

PERSONAL REALITIES AND THE APPRENTICESHIP OF SUPERVISING: MY TORTUOUS JOURNEY AS A SUPERVISOR

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***“Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part
that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.”***

(Samuel Johnson, n.d.)

ABSTRACT

The supervisor-supervisee relationship is an important relationship between two individuals; a relationship often fraught with conflict and tension. A successful relationship usually culminates in the finished product – the completed thesis; whilst a failed relationship results in the delay of the thesis or the abandonment of the research work altogether. Whilst one is usually trained in the field that one is teaching, lecturers typically become supervisors without any formal training; it is assumed that if one has done research, one can certainly supervise a research enterprise. This reflective paper recounts a senior professor’s evolution as a supervisor of the masters’ and doctoral theses. In this, she asked pertinent questions regarding how she learned to be a supervisor, her actions as a supervisor, her expectations and requirements, and the challenges she faced as a supervisor. She became a supervisor through an apprenticeship of sorts – learning at the feet of her own supervisor. This apprenticeship only shows one side of the equation, the side the student sees, but not the backstage work that comes with it. She discovers that she learns a lot more about supervising thesis through the act of supervising, having conversations with colleagues, reading about the area, and most importantly, reflecting deeply into the enterprise. A conscious, critical, and mindful reflection of one’s actions as a supervisor can help one improve practice and better serve the student whose relationship to a supervisor is very critical to their success.

Keywords: *supervisory practices, supervisor-supervisee relationship, thesis writing*

INTRODUCTION

I have always been bemused by the above quotation, a line oft-quoted by my husband whenever we were correcting our students' essays, theses, or dissertations. I thought it was a really apt saying, and a saying I often repeated to my own students as well, particularly when I was especially perturbed by the quality of their writing. I thought it was an original saying from my husband who is very good with words, but because of this paper, I decided to google the saying and learned that it was said by Samuel Johnson a couple of centuries ago.

My husband was and I am still teaching at the Faculty of Education in the Department of TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) at a large public university. As the name suggests, our program prepares students to become TESL teachers, historically for the public secondary schools, but currently for any organization that needs their expertise, be it in teaching or in training, human resource, advertising, or media, in both public and private sectors. Many of our graduates are much sought-after by industry as they can communicate well, both spoken and written. This is a result of the massive amount of reading, writing, speaking and listening they are exposed to in the program. However, the intensity of this exposure to English takes its toll on us, the lecturers.

In whatever subject we teach, particularly TESL-related, one of the main tasks of a TESL lecturer at the faculty is to correct and grade the students' writing, whether they be short answers, essays, or reports. Correcting essays by second language speakers of English is no small feat. Every time we mark our students' essays, you can hear us groaning, harrumphing, and literally tearing our hair out. It is the norm to encounter essays that are so mangled and so garbled that you throw up your hands in despair. You realize that you don't know what to correct, or if you do correct any mistake you are never sure whether the students will learn from their mistakes, or whether they will just continue to make the same mistakes paper after paper, assignment after assignment throughout their years at the university.

The faculty offers the bachelors, masters and doctoral programmes. In this paper, I am going to focus on post-graduate writing to document the initially tortuous personal journey that I experienced in my evolution as a graduate supervisor. But before I do this, I must state the genesis of our supervising duties. The faculty started assigning supervision duties to its lecturers at the undergraduate level. The TESL undergraduates are required to write a final year research-based report which is the capstone of their studies at the faculty. We call this Academic Exercise (AE), and the main objective of this course is to introduce students to the essential elements of doing research so that they are not unfamiliar with this enterprise. I had my first experience as a thesis supervisor supervising an AE paper. There was an unexpressed assumption that if you can do research, you surely can supervise research. At that time, it was unheard of to train supervisors; most of us began supervising by falling back on our experience being supervised. Hence, this paper is a distillation of my own genesis and experience as a supervisor. Its aim is to highlight my personal and often tortuous journey as a supervisor of PhD and master's theses.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

UiTM, formerly RIDA, MARA College, and ITM consecutively, was established in 1956 with the sole objective of uplifting the Malays' and Bumiputeras' educational opportunities. Although the Malays hold the political power in the country, it was the Chinese and the Indians who wield economic power. The leaders of the newly-independent country realized that it was only through education that the Malays and Bumiputeras can get out of their economic doldrums. Hence the institute was established to give these mainly rural youngsters what Tan Sri Arshad Ayub (dubbed the Father of ITM), in a biography about him of the same name (Rokiah, 2008), called a "second chance". Many of these youngsters would not have gone on to tertiary education were it not for the opportunity that ITM provided to them.

Rather than the traditional research-based courses that universities at that time were offering, ITM offered professional based or hands-on courses that would lead graduates to hold jobs required to help develop a young nation. Examples of these courses were Banking, Business, and Accounting. Because of the visionary thinking of its early leaders, the

medium of instruction at the newly-formed Kolej RIDA and later MARA College and ITM (henceforth referred to as UiTM) was English. English continues to be the medium of instruction at UiTM, but at the rate English language proficiency is seemingly declining in this country, teaching English as a Second Language seems akin to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). And lecturers teaching English continue to be responsible for teaching it to the mostly linguistically-challenged students.

Re-visiting My Article on Supervision

In 2006, I wrote an article on the mismatch between the expectations of supervisors and supervisees. This was triggered by the observation that some of our master's students were not completing their theses. Not completing their theses means not getting their degree. When I enquired, many of them said that they could not get along with their supervisors (although this may not be the only reason). One said that her supervisor would only spend a few minutes with her and would not even look at her face during the consultation process. Another said that it was impossible to meet her supervisor - he was incredibly busy and was unable to set any appointments. There were many horror stories on the part of the students; similarly, there were also horror stories from the supervisors. Supervisors complained that students have no research skills (Sidhu, Kaur, Lim & Chan, 2016), students don't answer their emails, or supervisees do not keep their appointments or meet deadlines (Ashari & Md. Yunus, 2006).

The anguish I heard from both sides compelled me to conduct that early research. As I near my retirement date, I feel duty-bound to reflect on my evolution as a supervisor. This reflection may have come a little bit late in my career, but if a junior lecturer were to read this paper and become inspired by it, I would be very satisfied. It is also my hope that this paper addresses supervisors' difficulties and challenges in directing students' dissertations. Following Donald Schon's (1995) exhortation for reflection-in-action, I asked several questions during my reflection. The following are the questions that drive this reflective paper.

Research Questions

1. How did I learn to be a supervisor?
2. What do I do as a supervisor?
3. What are my expectations and requirements as a supervisor?
4. What challenges do I face as a supervisor?

How did I Learn to be a Supervisor?

Like many colleagues, I learned to supervise at the feet of my own doctoral supervisor. It was an apprenticeship of sorts. I was first supervised by Professor Norm Overly (henceforth referred to as Norm), who was also my student adviser, and the first professor I spoke to when I began my doctoral studies at Indiana University in the fall of 1990. Not only was he my adviser, he was also the professor for several of the curriculum courses that I had to take as a curriculum major. When the time came for me to select my own doctoral committee (as is the practice at most North American universities), I invited Norm to be my supervisor and chairman of the committee. I also invited three other professors with whom I was familiar to be on my committee. I was at first reluctant to select my own committee members having not been exposed to this democratic process, and feeling quite inadequate, but it is now my opinion that being allowed to select your own supervisors is such a civilized and an adult practice. Instead of having a supervisor hoisted on you, as in most cases in Malaysian universities, in the US you can select professors whom you know to be on your dissertation committee because you had taken classes with them and they are familiar with you and the work you are capable of.

For two years Norm supervised the preparation and writing of my dissertation. I hardly met the other three professors during the time of researching and writing the dissertation as there was a professional understanding amongst them that Professor Overly would be the lead supervisor. I, out of respect, nonetheless, met each of them twice during the process of writing, at which time all agreed with Norm's direction of my writing. A couple of them did offer suggestions as to which research

articles I should read in order to strengthen my review of literature. That was the extent of their supervision of my dissertation writing.

During the first year of course-work, I had chosen the topic I wanted to do research on, and in our face-to-face meetings Norm and I would often discuss what I was going to do and how I would proceed. Our meetings usually took place in his office at the Education Building; I would typically have given him a draft of my work, and he would make comments by the margins in his tiny hand-writing. During the meetings with him, we would be discussing the general focus of my study and the direction I was to take based on his suggestions. The corrections on my English was minimal as my written English was near-perfect. Most of the corrections were directed at my ideas, logical structure, and or claims and arguments that I had made. The only time English was mentioned was when Norm outlined to me the difference between goals, aims and objectives – terms I found quite confusing at that time.

What I remember most clearly about Norm was how patient and courteous he was with me. He was a very busy professor and had more than 15 doctoral students under his supervision at that time. He also held two administrative posts consecutively whilst he was my supervisor: one as the Chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Department of the College of Education, Indiana University, and the other (which took him physically farther away from me) was when he accepted the post of Provost of the MUCIA (Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities) Programme at ITM Shah Alam. In the mid-80s, the MUCIA programme was the first twinning programme in Malaysia; JPA and MARA-sponsored students were prepared for the TOEFL and SAT, and subsequently did their two years of an American Associate Degree in Malaysia, after which they transferred to any American university within the consortia or those which were approved by JPA. During the time Norm was in Malaysia heading the programme, we communicated via e-mail.

The 90s were the early days of the e-mail (for a brief history of e-mail read <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-mail>). I would write at the computer lab at the Indiana University library and I would send my drafts via e-mail attachments. At that time, one had to write at the library as that was the only site that was connected. Writing at home was impossible as Wifi was not

easily accessible as it is now. If the Internet was quite unstable in the US at that time, imagine what it was like in Malaysia. Norm frequently said that my drafts used to burn up his dot matrix printer. Despite these difficulties, I was in a more lucky position with Norm than most of my colleagues who were doing their PhD in Malaysia and supervised by local lecturers. Norm would send back his comments to me within a week, whilst my colleagues in Malaysia had to wait months before they get any comments from their supervisors. I appreciated getting feedback very quickly because that meant that I could continue writing without losing momentum and interest. At the time, however, I did not vow to do the same thing as Norm, as the thought of becoming a supervisor was far from my mind then.

Norm was also very firm in his deadlines with his students. He usually set the times when we were supposed to turn in our revisions and when we were required to confer with him. When he was in Malaysia, he supervised all his students via e-mail. He was still in Malaysia in 1994 when he informed his students, and I was one of them, that he was coming for a short working visit to the US in March and suggested that a group of us defend our proposal during his visit. Taking our cue from this instruction, we worked very hard to meet this deadline and when March came, five of us managed to successfully defend our dissertation. It was a proud and satisfactory moment when Norm came out of the conference room and called me Dr Ashari, the newly-minted PhD graduate. Had not Norm kept up on me regarding my writing, I might have gone the wayward path of not completing my dissertation during the time stipulated by both the university and my employer. Thus, how Norm treated me when I was his doctoral student was how I came to treat my students when I first became a supervisor.

I became a supervisor in a rather serendipitous manner. In our Bachelor's degree program, our fourth-year students are required to carry out a research study; this course is called Academic Exercise (AE), a course similar to the capstone project in American universities. Before they reach the fourth year, they would have been taught Introduction to Research Methods in an earlier semester. In this course, they are taught the fundamentals of research, the various research methodologies, research instruments, and carrying out a literature review. The outcome of the course is the writing of the Research Proposal. This is then the research proposal that they bring to their assigned supervisor in the following semester. At

this time, ideally, most supervisors and their assigned students (hereafter referred to as supervisees) would start work on completing the research.

How are these supervisors appointed? This is a fundamental question. Since we are teaching at the bachelor's level, many of the faculty members have a master's degree, and it is assumed, rightly or wrongly, that at the master's level, they would have also undergone a research course and conducted research. Therefore, many of us became supervisors sans experience and training. And many of us stumble along the way, trying to be good supervisors without really knowing the strategies to become one. We often blame our students for not finishing their work, or for not meeting us, or for not having the research skills, or for going AWOL. Many of us question our students' skills, often without probing deep into our own skills as supervisors. This power imbalance between supervisors and supervisees often lead to deep misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two parties. Understanding my own supervisory practices, what I do wrong, what I do right, what I can do better, re-visiting my own research supervision became the compelling drive for this paper. Even in Islam, one is exhorted to *Muhassabah Diri*, i.e to do a daily accounting of one's own work: what went wrong, what was good, and what one can do better. This daily accounting of one's actions, be they personal or professional, serves to improve practice. In the Buddhist tradition, this probing deep into the self is akin to the concept of mindfulness – always being aware of what one is doing.

During the writing of this paper, I also carried out an SMS (Short Message Service) survey of my colleagues (referred to as C1-C8) and asked one simple question "How did you become a supervisor?" The following are their answers:

"There weren't any courses. Just a short briefing a long time ago." C1

"Not really... I mean formally..." C2

"I sought help from seniors at the faculty...and also emulate my Supervisor's SOP." C3

“No training, Prof.” C4

“Never. I asked the faculty on several occasions to have one, especially for new staff, but nothing happened.”C5

“Never. Basically learnt it on my own and through discussion with/ and observation of others.” C6

“Supervision, traditionally, is culturally transmitted...you perpetuate the practices of your supervisors.”C7

“Yes. At AKEPT. With a professor from Oxford on Postgrad Supervision.” C8

Out of the eight colleagues I asked, only one had received training on supervision at the Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT). Like me, when they became supervisors, they also fell back on the “apprenticeship-of-experience” they had with their supervisors. In short, when I became a supervisor, I fell back on my experience of being supervised to be my guide, remembering how Norm guided me and, hopefully, practising the good, and eliminating what was not good practice. The problem with this apprenticeship is that there is the unquestioned assumption that what one’s own supervisor did was often good and one might unknowingly perpetuate negative practices.

What do I do as a Supervisor?

The first thing that a student will do once he or she becomes my supervisee is to set an appointment to see me. During that first meeting, I usually invite them to talk about themselves, where they are from, what they like, whether they are married, what they do, what are their aspirations, among others. The students are usually nervous and need prompting to talk about themselves. Typical of Asian students, they do not ask me any questions. It will be later in our relationship that they will pluck up the courage to ask me personal questions. During the first meeting, I usually don’t volunteer any personal details about myself; I discover that most of the time my supervisees would have carried out some background check on me. My reputation always precedes me.

Most of the time the students will come with a research proposal in hand. I will outline to them what I am going to do with it. I typically take about a week to 10 days to read a proposal and give feedback on it. I usually require a hard copy version as it is cumbersome and tedious to the eyes to read a draft on the computer. Further, the paper must be double-spaced, fully justified, and printed on one side only. I will ask them to insert page numbers and with a running head of the title of the study on each page to remind me of their topic.

For those who do not have a proposal and who would like to change topic, I will typically ask them to talk about what they want to do and the reasons they want to pursue a particular topic. If I am satisfied by their explanations, I will approve their topic. I usually do not change the topic that my students want to pursue. I believe that it is their right to do what they are interested in doing. One of the things I constantly remind the students in the Introduction to Research Methods class that I teach is that they must be interested in the topic they are investigating. If they are merely doing it for the sake of doing research, I remind them that they are not going to go far with it and will soon lose interest.

I also tell them about the writing process – that it is a lonely job. I remind them that writing is hard and that it is a recursive process. One does not have to write in a linear fashion, beginning with the introduction and ending with the conclusion. I tell them that they can begin anywhere in the text; if they are stuck in one area, do not get frustrated, but just move on to another section. The beauty of the computer is that one can begin anywhere, one can cut, delete, copy, and paste at will, and I tell them to appreciate these functions. Most of the students will never know what working on a manual typewriter is like, that if one makes a mistake on a sheet of paper, one has to throw out that sheet and begin all over again.

I teach students regarding aspects of writing: the structure of an academic paper, introduction, body, conclusion; I introduce them to Swales' (Swales, 1990) rhetorical moves in academic writing: establishing the field, what is in the introduction, what is the gap, what is the gap they are going to fill in with their investigation, and the justification for their study, amongst others. In my lecture on the writing act, I frequently use the analogy of sewing in my description of the writing process. If one wants to make a shirt,

the different parts of the shirt is going to be joined- sleeve, collar, armhole, cuff, button, hem– to get a finished product. Similarly with writing, words are joined to make sentences, sentences to make paragraphs, paragraphs become chapters and chapters become a dissertation. Every part must flow smoothly and must be connected. I teach them the idea of cohesion and coherence in writing (Connor, 1984) and the use of linguistic devices to signal relations between parts of the text.

I also remind my supervisees that if they experience a mental block during writing, do something else like write the reference page, check the page number, write the acknowledgement or abstract, or some other menial tasks related to writing. The idea is that they must turn on their computer daily and look at the draft – the inspiration to write will come soon enough. Not turning on the computer for days on end, and therefore not looking at their writing for days or weeks will not get them anywhere; they lose momentum and lose the interest to write; and because they have not made any progress in writing, they would not be getting any feedback from their supervisors. We have many students who do not graduate because they stop writing. Again, this reminds me of Norm who constantly exhorted me to “...Write! Write! Write!” a mantra I often repeated to my own students.

What are My Expectations and Requirements as a Supervisor?

Students are to keep their appointments and be punctual. If, for any reason, they are going to be late, they must inform me by texting me beforehand. I get very annoyed with tardy students, and most of the time my students honour my wishes. Whenever they have an appointment with me, they are to text me the day before to remind me of the time and place for meeting. I really appreciate this as sometimes, I have been known to forget appointments even though they are written down on my desktop calendar.

Some students also cancel appointments because of a family emergency and they usually regale me with a long text explaining their predicament. In this instance, we usually will set up another appointment. As working adults, these students have responsibilities to their families and their jobs, and I appreciate and respect the challenges that they face (Ashari, 2006).

What I expect of students is also what I demand of myself too. I am usually in my office waiting for them to keep their appointments; if, for any reason, I was going to be late, I will also text them to inform them. If I have to cancel any meetings, I will text them to inform them of the cancellation. I have heard of supervisors who fail to inform students of any cancellation and the students are left stranded in front of their offices at the previously-agreed upon time. To me this is a total disrespect of the students' time. Most of our students are adult students and they have responsibilities to their jobs and families (Ashari, 2006). Many of them must apply for leave in order to meet with their supervisors and it is my opinion that supervisors who don't keep their appointments violate a fundamental supervisor-supervisee relationship; it is disrespecting their time.

I also expect students to have done their revisions and corrections when they hand me a revised draft. In fact, students are required to turn in the previous draft with the new one so that I can easily compare each draft side by side and note the revisions that have been made. In my first meeting with my supervisee, I also physically show them how to make revisions – I tell them to have a document stand next to their computer, place the draft on the stand, retrieve their work from the computer and start the revising process page by page. Every time they make a correction which I had indicated, they are to mark the correction on the hard copy with a tick. After each page, they are to hit the save button on the computer. I also advise students to save their work on several back-up thumb drives. In my early days as a supervisor, I have had students give the excuse that they lost their file and hence cannot turn in their work. In these days of the cloud and dropbox, this kind of excuses is no longer valid.

One of the major sins a supervisee can commit is to ignore the corrections I have made. I have been known to highlight corrections that were not attended to in the new draft and write in capital letters, "YOU DID NOT CORRECT THIS! SEE PREVIOUS DRAFT". Most of the supervisees attend to the corrections, but I had one student who ignored my comments and suggestions so consistently that I threatened to resign as her supervisor. Finally, she had to hire a language editor who made sure that she attended to my corrections faithfully. I take delight in telling my students that I read every word that they write and that every correction I make has been carefully thought out, and that whenever I make a correction, it is justified. In short, they had better checked their corrections.

Another requirement of mine is that my students must have a meeting with their family at the commencement of their graduate studies at which time they, through a consensus, lay the ground rules for the dissertation process. Each spouse, child, or parent must be informed about how much time the programme is going to take, and how much time they can spend for family activities and such. I advise them that it is imperative that they obtain the support of each family member as they go through their graduate studies. Without the family support, the graduate journey, whether at the master's or doctoral level, would be that much harder.

In conclusion, I expect students to honour their appointments, to be conscientious in making the corrections I have indicated, and to have a family conference regarding the demands of graduate work.

What Challenges do I Face as a Supervisor?

There are many challenges and many twists and turns, hence tortuous, that I face as a supervisor. The main challenge is the language competence of the students. Many of them need help with grammar and the mechanics of writing. Some of the writing problems they have are in using subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement, tenses, use of punctuations, use of discourse markers and signal words, possessives, word choices, word forms, modals, and many others. Many of them do not even know when to use the colon and semi-colon! In 1998, I even compiled a list of my editing marks so that students understand what the marks I make on their papers mean when they do their corrections. It is entitled *Editing Guidelines for Supervisees (Graduate and Undergraduate)*, a yet-to-be-published monograph. Besides the editorial marks, I also include general information on how to edit/prepare your research paper, and a section entitled *My Actions as a Supervisor*.

Another challenge is that as a supervisor, one needs to know a lot of topics. The field of TESL is huge and there are a variety of topics that students can do research on – from speaking anxiety to communication styles, from discourse analysis to pragmatics, from code-switching to error analysis, from teacher job satisfaction to teacher motivation, and from principals' leadership styles to students' achievement. On rare occasions, we may be assigned a supervisee in an area we are not familiar with and if you do get a supervisee who wants to do research on a topic you are

not familiar with, you might have to do a lot of learning on your own. For example, if you get a question like this – “What are the variables that could have potential cause for shaping teacher trust of the principal?”...how do you as a supervisor begin to think about this area? In short, the supervisor must be knowledgeable in many areas as well.

The supervisors need to know a variety of research methods as well, both quantitative and qualitative, and now even mixed-method (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). For supervisors who are more quantitatively-inclined, facing a supervisee who wants to do a qualitative research might present problems. A qualitatively-inclined supervisor might be baffled when given a set of statistical tables to comprehend. One of the ways in which I help students who are faced with this dilemma is to introduce them to other experts in the faculty, for example, I have introduced a supervisee to a mathematics professor who helped her to test the reliability of her questionnaire. I even read his research book to learn about Cronbach’s Alpha and factor analysis.

In summary, the main challenges that I face as a supervisor are the language competence of the students, the requirement to know a lot of areas in one’s field, and the ability to be familiar with several research methods. A supervisor’s mind must be like a sponge, absorbing many different knowledge to guide their supervisees constructively and productively.

Strategies for Successful Supervision

In more than 15 years of graduate supervision, I have learned a few things about successful supervision. The first is to set out my expectations as a supervisor, i.e. when to meet, how often to meet, what to do at meetings, how to do revisions, how to follow advice, and how to set appointments, among others. Phillips and Pugh (2000) devote a whole chapter in their book on “How to Manage Your Supervisor”. In this chapter, they lay out six expectations of a supervisor, one of which is the regularity of meetings. Early in our relationship, I always ask my supervisees whether they want to GOT. The cheeky ones will always say Games of Throne at which time I will say “Graduate on Time!”. I stress that if they want to GOT, they must have regular meetings with me, at least once a month. I also then give them examples of students who had graduated on time because they met me on a

regular basis. I stressed that regular means once every 4 to 6 weeks, not 4 to 6 months. The successful student has constant and consistent meetings with the supervisor.

A good supervisor also finds out the expectations of their supervisees. As most of the students are adults and usually working, I always ask how often they can meet me, what day of the week is best, and whether morning or afternoons work best for them. If the students have a particularly demanding employer, they might have to take leave to attend the supervisory meetings. I also learn about the work schedules of their spouses so that I know how to tell my students to get help from their partners.

A good supervisor gives timely and effective feedback, both face-to-face and written, to their supervisees. They are to read the drafts that their students have submitted and make comments and suggestions on the drafts. According to Phillips and Pugh (2000), providing feedback is not an easy task. One has to be both “constructive” and “supportive” (p. 173). I know of supervisors who sit on their students’ drafts for months and these students get stymied by the long periods of inactivity. Besides writing comments or giving suggestions on their early drafts, I often go through the drafts page-by-page with them and explain my corrections. Our meetings typically last between 60-90 minutes, and both supervisor and supervisee feel satisfied at the end of the meetings. Students usually take notes of our discussions, and this helps them during their revision. We usually close the meetings by deciding on when they are to turn in the revised draft and when to meet to discuss the corrected one. I usually need a week to read the newly-revised draft before I can meet them.

Competencies of a Good Supervisor

This paper is not about the act of doing research itself, i.e. searching for topics, reading the literature, building instruments, collecting data, and analyzing data. It has focused more on the supervisor-supervisee relationship during the process of writing the thesis or dissertation, i.e. the writing act itself. This is a relationship that is fraught with conflicts and power struggles. Pugh (cited in Lynch, 2014) said that when a supervisor-supervisee relationship breaks down, “...it can go disastrously wrong and have serious consequences.”

In the process of supervising my students' writing, I discover that I must possess certain competencies that will enhance the supervisor-supervisee relationship. I have categorized these into two: technical and interpersonal competencies. Under technical competencies, a supervisor must have good reading, writing, listening, and editing skills. Although Phillips and Pugh (2000) have said that a supervisee must not expect a supervisor to be a "copy-editor", I find that I edit the papers as I am reading them. This is in the DNA of an English teacher; the English teacher is armed with a red pen and wired to correct! It also behooves me to check the grammar of the students as they are going to name me in their acknowledgements. I have my reputation to safeguard.

The effective supervisor must also have good interpersonal competencies. Some examples of these competencies are patience, respect, and humility. A supervisor must be patient with the supervisees, especially when they are struggling between writing and juggling their responsibilities as a student, employee, spouse, or parent. Supervisors must be supportive of their supervisees. Although supervisors are regarded as being in a position of power (Lynch, 2014), common human courtesy of respecting one's fellow human being must prevail. Supervisors must remember their own days as students and reflect on what they did not like about their own supervisors. Some of what was learned during the apprenticeship-of-experience must be unlearned if they do not serve the supervisees.

CONCLUSION

Supervisors have to be super-human; they must know just about everything in the research enterprise, similar to what Fraenkel *et al.* (2012) said about knowing the mixed-method where the researcher needs to be competent in a variety of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative. There are many competencies that the good supervisor must have, other than the ones listed above, but it is beyond the scope of this paper. A recommendation for further research will be to carry out an empirical study with a larger population to really find out how supervisors become supervisors; whether supervisors need formal training; the challenges supervisors face; and strategies for successful and effective supervision. This paper is a reflection-in-practice of one individual who became a supervisor of graduate

students through a rather circuitous route of apprenticeship, self-learning and self-discovery. Like the advice given to teachers to not just rely on the apprenticeship of observation (Borg, 2004), a good supervisor must analyze and reflect on his or her actions as a supervisor; apprenticeship of supervision is but a partial view of the whole supervising process, and that the good supervisor must constantly learn, relearn, and unlearn.

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