JHEA/RESA Vol. 18, No. 2, 2020, pp. 99-129

(ISSN 0851–7762)

Compassionate Imagination and Respect for Student Diversity[1] in Effective Doctoral Supervision in African Universities

Saidah Mbooge Najjuma*

'If it is not working, change something in your behaviour'
(Nieminin 2018: 99)

Abstract

Achieving the purpose of the doctoral journey through productive interaction requires that the student and supervisor engage with each other's intellectual views, which means addressing any challenges posed by the student's diversity. According to Vilakazi (2016), supervisors embrace democratic justice in contributing to society by supervising students, using their expertise to take care of students' rights, enabling deliberative engagement and exposing them to critical learning. This is done through the interaction of voices, cultures, values and perspectives, amidst differences. Yet, engaging with diversity can bring about uncertainty, anxiety and other discomfort (Nieminin and Valcke 2018), which, if not handled well can be detrimental to a student's progress. Identifying, accepting and understanding differences and similarities that exist between individual students and supervisors, to fully utilise their talents and abilities during the supervisory relationship, is an important contribution to knowledge creation. This article explores the notion of compassionate imagination[2] as a catalyst to realising respect for student diversity in effective doctoral supervision.

Keywords: compassionate imagination, students' diversity, doctoral supervision, knowledge creation, African universities

* Department of Social development, Ndejje University, Uganda.
Email: saidahnajjuma@hotmail.com; snajjuma@ndejjeuniversity.ac.ug

Résumé

La réalisation de l'objectif du parcours doctoral par le biais d'une interaction productive exige que l'étudiant et le superviseur débattent des opinions intellectuelles de chacun, ce qui signifie qu'il faut relever tous les défis de diversité posés par l'étudiant. Selon Vilakazi (2016), les superviseurs adoptent l'idée d'une justice démocratique qui contribue à la société en supervisant les étudiants, en utilisant leur expertise pour protéger les droits des étudiants, en permettant une discussion convaincante et en les exposant à un apprentissage critique. Cela se fait par l'interaction des voix, des cultures, des valeurs et des perspectives, au milieu des différences. Pourtant, une discussion sur la diversité peut être source d'incertitude, d'anxiété et d'autres inconforts (Nieminen et Valcke 2018) qui, s'ils ne sont pas bien gérés, peuvent plomber l'étudiant. Identifier, accepter et comprendre les différences et les similitudes qui existent entre certains étudiants et leurs superviseurs, afin d'utiliser pleinement leurs talents et leurs capacités pendant la relation de supervision, reste une contribution importante à la création de connaissances. Cet article explore la notion d'imagination compatissante comme catalyseur pour concrétiser le respect de la diversité des étudiants dans une supervision doctorale efficace.

Mots-clés : imagination compatissante, diversité des étudiants, encadrement doctoral, création de connaissances, universités africaines.

Introduction

Doctoral students differ in many ways – in intellect, character, circumstances, gender, social environments and experiences, among other characteristics – hence, managing student diversity is inevitable in doctoral supervision. Even within a group with similar origins (Maiztegui-Oñate and Santibáñez-Gruber 2008), there are multiple identities. Manathunga (2009) equates diversity to culture in the context of higher education pedagogies. That culture can meaningfully refer to ethnicity, discipline, profession, industry and workplace. In the late 1980s, many academics posited that: 'our conventional idea about culture, although useful in many ways, gave a false impression of homogeneity and unity. *One society, one culture* was the underlying assumption' (Keesing 1987: 161, 1990: 47), and this reasoning seems deceptive.

According to Loomis and Shape, quoted in Norris (2000), experiencing diversity is a common component of the quality education experience to achieve excellence. The treatment of diversity and its place in doctoral supervision are part of the broader debate on social justice, where living

diversity is a necessity in all areas of human interaction. Supervision that is key to doctoral training ought to create a balance between the supervisor and the student so they might work together with a high level of dignity.

Whereas supervisors embrace democratic justice in contributing to society by supervising students, using their expertise to take care of students' rights, enabling deliberative engagement and exposing them to critical learning (Vilakazi 2016), it should be noted that students and supervisors enter the supervisory relationship with unequal knowledge, experience and disciplinary specialisation (DIES/CREST 2018). This requires each to imagine the other's position to build a constructive and productive relationship, enable emotional intellect and ethical deliberation, which Grant (2011), Naussbaum (1998), Waghid (2006) and Vilakazi (2016) have termed 'compassionate imagining'.

The student constructs an identity by entering a community of practice as a novice and by being mentored by this community to become confident in its specific culture and norms. In mentoring the student, the supervisor needs to map out the experience and existing personal, professional skills and competencies of the student in order to plan an approach that can work for both the student and the supervisor. This is vital for the supervision to be effective and for the completion of the doctoral programme to be achieved. Compassionate imagination helps a supervisor reflect on the positive aspects of the supervisory relationship in order to design strategies that will get the best out of such an opportunity, so as to realise the development of a confident researcher, a central aspect in the supervisory process.

This article shares findings and literature about students' understanding of doctoral supervisors' compassionate imagination, the context for doctoral supervisors' exercise of compassionate imagination in respect of students' diversity, and how both deal with the contradictions that arise out of students' diversity.

Problem

Doctoral students and supervisors enter the supervisory relationship with unequal knowledge, experience and disciplinary specialisation (DIES/CREST 2018), among other differences, which challenges their relationship and can be a possible explanation for non-completion of a postgraduate programme, or a longer completion time. Hence, identifying, accepting and understanding the differences and similarities that exist between individual students to fully utilise their talents and abilities during the supervisory relationship is an important contribution to scholarship throughout the

doctoral journey. While supervisors' and students' experiences of doctoral supervision relationship are clearly documented (Waghid 2006, 2010; Vilkinas 2002; Terry 2005; Manathunga and Grant 2011; Kearns et al. 2006; Green and Bowden 2012), studies on how supervisors modify their behaviour to respect students' diversity are not clearly documented, regardless of the fact that managing diversity is receiving more attention in higher education research and specifically in doctoral supervision (Maiztegui-Oñate and Santibáñez-Gruber 2008; NCHE 2013). This article seeks to discuss the question of respect for diversity through the lens of supervisors' compassionate imagination in doctoral supervision.

Objectives

The questions addressed here are:

1. What is the understanding of students of their doctoral supervisors' compassionate imagination in respect of the students' diversity?
2. In which contexts do doctoral supervisors exercise compassionate imagination in view of student diversity?
3. How are contradictions that arise out of student diversity dealt with during the supervisory process?

Methodology

This study is a combination of conceptual and empirical data. It adopted a qualitative approach using exploratory research design. It emerges from the author's participation in the training course for supervisors of doctoral candidates between October 2018 and February 2019, offered by Stellenbosch University, South Africa. For successful completion of the training, the participants were assigned an essay on a topic of interest in their field of research and within the context of the model of higher education. This article is an expansion of the author's preliminary essay and draws on a critical and reflective engagement with the learning materials in the form of video clips, academic publications, other participants' experience-sharing and the author's own ideas, insights, thoughts and reflection.

In addition, eight persons who had completed their PhD between 2015 and 2019, and five supervisors of doctoral candidates, were selected for the study using convenience sampling. In-depth interviews and participant observation were used to gather in-depth experiences of real-life stories (Babie 2004) of supervisory relationships, personal understanding and narratives of lived experiences that portrayed students' understanding of their doctoral supervisors' compassionate imagination; the context for

doctoral supervisors' exercise of compassionate imagination and dealing with issues of students' diversity in doctoral supervision. Analysis was enabled by triangulating all the collected materials creatively, to construct meaning out of the data gathered in relation to respect for students' diversity, presented in the section on findings.

Findings

The results showed that doctoral students and supervisors had a good understanding of compassionate imagination in their interaction in the doctoral process. The context of exercising compassionate imagination varied depending on the supervisor's career trajectory. Students shared their strategies of managing contradictions arising out of their diversity, which they seemed to have underestimated but which actually worked. Supervisors mostly employed flexibility and existing policies to manage their interaction with students.

Participants' Understanding of Supervisors' Compassionate Imagination in Respect of Students' Diversity

A sense of identity can be a source of pride and joy, strength and confidence to a researcher (Sen 1989, in Agarwal, Humphries and Robeyns 2004). This shows that diversity is important in defining one's identity and there is no doubt that a huge part of how a supervisor views a student will be linked to what the supervisor perceives to be the student's diversity. Since individuals have a number of identities that impact on how they relate with others and navigate the world, it appears that diversity is consciously or unconsciously present in supervision, and the response to it takes many forms, which can be satisfying or frustrating for the student. But when students' issues relating to diversity are identified and students are given enough support, the confidence this builds helps them to become researchers in their own right. Responses that indicate participants' understanding of compassionate imagination reflect power differences, support mechanisms, ability, satisfaction, experience and skills:

> We were taught the theories and skills of how to handle the clients, and as a student I wanted to develop a theory that fits my project, but the supervisor always wanted me to use her choice, and she insisted which I resisted. You cannot be somebody else; you have to be your own! I honestly tell you, from there onwards I refer to her as Dr Copy and Paste. (Mega, doctoral graduate, 2016)

The quotation above suggests a conflict of identity formation in the supervisory relationship. The doctoral student is of the opinion that the supervisor should be able to contribute to the development of innovative students who can create change after they graduate, but due to power differences this capability is overshadowed for some students. Thus, the importance for the student of being confident to stand for what s/he feels is right lays a foundation for potential future scientists.

The reponse also validates the statement that supervisors have both institutional authority and disciplinary expertise, which is necessary for them to provide strong supervision, but at the same time this can lead to uneven power relations if these factors work against an open and collaborative relationship. Such a situation can be worsened by students' attitudes towards and fear of authority, and it can constrain students from developing their own identity and greatly slow down the time of completion, since the student may be unsure of when and how to engage with the supervisor, or may decide to drop out of the programme (DIES/CREST 2018).

According to MacIntyre

> a central freedom of higher education would be to initiate a student into inquiry and controversy. This involves two interrelated processes. First, students should be taught to read texts scrupulously and carefully in order for them to arrive at independent interpretive judgments so that they can accept or reject their supervisors' interpretations. Second, students should be taught to subject a text to questioning, that is, to engage in systematic controversy, rivalry or conflicting points of view. (MacIntyre 1990: 231)

This involves thinking actively and carefully exploring situations from multiple perspectives and discussing ideas in an organised manner (Topp 1999: 157).

Although there are barriers to appreciating differences in any human interaction (Najjuma 2015), what is important is for supervisors to listen to the voices of students and then evaluate their own imagination, which may generate some form of understanding that guides the doctoral process. But how about creating a positive relationship between a supervisor and the doctoral student? Some of the responses in the study described doctoral students' realisation of their diversity in regard to compassionate imagination in their supervisors:

> I commend my supervisor because he made me who I am today. In case you came up with a new idea, he would ask you: Did you read it? Do you understand it? Will you be able to defend it? He then helps you to work around it. That way, you will work hard to address those three questions. (Maria, doctoral candidate, 2015)

This narrative relates to building a student's capability to promote the purpose and value of knowledge production, reflected in the quality of supervision that supports a student's pride. The supervisor encouraged critical thinking from the student about her research question. Indeed, when doctoral candidates begin to see the uniqueness of their context alongside their supervisors, it becomes clear that they are able to recognise compassionate imagination in their supervisors, find evidence to defend their position and will be able to learn and trust themselves in respect of their ability, which they will likely communicate with confidence.

Peschl (2006) explores the relevance of utilising students' knowledge as a requirement in doctoral supervision. Embedded in and pre-structured by a particular frame of reference, knowledge receives its meaning and structure from this frame of reference, which includes previous social and cultural experiences. Theories of adult education also respect knowledge creation. This therefore calls for supervisors to consciously guide students in a manner appropriate to their particular context. Further, a student ought to actively participate in receiving feedback to foster transformation of understanding (Najjuma 2016).

In another interview, this respondent explained how a good comment improved her self-esteem:

> My supervisor's final comment was that: 'I like the way you cite and the flow; this really earns you credit and edge. Your chapters flow perfectly well. It depicts professionalism in the field of business management.' (Mo, doctoral graduate, 2015)

We cannot say that students have no issues, but this response partly explains the need for a supervisor to focus on the strength of the student rather than on flaws (Najjuma 2016) to help improve the quality of research. It also reveals a relationship between satisfaction with the supervision and a student being able to complete the research. The capacity to recognise creativity and innovation, give verbal praise and rewards, and discuss important outcomes of completion, are important traits of compassionate imagination. Another participant reported:

> Each time I met my supervisor, before any serious business, he would tell me 'funny' stories around supervisory relationships. They were really many stories. We pondered on these stories, we laughed and you could not fail to learn something. He could briefly inquire about my family and bring any other conversation to make me feel at home. This was possible to build a relationship that could allow me to navigate the process as a colleague. I think that he was trying to find out how different I am. (Doctoral graduate, 2017)

This can be a way of testing the patience of a doctoral student and is illustrative of two things. It shows that supervisors can use narratives to build rapport and enter into the student's world. It also creates a feeling that such a student is able to work with a supervisor who understands her/him well. Such a supervisor will relate to and more practically engage with the student to get the best out of him or her. Telling anecdotes relates to 'bounded intellectual intimacy' (McMorland et al. 2003: 5) – relating the self to an understanding of other people, which comes about in a non-intellectual, embodied, dialogical or conversational manner, which itself is an embodied, temporally unfolding, responsive form of understanding. This is, however, not an individual achievement, but developed and negotiated with others in the circumstances of its use and seems to stress that students can be given the opportunity to talk about their 'other business', which can be a learning ground for the supervisor to identify the gap for exercising compassionate imagination. However, some supervisors reflected an inclination to the traditional model of supervision, as shown below.

In one of the higher education institutions I visited for the study, a programme for mentoring doctoral students to progress well on their doctoral journey was in place and administered by the graduate school. One facilitator, however, wrote a note to the director, expressing discontent and questioning the objective, and in a way sought to maintain the traditional model (one-to-one) of supervision uncritically: '... you call our students and you empower them. Instead of us telling them what to do, they appear to be telling us how to supervise them. I am not going to accept that, a student must obey what I tell her/him or else they will not be able to finish' (message from a doctoral supervisor).

This partly shows resistance to change on the part of the supervisor, and the supervisor's reluctance to accept innovation by the students, which undermines the efforts of higher education to create an independent researcher in the student. It definitely illustrates a problem with diversity that may affect a students' identity formation. It is important to note that this impacts on an individual private space, where there may be a lack of accountability, a transmissive approach to education, power issues and paternalistic dependence (Parker 2009; Manathunga 2009; Pearson and Kayrooz 2004; MacKinnon 2004).

Waghid (2006) similarly argues that it is problematic to understand learning as a process in which students are supposed to know what they want, and where supervisors are simply engaged to meet the needs of students and to satisfy their demands. He observes that this ignores a primary reason for doing

a doctorate degree, which is to explore unintended and unexpected possibilities and in the process find out what one's needs are – a process in which supervisors play a crucial role, because their experience is integral to this discovery.

This frame of reference can be challenged if students reflect and step out of their normal way of thinking via the process of radical questioning. Fernandez-Duque, Bair and Posner (2000) refer to the process of questioning one's own knowledge as metacognition – the awareness of one's own knowledge and the ability to understand, control, manipulate and regulate individual cognitive processes (Najjuma 2015; Livingston 1997). The Freire method also stimulates reflection and critical thinking processes and is an effective tool in empowerment (Freire 1970).

On the other hand, supervisors' responses reveal other understandings of compassionate imagination in respect of students' diversity, as in the following comment.

> Understanding that my student is different in terms of sex, experience and culture – in a way, like I myself. We have the same rights. So, as a supervisor, you must consider diversity natural and own[3] the challenge. (Supervisor, fifteen years of experience)

Another comment, from a supervisor with four years of experience, echoed the sentiment that some sort of respect for human dignity and trying to address the needs of your doctoral student holistically is important.

And yet others said:

> I think that it is about giving the student liberty to explore her/his abilities, in their own ways, but with some guidance. If you allow much liberty, the challenges can be many. (Supervisor, five years of experience)

> It means appreciating diversity in terms of expectations and reality. What I know is that the future wants trained individuals with skills pertinent to the changing needs of society, no matter what approach is applied. (Supervisor, eight years of experience)

> I think that it is the gap between contextualisation and expectation, over which the supervisor decides to create spaces through which learning can take place. You can make some assumption of what might happen during the doctoral journey, but you continue to supervise, while at the same time being sensitive to those assumptions. (Supervisor, fifteen years of experience).

> It is about respect and tolerance that is hidden in the recognition of the student as different and the hope that your supervision will make the student grow into the research field with their identity. (Supervisor, twelve years of experience).

These responses reveal a lot about the supervisors' appreciation of diversity, in recognising cultural rights, abilities and sensitivity to differences, and present a balanced observation. They reflect the importance of sociocultural and human rights, dignity and students' cognitive ability, which is indicative of a compassionate imagination, even when its significance may be minimal. They show the need to reflect on and/or discuss the expectations of the students with them so as to address dilemmas that might arise out of diversity and the matching of expectations.

Frick argues that:

> in contemporary neoliberal formulations of supervisors, little of the complexity of culture is recognised. Supervision is cast as a mainly cognitive undertaking between rational, disembodied minds, where the supervisor is expected to proceed smoothly. It is a project to be managed, once roles and expectations have been agreed upon and Gant charts are in place. While these dynamics can be difficult to navigate, for both the student and supervisor, and offer challenges to how institutions think about supervision and who can do it, they also offer possibilities for transformation of actors in supervision in diverse formations. (Frick 2010: 89)

Nussbaum (2003) argues that there are dangers in any act of imagining, and we should not let these particular dangers lead us to admit defeat prematurely. It is in the work of imagination that we can challenge ourselves again and again. This implies that students have developed capabilities to imagine alternative possibilities and that supervisors have succeeded in establishing spaces in which meanings can be shared, understood, reflected on and contested. Waghid (2006) refers to this as 'freedom'.

Context for doctoral supervisors' exercise of compassionate imagination in view of students' diversity

Supervisors need to ensure that their students' expectations are met and encourage them to participate in some form of intellectual conversation. This will enable the students' emotional intellect and ethical deliberations inclined to the content and quality of their relationship, and help them build identity in their field. When asked what acts of supervision are considered sensitive towards diversity, students echoed some of their supervisors' best practices, while supervisors indicated some contentious acts of compassionate imagination that squeezed them between two options. One respondent commented, 'I believe that the growth I have achieved in the field of research was because I worked with my supervisor who complemented my education experience'. He recalled the supervisor saying, 'The study area is slightly new to both of us, I will be learning with you. (Excited) I will be learning with my student'. (John, doctoral candidate, 2017)

This shows some effort by the supervisor to create the space for a mutual relationship and learning with the doctoral student, as opposed to imposing a vertical relationship, and reveals the student's satisfaction. It also shows a commitment to lifelong learning by the supervisor. So, both were able to share the disciplinary knowledge, generic skills and research skills needed to complete the task and forge ways to flourish in a new field of study. In this way, both the supervisor and the student were able to negotiate the system, procedures and resources, and access each other's expertise, which would contribute to attaining the vision and goal of doctoral training. In other words, it shows that the supervisor tried to shape a confident researcher by building trust, providing mutual support and fostering sharing of knowledge in the student which enabled the student to complete the degree.

The supervisor ought to create conditions whereby students truly learn, which means that the following should be in place:

> encouraging students to imagine situations beyond the parameters of their research interests, where things would be better – that is, to be caring towards students; democratising interaction, whereby students can take the initiative to imagine possibilities not otherwise thought of – that is, to be responsible towards students; and connecting with the student's story-telling with the aim of discovering untapped possibilities – that is, to be respectful towards students. (Waghid 2006: 431).

However, this threshold of learning may compromise the goal of supervision, when in considering doctoral student's diversity, in case of multiple students, each with their differences, can be time consuming and challenging on the part of the supervisor amidst multiple roles and responsibilities. Reflecting on how supervisors used their understanding of students' diversity to exercise compassionate imagination, one supervisor commented that:

> I was assigned to assist the student develop a concept paper, in preparation for her registration for the doctoral programme. She chose me as her supervisor, and guided by the policy, we both agreed on each other's expectation and work methods. I tried to work within the limits of that understanding. I made her my friend and I think she forgot where to stop. At a time when she was expected to develop a conceptual framework, she told me; now that part has defeated me. You will do that for me. I think she was abusing my compassion! So, I asked her, will you now consider to have done your PhD? Please go and revisit the guidelines. She got lost for three months, and after she came back and we re-embarked on the project. (Supervisor, eight years' experience)

This is indicative of a student abusing a supervisor's strength by using the space created to exploit her and failing to effect personal growth. This brings us to reflect on the question of whether the supervisor and the student as friends can be able to respect each other professionally and how this can be dealt with to complete the doctoral journey. Guiding a student academically and providing emotional support may mean that professional expertise competes directly with the student's ability, which may interfere with academic novelty. It calls for keeping the relationship professional, even when a student and the supervisor are friends. It also requires the supervisor to divide herself to help the student academically and emotionally, which Green and Bowden (2012: 78) meant 'looking after both the whole parcel'. Kearns et al. (2006) writes that such emotional swings are discussed explicitly at induction sessions for research degree candidates. The expectation is that the research journey will begin for candidates with a sense of personal and career consequences of success.

Considering that the supervisor is directly involved in influencing and determining the agency[4] of the student, it is essential that guidelines that support this process are clearly stated and agreed on. In this regard, Ndejje University in Uganda has a research policy which stipulates the supervisors' responsibilities and recognises diversity. In line with Uganda's National Council for Higher Education guidelines, the university has set in place policies for the supervision of graduate students, a PhD handbook and guidelines for marking examinations, which state how students should be handled. There is a communications policy that stipulates who communicates to whom, when and where. Therefore, supervisors are expected to perform their roles within the limits of the existing policies, irrespective of the fact that the university has no specific policy on managing diversity.

According to Vilkinas (2002), the supervisor assumes different roles during the doctoral process, to enable a student to become a good researcher. Nieminen also contends that:

> one of the most important responsibilities of supervisors is to change roles during the course of a study from director, to guide, to critical friend, to internal auditor and to co-author. The aim (particularly at the doctoral level of studies) is to help the candidate to evolve from a dependent novice researcher to an expert, autonomous researcher (Nieminen: 132)

Table 1 reflects Brown and Atkins's view of the supervisor's role.

This entails recognising and addressing diversity issues such as cultural concerns, intellectual abilities and money issues that could conflict with the quality of supervision and motivation to complete the doctorate. So, putting diversity at the centre of the doctoral supervisory relationship

promotes confidence and independence among the students and allows easy identification of professional direction to focus on the doctoral project. It supposes that respect for a student'sdiversity is inevitable when diversity is accepted. Brown and Atkins (1988) further argue that:

> given a wide range of possible roles, perhaps, it is not surprising that differences in opinion can exist. Areas of potential disagreement exist at every stage of research study. What seems likely, however, is that within a general orientation, supervisors move from one role to another, which may be triggered by the personality of a doctoral student.

Table 1: Role of the supervisor

Director	- determining topic and method, providing ideas
Facilitator	- providing access to resources or expertise, arranging fieldwork
Advisor	- helping to resolve technical problems, suggesting alternatives
Teacher	- of research techniques
Guide	- suggesting timetable for writing up, giving feedback on progress, identifying critical path for data collection
Critic	- of design of enquiry, of draft chapters, of interpretations of data
Freedom giver	- authorises student to make decisions, supports student's decisions
Supporter	- gives encouragement, shows interest, discusses student's ideas
Friend	- extends interest and concern to non-academic aspects of student's life
Manager	- checks progress regularly, monitors study, gives systematic feedback, plans work
Examiner	- e.g. internal examiner, mock Vivas, interim progress, reports, supervisory board member

Source: Brown and Atkins (1988)

The roles highlighted in Table 1 describe the different angles and interpretations of compassionate imagination in managing students' diversity, which necessitates that the supervisors balance the student's personal, intellectual and social identity. It also underlines the necessity to seek feedback on supervision performance, getting the required skills and then to try them out.

But if we are to critically address student diversity, it can be assumed that a supervisor who attempts compassionate imagination can be expected to provide extra attention in terms of care, time and empathy to enhance their students' competencies in order to guarantee their completion. However, a student with high mental ability and a slow learner cannot be handled the same way. In fact, inter-culturality, according to Maiztegui-Oñate and

Santibáñez-Gruber (2008), demands that the supervisor modifies his/her system of teaching to facilitate the academic achievement of students with diverse origins. Where few variations exist, such as supervising a fellow staff member, the doctoral supervisor might need to make effective use of existing policies.

Dealing with contradictions arising out of students' diversity in doctoral supervision

The context in which learning takes place during graduate supervision is critical in determining the quality of the process as well as the outcome. It also influences the power dynamics, and the relationship between the supervisor and the student (Frick 2010). Grant and Lei (2001) discuss power within supervision as pertaining to two aspects: structured unequal power based on institutional position, and power based on a Foucauldian viewpoint in which power is something that exists because both are capable of acting upon each other. Given the possible mix of power differentials within the supervisory relationship, there is the opportunity for miscommunication that could lead to zones of uncertainty or even conflict. A study by Rudd (1985) shows that the reason for non-completion or late completion of a doctoral degree usually lies in a number of issues, including personal problems outside research, which tend to travel in company with other problems more directly connected to research.

When asked how they dealt with contradictions arising out of diversity during the supervisory process, doctoral students and supervisors indicated that they had adopted some strategies that worked. While this article does not focus on the politics of academic supervision, we argue that the nature and execution of doctoral supervision entails some political implications.

Politics of academic supervision

In-depth interviews with supervisors and students revealed some disquieting remarks that question how best to exercise compassionate imagination. Despite the reality that supervisors and students enter a relationship with unequal knowledge, experience and disciplinary specialisation, the responses revealed that, in most cases, supervisors did not decide on which students they wanted to supervise. Often, strong and weak students are assigned to supervisors. There are students who effectively hold supervisors at gunpoint, demanding to complete their degree even when they are not due for graduation. There was also an issue of the commoditisation of higher education where students paid to get their PhD. Some responses observed that a PhD is not for academic dwarfs, while another doctoral supervisor

commented that: 'It is okay if you have got a brilliant student but these are few and far between. With most students you have to keep up to date, so you are sure they have got it right or they won't get through the thesis examination' (Bøgelund 2015: 48).

It is important to note that supervisors are gifted differently, and, therefore, different styles of exercising the supervisory role exist. Terry (2005) documented the different styles as laissez-faire, pastoral, directional and contractual, and as entailing high structure and high support or low support and low structure. It suggests that supervisors should study these supervisory styles and decide how to use them creatively in advancing their students' progress.

However, the aspect of operational flexibility within the time of engagement must be considered, to synchronise with the needs of the student, which is an important aspect of compassionate imagination. For example, in the case of Joseph quoted later in this section, there was the potential need for the supervisor to temporarily engage in the 'pastoral' supervisory style when the student experienced a financial diversity.

Now, when students think that supervision does not work, do they see the problem as theirs, the supervisor's or that of institutional practice? The PhD is regarded as crucial for improving quality in the university. At undergraduate level, students are often positioned as knowledge-tellers, but at graduate level they take on a very different identity – that of knowledge-creators. This is a fundamental shift in identity and relationship to those who are already working in the field (DIES/CREST 2018), which both students and supervisors need to appreciate. It is also important to note that supervisors do not come from a vacuum, they are also a product of mentorship and systems that may not have respected diversity. Institutionalising compassionate imagination is more likely to be successful when university policies and procedures tend towards managing diversity.

Ugandan universities increasingly engage with diversity through policies and practices, managing multicultural student associations, as well as diverse academic and non-academic staff, and the theories and worldviews expounded by different faculties (Izama and CCFU 2013). Ndejje University specifically recruits staff and admits students of all religious denominations, which indicates tolerance and a respect for diversity, and supports interactions across differences, which is a mechanism that upholds diversity. It embraces phrases such as 'creating knowledge society' (Castells 1991), 'knowledge economy' (Jessop 2007), 'talentism is the new capitalism' (Schwab 2012).

Dealing with Contradictions Arising out of Student Diversity

Experiencing diversity is a common component of a high-quality educational experience. To achieve excellence, it is also imperative to achieve diversity (Loomis and Sharpe, in Norris 2000). Doctoral supervision is 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 and Manathunga 2011). Engaging with diversity can bring about uncertainty, anxiety and other discomfort (Nieminin and Valcke 2018), which are sometimes hidden in the absence of agreed procedures on how to progress, and which pose contradictions that put both the student and supervisor at odds, not knowing how to proceed. As the journey continues, the complex mix of excitement and anxiety is punctuated by periods of frustration, even despair (Kearns et al. 2006), which should be progressively addressed. Since it is a journey into the unknown, it is important for both parties to be aware of mutual expectations, which can be easily accessed with some means of compassionate imagination, as this student explained:

> I was fortunate that from the beginning, I was allocated a very supportive professor who was following me over my progress. In the middle of my PhD journey, my progress was constrained financially and I was almost dropping out of the programme. Here, my professor could not see any more of my zeal to complete. He was keen to understand why I was regressing. He invited me and he spent a whole day with me wanting to understand why I was not progressing. He asked me very many questions about my family, my job and generally my background. After sharing with him, he inquired about my monthly income. Then he asked me to convert that amount into US dollars which was not even measuring to USD 350. I saw tears coming out of his eyes. He asked me, Jose, how do you manage, but he immediately noticed I was a real struggler who needed assistance!! He picked his phone called other officers, after which he printed a form and encouraged me to fill, sign and submit to the Research and Capacity Development Department. Within two days, I had received an email calling me to get some sustenance allowance and the department covered half of my fees. This is how my supervisor saved me from dropping out of school at an old age. He continued to give me psychological and academic mentoring that enabled me complete my doctoral journey which at one time was represented by a zigzag curve! (Jose, doctoral graduate, 2019)

This example suggests that good communication is a way of exercising compassionate imagination to address a contradiction in the student's diversity. It is a skill that the supervisor in this instance used tactfully, to provide psychological and social support within professional limits, in

addition to other roles and responsibilities. It shows that a supervisor who exercises compassionate imagination acts as a listener, canvasser, counsellor and enables a co-operative relationship with a doctoral student. The student is also expected to adhere to ethical and legal requirements to minimise negativity and the impact of the feelings of liminality,[5] and in the case that a liminal state occurs, a student is guided in a constructive and healing manner on how best to mitigate this.

In this respect, supervisors can consciously avoid using offensive language, seek to understand acceptable terms and deliberately take care of non-verbal insinuations, gestures and subtle prejudices, and be non-judgemental when contradictions arise. This is because such indications may imply non-acceptance and could make the relationship difficult, threaten cognition and jeopardise completion. Moreover, when supervision creates tension between a student's diversity and ethics, this goes against the universal values in Uganda's 1995 Constitution. The supervisor's responsibility should be to ensure that the students' doctoral journey unfolds as an enriching and insightful experience that will cultivate an identity, as well as values and approaches to personal and professional development (Frick et al. 2010). It should not be a miserable experience, as in this example reported by May, a doctoral graduate:

> I practically dropped off the programme, when my supervisor made life difficult. He jokingly warned me that people 'from elsewhere were most likely not to complete', because they have little acceptance from existing supervisors. Indeed, I did not know he was talking about himself! As I packed my bag, a colleague, who passed through the same school, and now working as a staff asked me, 'Can you please allow me to talk to you for a minute before you go?' I said it is okay. Then he asked me. 'What is your goal of doctoral studies?' I explained. He asked again. 'Does what you study meet your goal?' I replied, Yap. He told me that 'things seem difficult and are likely to be more difficult as you progress, but why not focus on your goal?' He shared his personal experience. … 'What I wanted is to get that expertise from my supervisor to myself. I GOT IT! Now I am Dr Col., I am now an expert in my field. That is what you need to focus on.' This dialogue helped me a lot to redefine my focus. It was a transformational moment in my doctoral studies and I finally completed. (May, doctoral graduate, 2019)

It seems clear that the student's background was a limiting factor on the doctoral journey. So, the student perhaps needed to consistently rethink her goal and ask herself, 'Will I be affected at any one point on this doctoral journey?'. This would ensure that any foreseeable negative effects would be identified. However, frustration, fear and uncertainty are inevitable in managing diversity in the doctoral process and focusing on the goal of

completion could be a better option for doctoral students to complete their doctoral journey. It also shows that students are likely to get solutions to non-completion out of sharing experiences with colleagues.

A tendency of supervisors and students to use ethnicity, identity and appearance as a yardstick to determine the ability to interact in terms of supervision, reflecting prejudices in relation to some groups, is a direct result of a biased conception of diversity. Sometimes, it is clearly indicated in how students refer to their supervisors. Some students describe their professors using nicknames that depict a myriad of attitudes, such as 'I hope today I will be able to see madam short!' Similarly, the supervisor could criticise the student who takes time to understand, in terms of ethnicity. Each of the two might even inquire what tribe the other is from before they attempt to meet.

In Uganda, common ethnic prejudices are phrased, such as: 'We cannot wait for Karamoja to develop', 'Basoga tribesmen are big-headed', 'the Baganda from eastern side of Kampala are night dancers', among others. Uganda has fifty-two ethnic groups, each with culture and language differences. The official language, though, is English, which helps to avoid using such differences as an instrument of isolation at a public institution such as Ndejje University. Although there may be no policy at a university level on terms that are offensive or acceptable, the best plan for respecting students' diversity is for supervisors to let the students share with them their preferred identities and for the supervisor to execute professional ethics. Manathunga (2009) argues for the need to ensure morally justified pedagogic interactions that are devoid of narcissism, which he calls 'compassionate rigour'. Otherwise, reluctance, failure to complete, a weak supervisory relationship and drop-out will continue to be experienced by doctoral candidates, due to the failure of their supervisors to embrace compassionate imagination as an aspect of their effective supervision.

In various ways, both student affairs professionals and faculty have a responsibility to shape campus environments that ensure equity of access as well as social and academic success (Dancy 2010). This reflects the recognition that, in the twenty-first century, the focus of schools and corporations needs to be on 'living diversity', including the diversity of thinking systems (Rosado 2006). The confusion and incoherence associated with this level of learning holds potential for new meaning that should be valued. As architects of knowledge and learning environments, universities play a pivotal role in influencing the ways in which diversity is lived and promoted (Clegg et al. 2006).

Further, Bartlett and Elliott (2008: 66) argue that:

> Social engagement often engenders contexts that are appropriate for valuable change and learning, as these contexts create the space to engage with others who think differently, thus providing the opportunity for actively and developmentally transforming practices. Social engagement provides a forum for the application of skills learned and the possibility of problem–solving in their own world situations where accountability and relevance are required in formal study.

However, participation in a PhD programme in a different cultural environment ought to increase a student's independence, as well as the ability to cope with diverse situations as a competent researcher, as this student explained:

> For us who studied outside the country, diversity of perspective was a very serious issue. If you want to present the reality on ground such as, in my case, the existence of or non-existence of the media law in my country, the supervisor wants to evaluate your contribution based on what he/she saw on the news bulletin. (Isaac, doctoral graduate, 2018)

This diversity of opinion is obviously and partly driven by the liberalisation of the media, which has little urge to produce credible information following government deregulation, and where ensuring accountability may be complex. However, it could be addressed by a supervisor interrogating the student's context before drawing any conclusion. Isaac's situation is one that most international doctoral students are likely to face, given that their supervisor may be unfamiliar with the student's context. Waghid (2006) reports on a similar South African experience:

> Black students responded more favourably to a black university professor than to white supervisors; some students could not help feeling that they were being racially discriminated against on the ground of being a coloured with limited opportunities to move into the sphere of higher education which was reserved mostly for whites. In another study, race manifested as a silent category of social segmentation whereby there was considerable reluctance to dismantle the social order organised around that segregation. (Waghid 2006: 428)

Another student, when asked how she was progressing with her supervisor, responded: 'He is neither interested nor interested' (personal communication with a seasoned supervisor). This response is indicative of a frustrated individual who is about to drop out of a programme. However, when space for sharing experiences is opened up, such students would develop the confidence to speak up and write their own story and the supervisor would arguably evaluate the work of the student respectfully (Green 1988).

This bring us to the question of 'equality of what', put forward by Sen (1979), which could relate to accessibility to opportunities such as education and resources and respect for difference, among others. Dealing with contradictions here necessitates positive discrimination in terms of giving 'extra' to students with multiple diversities. This is where compassionate imagination supports agency in order for the programme to be completed. It calls for students to be mentored on how to negotiate for a stress-free learning space, and to engage in spaces for peer support, such as group forums, social media and question-and-answer dialogues in order to receive constructive feedback and mutual support.

For supervision to be effective, it must be an involving process that concentrates on meeting the needs of the students' programme and those of the administrative structures (Benaquisto 2000; Egan et al. 2009). The supervisor cannot be the same from day one of supervision up to the last day, since the process revolves around feelings, fears, emotions, surprises, etc, which defines the supervisor's and student's relationship. Green (1988) argues that, 'Students and supervisors are not merely functionalities in an instrumental system geared towards turning out products which meet the standards of quality control, but participants in a highly esteemed academic enterprise where they mutually assert their autonomy and prepare the ground for constant communicative interaction.' Reflecting on contradictions, still, one student commented:

> When I sensed the problem, I politely talked to the dean who engaged the supervisor about a misunderstanding that had constrained our progress. My supervisor did not come to know I was involved. (Clare, doctoral graduate, 2016)

Other responses were:

> When I got frustrated with the supervisor telling me to change from qualitative to quantitative four times, I simply threw the book at the supervisor's table and went out. After several weeks I receive a call from his administrator who told me that your book is here why don't you pick it? I told him that the professor does not understand me. He also agreed that it is true the professor did not understand me and referred me to George—another supervisor. When I went to George, before we could begin any business, he asked: 'Do you think you are beautiful?'. I simply moved out of his office and went to the director to request for another supervisor. (Josu, doctoral candidate, 2015)

> On three meetings, my supervisor could not accept me to use a concept in my research topic. But I simply kept quiet because I did not want to fight with him, even when I knew it was good for me, since it would widen my areas for publishing. The next time I presented what he wanted and also proposed a theory which was not familiar to him, discussed it and he was

> convinced it would be suitable for the study. After making corrections, I went back to him and I included the rejected concept in the title. So, he shouted … Again this word? I convinced him that the theory would not work well when that concept was not measured. He responded, 'Are you sure? Okay then, we can include it'. So I was excited that my method worked. (Agnes, doctoral graduate, 2017)

In these two contexts, the role of middle-level managers, such as deans and directors, in handling contradictions is evident, or else doctorateness[6] hangs in the balance. Further, dialogues, active listening and flexibility are important ingredients of a doctoral process. It is therefore imperative to understand that respect for students' diversity helps to realise the potential in candidates. Opening up spaces for articulating expectations and negotiating the relationship and context allows the stakeholders to dialogue on the critical issues of doctorateness, and in this way to address diversity.

DIES/CREST (2018) recommend a memorandum of understanding.[7] According to the website *Enhancing Postgraduate Environments* (2017), the aim of a memorandum of understanding is to guide the student and supervisor to develop a sound and productive working relationship that is the result of an open discussion in which the expectations and preferences of both are clarified. By deliberating on different perspectives of rights and the challenges that come thereof, the necessity for effective management of diversity in doctoral supervision is sought. A memorandum of understanding will need to be revisited and probably reviewed during the doctoral process to cater for unforeseeable aspects of interaction, in order to develop a shared understanding. It may also include ways to deal with potential disputes or differences of opinion, roles and responsibilities, skills and knowledge, intellectual property, patents and progress and how to find help.

To successfully address issues of diversity, it is important to prepare doctoral students with a variety of skills in an induction process. At Ndejje University, for instance, students, among others, ought to know the policies that concern graduate education highlighted earlier, in order to negotiate successful supervision and completion of their doctoral studies. This also relates to the requirement of ethics on the part of the supervisor from the students' point of view. It is important to analyse similarities and differences between the student and supervisor and the different roles that supervisors have to play to meet the challenges posed by students' diversity.

Banks (2008), Sleeter and Grant (2003) and Sleeter and Stillman (2005) in Maiztegui-Oñate and Santibáñez-Gruber (2008) argue for treating diversity in a way that goes beyond mere co-existence of diverse communities in their own distinct niche, and call for an approach that appreciates diversity

as an asset, as something that can benefit society and allows us to understand multiple perspectives of reality. Related to this, the Uganda government put measures in place, such as the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, established by the Uganda National Council for Higher Education, and wording in Uganda's 1995 Constitution, which emphasise expanding the functional capacity of educational structures and reducing inequalities of access to education and equality in access to education. The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda especially defines education, regardless of levels, as an entitlement for all Ugandans, recognises diversity in the form of ethnicities, minority and vulnerable groups and prohibits discrimination in the education sector. All in all, achieving doctorateness is often a consequence of extended collaboration between the candidate and the supervisor (Trafford and Leshem 2009). Passing over the threshold of doctorateness also requires that factors such as diversity are detected and addressed.

Discussion

Respect for student diversity examined from a broader perspective would seem to be a major factor in a balanced understanding of the student/ supervisor relationship, as they decide to work together on a common goal of doctorateness. Creating this space may entail listening and deepening understanding, exchange of information, sharing personal stories and experiences, expressing perspectives in culturally acceptable ways, clarification of viewpoints, developing collective solutions to challenges, agreeing on common values, reflecting on assumptions and learning to unlearn. Indeed, this is so because there are clear differences in terms of competencies between the supervisor and the student (DIES/ CREST 2018). ‘

> The doctoral process, which views knowledge as a process and product of the interaction of voices, is concerned with the construction and transformation of understanding through the tension between multiple perspectives and opinion, meaning is thus created in the interaction between the supervisor and the student. (Dysthe, Mare and Westerheim 2006: 302)

This creates a responsible workspace in an environment where diversity is respected. Some supervisors have wide experience of supporting diverse students, whereas others are in the process of acquiring experience. For some novice supervisors, learning has just started, as the results show.

The data shows that doctoral students' understanding of compassionate imagination from the supervisors was based on their experiences of satisfaction and frustration, which also depended on the career trajectory of the supervisors. It is important to note that the doctoral supervision process trains a student in a range of skills and attitudes that will be needed during

various engagements, such as research, in academia and in other fields outside academia. This requires supervisors to imagine the implications of the diversity factors for the student, while modelling ways in which they would like their students to engage with scholarship by building the confidence and ability of the students to contribute to scholarship.

The qualities of a supervisory relationship that reflects compassionate imagination, in this study, were related to the supervisor's experience, commitment, patience, sensitivity, respect for human dignity, understanding and tolerance. Small acts of compassionate imagination, such as trust, counselling and praise, had a big impact on students' completion of their doctoral programme. However, students who were wholeheartedly embraced by their supervisors despite the diversity factor, found it difficult to draw the line between supervision and friendship. Respect for students' diversity is important in building identity of a student as a prospective supervisor. The supervisor ought to reflect on some elements proposed by Nieminen and Valcke (2008), such as utilising values and experiences that promote respect for diversity, so as to improve the outcome of their supervision relationship as they immerse students into professional culture, understanding students' differences through discourses, and employing friendly supervision styles, such as humour, to mention a few.

The data shows the kind of strategies students adopted to deal with contradictions that arose due to their diversity, including engaging with middle-level managers, use of their tacit skills, appreciating and embracing differences and sharing experiences with friends, among others. The supervisors, on the other hand, mostly embraced flexibility, application of experience and the use of existing policies to manage their interaction with doctoral students.

The context for building realistic relationships during doctoral supervision brings meaning to doctorateness. In appreciating diversity, the supervisor reveals strength of character and an all-round conscious person, which will improve their results as a supervisor. Vilkinas (2002) suggests that 'a good supervisor has research knowledge and interpersonal skills. They need to be innovative, creative problem solvers, resource oriented, work focused, decisive and dependable.' Here, a supervisor can be viewed as someone who can interact well and lead students to completion. The only constant is that a PhD is a learning experience that primarily unfolds with a supervisory relationship. A more holistic, integrated and reflexive approach on the part of supervisors, students and the institution could enhance and enrich many aspects of the PhD process and its outcome for everyone concerned.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Diversity is a form of human experience, while the doctoral process is a form of immersion that offers supervisors and doctoral students an invaluable learning and life-changing connection. Diversity must be taken into account when planning the doctoral journey, and overlooking diversity during the doctoral process should be considered unethical.

A good deal could be done in growing respect for students' diversity by providing supervisors with enough training on aptitude and attitudes. Supervisors ought to be trained at an early stage, before they accept the job, to enable them to take a sincere interest in the growth of students for the future of the research profession, and to appreciate students' diversity issues. The training may cover the time over which research occurs, the role of the supervisor, intellectual property, values and practices that support honesty, integrity and reliability, supervisory qualities, standards of quality, and recognition of when to ask for help, among other matters.

In Africa, efforts are being made by various capacity-building institutions, such as DIES/CREST at Stellenbosch and the Council for Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa in Dakar, to train doctoral supervisors and doctoral mentors and to help them build self-confidence, so that they may lay the foundation for a good supervision relationship in the first few interactions with the student and thereby achieve the goal of completing a doctorate. Additionally, supervisors may make a commitment to train themselves about professional ethics and effective monitoring strategies, and continuously build their skills in research.

To manage diversity in effective supervision, it is important to have in place a written agreement that outlines the roles, values, commitments, expectations and responsibilities. A memorandum of understanding between the student and supervisor may be developed to document the supervisory relationship. Some good practices of treating diversity need to be shared, which can be benchmarked to make the doctoral supervision enjoyable. By and large, these measures will encourage collegiality and the student will feel that she/he is being treated respectfully. This way, all students who enrol would be motivated to put some effort into their studies and would at least have the chance to succeed with sufficient abilities to fully engage in the world of research.

Respect for students' diversity in doctoral supervision seems to be a complex reality, as examined in this article. However, the development of a confident researcher is a central goal of the graduate process. Therefore, a co-ordinated approach, such as creating a work plan that would allow students

and supervisors to monitor academic performance and progress, is necessary so as to make learning more exciting. This can be enhanced if both student and supervisor adopt a completion mindset and find the best strategy to ensure timely and successful completion, irrespective of the diversity factor. This can be enhanced by documenting good and bad practices of managing student diversity in doctoral supervision and sharing recommendations, to foster the student's general wellbeing and intellectual growth. In addition, supervisors ought to promise their availability and supervise by example. This calls for honesty about their capabilities when dealing with students.

In order to deal with the challenges of diversity, improving the attitudes of supervisors and students through awareness of how diversity can be managed is important. This is possible through creating forums for sharing supervisory experiences that can be documented and published for wider sharing. It is also necessary to update data on diversity, especially on approaches that respect diversity in doctoral supervision, which can work as training materials during refresher engagements.

Mentoring supervisors is highly recommended so that they may develop new competencies in managing diversity in supervision. Therefore, supervisors must be prepared to enrol for mentoring programmes, such as those offered at Stellenbosch University and CODESRIA, among others, to help sharpen their competencies and professionalism in supervision. This suggests that universities should create policy that encourages managing diversity. This may entail reward for involvement in managing diversity, creating diversity management programmes and promoting problem-solving strategies, such as knowing who to contact when serious problems arise.

The variations in supervisors' understanding and addressing of diversity clearly indicate that they seem to be ill-equipped, and in some cases not interested, to deal with students' diversity. Yet it is an important aspect of doctorateness. Alternative models of doctoral supervision should be explored to allow sensitivity to students' unique ways. This calls for specific and unique approaches to supervision. One method that has been suggested is supervision in teams where a student can experience greater support from a wider group of supervisors. This initiative could involve distribution of tasks, team learning, shared responsibility, exchange of experiences, and more flexibility and contribution towards solving any problems around student diversity, since this could be dealt with from various angles, and it would broaden the opportunity to discuss students' challenges. It would allow staff to refer to other staff for good management practices, since all have different sets of capabilities. The students would assume a greater role in managing their supervision, which would help negotiate power issues,

since there would be less command and control by the supervisor. This can be an advantage if each member of the supervisory team has a completion mindset in relation to the students' work.

The role of middle-level managers in doctoral supervision should be emphasised. As administrators of academic units, they can ensure the PhD curriculum is implemented within the required timelines. They can help to strengthen communication along the doctoral journey, assisting in dealing with issues before they become challenges. In smoothing the way for doctoral students to pass over the threshold of doctorateness, they establish the credibility and authority of the institution, which helps to improve the image of higher education.

Notes

1. Respect for students' diversity in this article means respect for the interests of different categories of doctoral student as well as the measures employed to address these interests and how these affect the supervisory relationship. Among the forms of diversity discussed in this article are differences in gender, age, ethnicity, class, race, income, mental abilities, perceptions, culture, diversity of thoughts, values, expectations and different languages, among others.
2. Imagining the other's position to build a constructive and productive relationship, enable emotional intellect and ethical deliberation. It helps to reflect on the positive aspects of the supervisory relationship in order to design strategies that make the most of such an opportunity and develop a confident researcher (Grant 2011; Naussbaum 1998; Waghid 2006; Vilakazi 2016).
3. Owning a challenge in this paper is conceptualised as making diversity a shared challenge of those in a supervisory relationship. This depends on the effectiveness of ownership as a benefit of collective interaction. It is about sharing the successes of doctorateness. It is important for the supervisor and the student to have a shared understanding of the context of diversity and consider it a shared challenge, irrespective of power dynamics.
4. The expression of 'agent', to borrow from Sen (1989), is employed here to denote someone who acts and brings about change and whose achievements can be judged in terms of a person's own values, capabilities, objectives and vision, whether or not the assessment is done in terms of some external criteria as well. The opposite of a person with agency is someone who is forced, oppressed or passive (Sen 1989: 19).
5. Being unable to progress, and experiencing such negative feelings, or emotions, was termed liminality by Van Gennep (1909/1960). Thus, a liminal state of consciousness describes the experience of being unable to pass through a particular threshold to new, desired and necessary conceptual understanding (Meyer and Land 2006: 19–32).

6. Entails both 'doing' and achieving a doctorate. It merges the research process and research techniques. It is a portal through which candidates have to pass which may facilitate or hinder progress (Trafford and Leshem 2009).
7. A written document that outlines the roles and expectations that the student and supervisor have of each other and how they plan to work together, thereby making the graduate journey and relationship explicit.

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