the supervisor in editing
- How ideological differences are going to be handled.

4. Work with Students to Establish a Strong Conceptual Structure and Research Plan or Proposal

During the first planning stage, it is especially important for students to grapple with and make explicit their assumptions and where appropriate their hypotheses. This underlies the significance of advanced preparation before undertaking any postgraduate degree - for the student who has only a vague idea of what he wants to do cannot come up with an effective conceptual framework.

This is more as in certain disciplines, students must determine the conceptual framework that will guide data collection and writing. The creation of this research framework is a period of exploratory reading and writing. The supervisor should direct students to relevant readings. As students explore the territory and its possibilities they need to be encouraged to write freely. The demands during this planning period vary, of course, according to the level of the study—with Ph.Ds being most demanding.

The size and style of a formal research proposal differ significantly according to the level of the degree, and whether the project aims to conduct scientific or technical investigations, prepare a philosophical argument, develop new theoretical frameworks, or produce creative works (such as dance, creative writing or film). The degree of detail in the research proposal also depends to some extent on the student's level of independence. Broadly speaking, however, the proposal might include:

* A statement of the problems or issues and why they are worth investigating
* A description of the study in relation to previous research
* Clear research questions or objectives
* A methodology that can investigate these, including, where relevant, the specification of equipment and facilities requirements
* A feasible timeline, with measurable targets

Unless students have produced a sufficiently thorough written plan it is unwise to give the project the green light. The research proposal needs to be robust enough to allow the student and supervisor to consider the following questions:

* Is the scale of the project appropriate to the level of the degree?
* Is the research truly worth doing? (that is, is it likely to lead to significant advances in knowledge, and will it be useful for the students' career?)

* Is the methodology feasible and manageable?
* Where relevant, is the project likely to receive the approval of the
* University's Ethics Committees? (Does the university have 'ethics committee'?)
* Will adequate resources be available? (for instance, will primary sources be accessible?)
* Will enough data be collected?
* Is the time frame plausible?

The proposal or research plan is the beginning of the sustained argument of the eventual thesis. When the pieces finally fall into place, the project has reached one of its satisfying milestones and the research and writing which lie ahead will seem less of a mystery journey.

5. Encourage Students to Write Early and Often

The kind of writing required in research degrees varies enormously between disciplines. In some fields, the dissertation, thesis or report presents results obtained over long periods of experimentation and analysis. In other fields, the writing is the research (though based on many hours of reading). These differences make it difficult to generalize about effective writing habits.

However, it does seem that, across all disciplines, early writing - on focused writing tasks, not necessarily the thesis chapters themselves - and regular presentation of work to supervisors are beneficial. It helps to prevent a psychological pattern in which 'writing up' becomes more and more daunting as data or ideas are accumulated. A vicious cycle can be established in which the student postpones writing because of the enormity of the task, continues to gather data or do more reading, and thus adds to the looming mountain of intractable material.

For most students, a literature review is a good place to start.

Students usually do a good deal of reading in the first stage of their research, in order to locate their project in the forest of literature. In this area, writing can begin virtually from day one. Students can be encouraged not only to take notes on their reading, but also to prepare brief critical summaries in a form that can be readily incorporated into their theses. Of course, their understanding and judgments will develop as they explore further, and their initial thoughts may need to be thoroughly revised or discarded. But the effort will not be wasted; a record of progress can be a valuable resource. And the good habit of producing succinct and focused writing will be established. For instance, I usually start my Ph.D. students off by first giving them a whole textbook in the related area, and then asking them to summarize it for me. This way they are being groomed into the art of summarizing what they read, as well writing about it.

6. Initiate Regular Contact and Provide High Quality Feedback

Frequent and regular contact between the supervisor and the student is crucial to effective completion of a supervised work. With the availability of Internet services now many students prefer to be supervised 'online', e.g. by sending their chapters to the supervisor's email. This is not the best way. The physical presence of the student within the space of the supervisor creates greater rapport and communication between them and ensures effective supervision.

Timely feedback is important in maintaining the momentum of the project and helping it stay on course. The means by which feedback is provided is very much a personal matter for individual supervisors - formal sessions, chats in the lab - but the nature of the feedback is not. Postgraduate students may be understandably sensitive about their developing ideas and draft work can conceal a mass of insecurity and doubt. Not surprisingly, students react adversely to criticism that is delivered unsympathetically or without suggestions

for how they can improve their work. What students value in feedback is confirmation of their success (it is easy to overlook the things that are going well), unambiguous identification of problem areas, and suggestions for how to tackle them.

Feedback can range from very specific comments on particular issues in the research to the occasional friendly reassurance that the project is on track and worthwhile. This is especially important when students encounter practical hurdles in their study or experience personal stresses and strains.

Feedback is a powerful tool in the hands of a good educator. The best feedback will invite, nudge and provoke students into exploring what is possible. This kind of feedback rarely supplies answers, but instead it points students towards discovering things for themselves. Feedback that stretches and extends in this way is necessary for even the best and most independent students. The worst sort of feedback is that which demoralizes, or leaves students totally puzzled about what they should do next. Naturally it is deflating for a student who has worked painstakingly at crafting a thesis chapter to discover that his/her supervisor has only skimmed it or, worse, not read it at all. Some of the guidelines for creating effective feedback situations include the following:

* Where possible, discuss an informal agenda with the student beforehand.
* Arrange your office so that it is a comfortable place to meet. Avoid
* Always check on the student's motivation - look for signs of flagging spirits or fading interest.
* Agree on the length of each session and try to stick to this agreement.
* Prepare for the meeting by re-familiarizing yourself with the project.
* Allow for some informal and wide-ranging exploration of ideas

* Take a record of the key issues and decisions of each supervision session, and provide students with a copy. In addition to being an aide memoire for yourself, these will remind students of the discussion.
* Discuss the timeline ahead and any periods during which you will be unavailable. It's unsettling for the student to learn suddenly that you have left town for one thing or other.
* Settle on a date for the next meeting and agree on the tasks to be undertaken by that time. Although it should be understood that the 'penciled-in' date can be changed, to alter or postpone the meeting will now require some action from either party.
* File copies of all documents relating to the project. It is essential for supervisors to keep an adequate document file on the project. This file is especially important should a colleague be required to take over the supervision at some stage.

7. Inspire and Motivate

The most powerful motivating force in postgraduate research is a conviction that the project is important. Researchers have to be self-starters and self-managers, and the effort of will required over an extended period demands genuine engagement and personal commitment. From the beginning of a project, a supervisor can help a student to understand the significance of what she or he is doing - and frequently reaffirm that significance as the work progresses. Presumably the supervisor is convinced of the importance of the project before taking it on. It may be only a tiny gap in the great map of knowledge that will be filled by this piece of research. Nonetheless, the student contributes to the enterprise in which all researchers are engaged - the advancement of human understanding. To give students a sense of the nobility and excitement of this role is to bestow a gift of considerable value and utility.

Another way of affirming its importance is by engaging with the student's ideas and arguments. The more you do this, the

more you will signal that you regard the student as a colleague (since in fact some of the students are colleagues, teaching either in the same Department or in other universities). Just as you might engage a colleague in vigorous debate at a conference, you can pay a student the compliment of doing the same, once you are sure that she or he is confident enough to handle it and (most importantly) understands the spirit in which the challenge is offered.

Structures, organization, procedural clarity - all of these are very important in research supervision. But unless there is also an engagement of minds and a sense of excitement in intellectual exploration, the research will be a pretty dull business and difficult to keep believing in.

Another practical way of helping students to stay excited about their work is to arrange opportunities - in seminars and at conferences - for them to communicate with others about what they are doing. A vital research seminar programme in a department is a key factor in maintaining motivation and morale among postgraduate students. It requires the regular, active and supportive participation of the academic staff.

Being human, both the student and supervisor are often subjected to personal, professional and life circumstances that could affect the supervision process. But there are ways in which supervisors can assist with these problems, if not solve them, and this will be a further demonstration of a genuine desire to inspire and motivate. For instance:

* Be aware of the interaction between the personal and the academic. If students are struggling, try to ascertain tactfully whether personal problems are interfering with their research. Most students will welcome the opportunity to let you know about these - but you may have to take the initiative.
* Make clear to your students from the beginning that you are

interested and approachable, if they wish to inform you about any non-academic difficulties. Let them know that you will listen sympathetically if they want to talk about a child's illness or an unexpected demand at work.

* Be flexible in your requirements at times of personal stress. Just how flexible to be is a matter of judgment. At times, it may be necessary to get tough with students who use a succession of pseudo-crises to evade the task. But don't be too quick to decide this is the case. Some students experience real crises.
* Be a sympathetic listener, but don't try to act as a counsellor. To do so is exhausting and dangerous if you are not trained in counselling skills. Many experienced teachers develop a warm and sympathetic manner, but also maintain an appropriate detachment. Students are given signals that repeated and intense personal discussions are not invited. You need to know enough to determine your approach to the student's research schedule, and your role is to be generally and genuinely supportive.
* Finally, serious problems require expert help. Know where to refer your students, and, if necessary, help them to make the contact and even the appointment.

8. Carefully Monitor the Final Production and Presentation of the Research

The final push towards submission of the thesis is usually frenetic, as the project moves into a higher gear and the research presentation is given its last polish. During this phase the supervisor adopts a new frame of mind, because now the research needs to be looked at from the perspective of an examiner. Some hard-nosed judgments may need to be made and firm recommendations given.

The first full thesis draft requires a careful reading, focusing on the overall coherence and internal consistency of the argument.

Some last-minute sacrificing or addition of material is also usually necessary. Once this has been done, the next reading can concentrate on detail and general tidying-up. Before submission, supervisors should check that students have attended to all their final suggestions. Departments can improve the chances of successful examination by having all completed research reviewed by a staff panel before it is submitted for examination, which is currently done in many universities in the form of 'internal defense'.

The supervisor is also responsible for recommending appropriate examiners. The criteria for selection vary of course, according to the level of the degree being awarded, but broadly supervisors should recommend examiners who are familiar with or expert in the area, who are likely to be respectful of the approach the student has taken, and who can contribute to the student's career development. All supervisors should be conscious that, in a significant sense, they themselves, their departments, and the University are under examination too.

Supervisors are responsible for pointing out problems in presentation and for assisting students to deal with them. Questions to ask include: Are the chapters, sections and paragraphs numbered consistently and consecutively?

* Is the layout consistent, so that there are no irritating variations?
* Have errors and variations in spelling been eliminated?
* Are the page numbers on the Contents page accurate?
* Is the style of citation and referencing consistent? (It is wise to provide students early on with a style guide approved by the University)
* Are the acknowledgments appropriate?

For most people, completing a research degree is one of their biggest accomplishments in life, and their emotional investment causes stresses and strains. Moments of doubt

can start to appear in the final stages. Even though the vast bulk of the work has been done and (in the supervisor's opinion) little additional work may be necessary, some students nevertheless stall. The supervisor must be a calming and reassuring influence, while at the same time playing the devil's advocate and putting the work through a comprehensive quality assurance audit.

Conclusion

The student-supervisor partnership clearly does not end with submission of the thesis. It continues through the assessment period, the celebration of successful completion, and beyond—for there are possibilities for publishing the work to be discussed and career plans to be considered. The gradual evolution of the partnership to this point is one of the most pleasing and rewarding aspects of academic life in a research university.

References

Asby, E. 1965. 'A contribution to the dialogue on African universities.' *Universities Quarterly,* 20 (1), 70-89. Birmingham: Kogan Page Limited.

Brew, Angela. 2001. Conceptions of Research: A Phenomenographic Study. *Studies in Higher Education,* 26, 3, 271-285,2001

Calma, Angelito. 2007. 'Postgraduate Supervision in the Philippines: Setting the Research Agenda.' *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher,* 16 (1), 91-100.

Cryer, P. 1997. *Handling Common Dilemmas in Supervision.* London: Society for Research into Higher Education.

Delamont, S., Atkinson, P. and Parry, O. 2004. *Supervising the PhD: A Guide to Success.* Maidenhead: SRHE and Open University Press.

Dryden, C. and Jones, A. 1991. *Study of Postgraduate Supervision at the University of Sheffield.* University of Sheffield: Personal Skills Unit.

Eley, Adrian R. and Roy Jennings. 2005. *Effective Postgraduate Supervision—Improving the Student-Supervisor Relationship.* Berkshire: The Open University Press.

James, R. and Baldwin, G. 1999. *Eleven practices of effective postgraduate supervisors.* Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education and The School of Graduate Studies, The University of Melbourne, Australia.

Kamler, Barbara and Thomson, Pat. 2006. *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for supervision.* New York: Routledge.

Lee, A. M. 2007. Developing effective supervisors: Concepts of research supervision. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* SAJHE 21 (4) pp 680-693.

Lessing, A. C. & Schulze, 2003. Lecturers' Experience of Postgraduate Supervision in a Distance Education Context. *SAJHE/SATHO* VOL 17 NO 2 2003, pp. 159-168.

McAlpinbe, Lynn and Amundsen, Cheryl (eds). 2011. *Doctoral Education: Research-Based Strategies for Doctoral Students, Supervisors and Administrators.* New York: Springer.

Phillips, E. M. & Pugh, D. S. 2000. *How to Get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and Their Supervisors,* 3rd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rochford, K. 2003. Hundred per cent successful throughout rates of Master's and doctoral research students. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 17 (3), 217-225.

Stack, E. M. 2008 Reflection on the Supervision of Postgraduate Research in Accounting Department, Paper presented at the Southern African According to Association Conference held on 25-28 June 2008 at Emperor's Palace, Johannesburg [Non-refereed section] Paper: SAAA 10.

Vilkinas, T. 2002. The Ph.D. process: the supervisor as manager. *Education and Training,* 44 (3), 129-137.

Whittle, Jan 1991. *Postgraduate Participation and*

Performance: Research Students and the University of Adelaide. Med Thesis, University of Adelaide, Australia.

Whittle, Jan 1992. 'Research Culture, Supervision Practices and Postgraduate Performance', In *Starting Research: Supervision and Training*, edited by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, pp. 86-107. Brisbane: The Tertiary Education Institute, University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Wisker, G. & Brown, S. (eds) 2001. *Enabling student learning: system and strategies*.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. & Ryan, Y. (eds) 1994. *Quality in postgraduate education*. London: Kogan Page Limited.