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A Reflection of Post-Graduate Supervision Practice: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Effective Student Engagement

Shaun Pather

University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Abstract

There can be no debate of the central role of postgraduate studies to the enterprise of the research university. As we reflect on the past, and into the future of higher education, it is clear that the economic foundations of nations are built on their ability to create new knowledge to research and in turn to transform the same into innovations and resultant societal impact. In this regard postgraduate supervision is integral to the foundation of national knowledge creation. The PhD degree is regarded as the capstone entry point for researchers to formally enter the scientific enterprise and the world of academe. However, research shows that many academics undertake the role of postgraduate supervision without any formal training or orientation to the task at hand. This paper reviews the literature in relation to the challenges in higher education in respect of postgraduate supervision. Using a personal reflective lens the paper highlights the relevance of understanding the locus of disciplinary identity during supervision; the need to embrace plurality in terms of modes of supervision; the importance of knowing the boundaries of power, and how to evade the creation of supervisor dominant relationships; and lastly that simple pragmatic tools can aid and address what is often perceived by the student to be a terrain of extreme complexity.

Keywords: post-graduate supervision, power relations, pragmatism, quality, self-reflection, supervision-styles