Case Studies on Quality Supervision of International Research Students at Australian Universities

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Abstract:
This paper reports on a case study of the professional growth and intellectual development of two international higher degree research (HDR) students from China who undertook research training in education at two Australian universities. They were supervised by two different native English speaking Australian supervisors. The investigation focused on the teaching/learning relationship between these international HDR students and their Australian supervisors to identify some of the features of quality supervision in HDR training for international students. The purposes of the study were to identify key academic concerns that HDR graduates have while training to become researchers and to explore what international HDR students and their supervisors see as appropriate supervision. It contributes to knowledge about quality supervision by providing research-based information about working with international HDR students and what supervisors might do to improve the quality of their research training.

Introduction

In the context of contemporary globalisation, a large number of international students from Asia, and especially from China have been enrolling in higher education institutions in English speaking countries, in particular in Australia, the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and New Zealand. Being the top source market for each of these five main English speaking countries, students from China constitute nearly one-quarter of all international students. For example, in 2006, Chinese students had 62,582 enrolments in USA; 51,080 in UK, 46,075 in Australia; 30,516 in Canada and 21,034 in New Zealand (Australian Education International, 2007). In Australia, more than half (51%) of Chinese international students were studying in higher education; however, no data is available on exactly how many of them enrolled as international higher degree research (HDR) students(Australian Education International, 2007). International HDR students constitute more than 20% of all HDR students in these English speaking countries. The increasing diversity of the student body has aroused concerns about the quality of international HDR students' supervision (Han & Zhao, 2007; Singh, Han & Harreveld, 2006; Singh & Li, 2004).

Researchers have found that international HDR students in general, and those in China in particular encountered considerable difficulties during their research training in English speaking countries (Durkin, 2005; Huang, 2006; Trice, 2003). According to Durkin (2005) and McClure (2005), international HDR students had difficulties producing their literature reviews and academic writing. Homes (2005) and Guifoyle (2006) found that international RHD students hesitated to make oral presentations and

lacked the ability to build research networks beyond the campus. Adrian-Taylor, Noels and Tischler (2007) indicated there was a conflictual relationship between international HDR students and their supervisors. However, there is little research which explores the professional growth and intellectual development of international HDR students, in terms of enabling them to speak with their own voice.

To help fill the gap in current knowledge, this paper reports on the experiences of two international HDR students from China and their productive relationships with their supervisors. The purpose of this investigation into the teaching/learning relationship between international HDR students and their Australian supervisors is to document some of the features of quality supervision in HDR training for international students. In doing so, this paper identifies key academic concerns that these HDR graduates had while training as researchers, and explores what they see as appropriate supervision. It aims to contribute to knowledge about quality supervision by providing research-based information about working with international HDR students and what their supervisors might do to improve the quality and impact of their research training.

The two key features of supervision explore in this paper relate to mentoring the student to the timely and successful completion of a really useful thesis, while also designing their future career trajectory. The literature related to research on supervision for international RHD students are reviewed at the first part of the paper. Then the methodological note is presented and followed by the reflections on research training, supervision and mentoring. The discussion of quality supervision and the challenges of internationalising universities, and the conclusion are provided at the last part of the paper.

Research on supervision for international RHD students

The focus of this section is on literature related to research on supervision for international especially Chinese background RHD students. This includes consideration of research on different academic culture, styles of academic writing, and English language proficiency.

Different academic culture

The education system of a country is intimately linked with its national culture. Academic culture shock is experienced by most international RHD students (Brown, 2004). Huang (2006) suggested that there were considerable different academic culture experienced by international HDR students. First, there were problems with learning critical research approaches and analytical writing skills. Many international HDR students were confused and depressed about their inability to develop these particular skills. Second, some had particular problems with their relationship with supervisors. The students reported that there were many cultural barriers between them and their supervisors. For example, in Chinese culture, students rely considerable on their supervisors providing them with explicit guidelines and clear directions. As a result of cultural differences, these students had incorrect expectations of, or misunderstanding with, their supervisors. Third, access to research evidence was a recurring problem. These research students experienced difficulties in data collection due to uncooperative respondents. Some had a low level of understanding about data collection methods and laced the time management skills needed for this important work. In contrast, Jones (2005) using an in-depth qualitative case study investigated Chinese background international students' learning

experience. It found that despite cultural and linguistic differences, international students' conceptualisation of critical thinking was similar to their local counterparts.

Styles of academic writing

In terms of academic writing, there exist considerable differences in structuring literary texts in English and Chinese (Adrian-Taylor, Noels & Tischler, 2007; Durkin, 2005; Huang, 2006). The apparent ambiguity and implicitness in Chinese writing have been compared with the explicit, directness of western academic writing. The latter is more overtly linear in its logic and more explicit; everything has to be stated very clearly and everything has to logically sequence. In China, explicitness is seen as unsophisticated and is culturally inappropriate. When these Chinese students used their traditional techniques of inference they left their western readers guessing what they meant.

Durkin (2005) used in-depth case studies to explore the challenges Chinese students (n = 41) faced in adapting to academic expectations and teaching/learning styles in a HDR course. It was found that these Chinese HDR students lacked confidence and skills in western-style research methodology. This was especially so with regard to citing scholarship and in meeting requirements for essay writing, in particular the development of linear argument, undertaking a critical analysis and evaluating the work of other scholars.

English language proficiency

Language was a major factor contributing to the conflict between international HDR students and their western supervisors (Adrian-Taylor, Noels & Tischler, 2007; Brown, 2004; McClure, 2005). Homes (2005) and Durkin (2005) reported that the Chinese HDR students they studied were reluctant or hesitant about making oral presentations and speaking at research seminars. They feared that their English would not be understood. Their education in China has taught them not to ask questions during class but afterwards in small groups or individually. They feared not looking intelligent. They had a sense of it being culturally inappropriate to speak out or to offer their opinions in formal sessions. The reasons for this were attributed to the need to preserve "face"; a sense of shame especially over their use of English; avoidance of dangerous or 'unsafe' consequences, and a cultural perception of politeness.

When writing their thesis, some Chinese HDR students translated their thinking from their mother tongue to English. This requires a high level of competency in English for speakers of Chinese. Exact translation is further complicated because literacy reflects cultural values and norms. Western-style critical thinking and argumentation seem to be particularly difficult to translate into mother tongue for these Chinese students (Durkin, 2005; Huang, 2006).

Guifoyle (2006) reports that students of culturally diverse backgrounds can feel isolated and feel different from or separate to, those around them. Loneliness is a major problem for international HDR students. It was found a counter to isolation is the supportive network provided by postgraduate peers and supervisors. But such support can be problematic, where there is a language barrier. English language proficiency is a key to forming good relationships necessary for forming academic networks; speaking with research colleagues and supervisors, and making scholarly exchanges inside and outside seminars. In terms of their supervisor, most international HDR students want to develop a close relationship with their and receive supportive supervisory.

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Methodological note

This study aims to explore some features of quality supervision related to international HDR students. The broad research questions for this study were: What strategies are recognised by the international HDR students as contributing to their productive supervision? How did these strategies work? Why did these strategies work?

To answer these questions, case study methods were considered as the most appropriate (Brew & Peseta, 2004; Yin, 2003; Zhao, Mulligan & Michelmore, 2006). According to Yin (2003), a case study is an enquiry in a real-life context, as opposed to the contrived context of a laboratory experiment. Case study methods provide means for undertaking empirical inquiries that can investigate contemporary phenomenon within real-life contexts. This is especially valuable when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Yin (2003) suggested when anchored in real-life situations, a case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon that offer insights, illuminate meanings and expand its readers' experiences.

In terms of case selection, two international HDR students from China (identified as Student A and Student B) were selected for this study. They were chosen from two Australian universities (identified as University 1 and University 2). The selection of the individuals for this study was not done by means of random sample nor representing sampling, but involved purposive sampling (Zhao, Mulligan & Michelmore, 2006). Two HDR students are recognised by their productive research training which is chosen to illuminate quality supervisory relationship between international HDR students and their supervisors. There were two major reasons for choosing the individual subjects for this study. First, their academic achievement was considered. The Chinese international HDR students were selected because they had completed their HDR projects on time; they have published papers in English in book chapters and refereed journals; and both obtained jobs in Australian universities. Second, their productive relationship with their supervisors was considered important. These Chinese international HDR students were also recommended by their supervisors as exemplary models of successful international HDR students.

In order to collect authentic, valid data on their research training and supervisory experience, the HDR students wrote retrospective reports reflecting upon their research training experiences. Self-reflective reports are considered a suitable technique for data collection in case studies of educational practice (Brew & Peseta, 2004). The main purpose of using self-reflective reports was to find out detailed information about training and supervisory practices experienced by the HDR students, and their views about the quality of the supervision they received. For this study, the processes of data collection and analysis were conducted almost simultaneous (Yin, 2003). Analysis of the data began with the receipt of the first self-reflective report. Emerging insights, themes and tentative hypotheses were formed during the data collection period for each student. After receiving two reports, a more holistic approach to data analysis is adopted. Open coding was used at the early stage of data analysis. The researchers read the report line-by-line, noting words and phrases that identify key themes and naming specific analytic dimensions in terms of emerging categories (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Focused coding was used at the later stage of data analysis as the researchers built up and elaborated analytic themes. The major themes for coding the data included the participants background, preparatory work and studies; choosing a research topic; understanding of research methods; part-time work experience; jointly authored publications with supervisors;

development of knowledge networks; the relationship between research and work career trajectory; language and culture in their research; strategies to advance English language proficiency, and factors and strategies contributing to successful research training. Together this material provides an empirically grounded, conceptually informed basis for forming and informing some of the features of the quality supervision of international research students, and perhaps more generally the internationalisation of education.

Findings from case studies

This section provides the reflections of two Chinese HDR students on the quality of the supervision they received during their research training. It addresses key academic concerns that Chinese students have while training as researchers, and explores some key features of quality supervision. The underlying premise is captured in the following statement:

> The difficulty of managing the PhD supervisory relationship is a well-known one. The intensity with which this relationship can be played out reveals that much more is involved than a simple transference of knowledge from one individual to another. On the contrary, each individual is revealed to have complex investments in this relationship (Owler cited in Green, 2005, p. 154).

The PhD supervisory relationship is a teaching/learning exercise involving the transmission and production of knowledge, as much as the formation of a researcher.

Understanding international HDR students' motivation to become researchers

Understanding international HDR students' motivation to become researchers is an important initial step in developing quality supervision. It is acknowledged that international HDR students are driven by different motivations to undertake their research higher degrees in English speak countries (Huang, 2006; Wellington & Sikes, 2006). In indicating her eagerness to learn, Student A indicated that:

> I had been teaching English as Foreign Language in a Chinese university for nine years before I came to Australia to do my PhD. I planned to do whatever studies I could in an English speaking country to improve my English. As an English teacher, I struggled with my oral English … The only expectation I had was that by doing a PhD I would improve my speaking, reading, listening and writing in English, so that I could return home a better English teacher. I wanted to do a PhD to improve my skills in English. I didn't expect that I could gain knowledge by doing research. I did not know what research in Western countries involved. I had no idea of how to do the research.

Student A's report suggests that her motivation to become a research was driven by a desire to become even more proficient in English and to undertake research. This desire was deeply rooted in her educational background as an experienced English language teacher. More than this, it reflected a deep understanding of what are essential items for a life in the twenty first century, namely computing, driving and English. This was influenced by her preparatory work and studies, realising that a higher degree would be a springboard to a worldly life. This provides a different perspective to Huang's (2006) study, which involved interviews with forty international HDR students and found that one of the most important motivations

shaping their choice of research was using the dissertation as a link to their career trajectory. Student A also reported that her supervisor understood her motivations for doing a PhD. They established this the first time they met. Her supervisor promised to assist her to achieve her resume goal by helping her to improve her advanced English language proficiency and building a strong resume.

In contrast, Student B's motivation to do a PhD was based on his interests in educational research. He stated:

> After obtaining a Bachelor of Education and Master of Education, I worked as a lecturer in educational psychology at a teachers' training college in China from late 1980s to the mid-1990s. During that period, I developed broad research interests in the areas of educational psychology, teacher education, mathematics education, evaluation and assessment, and comparative education … I jointed the School of Education at University 2 in Australia as a Visiting Fellow from May 1997 and July 1999. From my own learning and research experience, I found there existed considerable difference in educational theories and research practices between Australia and China. With a keen interest in understanding these differences, I started to consider doing a PhD on comparative education in an Australian university.

Student B's report indicates that his research was motivated by his personal interest in the subject area. This agrees with Wellington & Sikes's study (2005) which involved interviews with 29 students pursuing professional doctorates in the UK. This study found that one of the most popular motivations for doing a research degree is to build a theory. Student B, like Student A, also reported his interests to his supervisor when they first met. His supervisor shared similar interests and expressed the intention of assisting him to understand the relationship between Australian and Chinese educational policy and practices. Such comparative studies seem popular among Chinese students and their Australian supervisors since the results of such a study can provide valuable insights for curriculum and assessment reform both in China and Australia. This may contribute to both countries' efforts to raise standards in mathematics for the 'knowledge based economies and societies' of the 21st century.

After exchanging ideas with each other, both Student A and Student B recognised that their motivations were different in terms of internal and external motivation. At another level both share strong achievement motivations, which are rooted in their educational culture (Biggs & Watkins, 1996, 2001a, 2001b; Kennedy, 2002). Chinese international HDR students in these studies were motivated to achieve high academic success due to their cultural values of family responsibility where 'to succeed is to honour one's family'.

Motivation is a goal-directed activity. The focus is on the goals an individual is pursuing; the situations in which achievement is possible and behaviour as purposeful, intentional and directed toward the attainment of specific goals (Meece, Anderman & Anderman, 2006; Printrich & Schunk, 2002). The supervisors of both Student A and Student B understood their goals which involved either the development of advanced competence in English language and educational research.

Selecting a suitable topic
Choosing a researchable topic is part of the early stage of the research project. Most international students in the area of educational research prefer undertaking

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comparative studies of some aspect education between Australia and China based on their own research experience (Han & Zhao, 2007). Student B reported:

> I began my educational career as a primary school teacher of mathematics in the early 1980s. After three years of teacher education and two years teaching experience, I gained a wealth of knowledge relating to mathematics teaching and learning in Chinese schools. This provided me with useful knowledge when I decided to choose to do a comparative study of mathematics curriculum and assessment policy and practice in Australian and Chinese primary schools' as my research topic.

Student B started his HDR training with his own research topic. At that time, he found that his research was dealing with a 'hot' topic because there was growing concern regarding the quality of mathematics education and students' level of attainment. Internationally educators were interested in knowing about the status of their education system and how their system compares with those in other countries. The focus on comparative mathematics education had been made more significant by international comparisons of mathematics achievement and factors accounting for differences in achievement (Graf & Leung, 2000; Howard, Perry, Keong, 2000; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, Garden, O'Connor, Chrostowski & Smith, 2000). Student B's supervisors also had a considerable interest in his project as it would contribute to their understanding of the mathematics achievement gap between East Asian and Western countries.

Unlike Student B, Student A did not opt for the familiar comparative studies, which she could have done if she wished, bring her own project, but she took up her supervisor's invitation to work on a project in which he was also engaged:

> I benefited from my ignorance about research and the initial difficulty I had in choosing a topic. I really had no idea of what topic was important and worth doing. So when my supervisor asked if I would like to work on a project investigating an educational issue of importance in the Australian context, I relied in the positive. This allowed me to gain some insights into international issues because I drew on theories of cultural globalisation, especially as there relate to transnational worker mobility. This proved to be an instance of brilliant foresight. He predicted the issue I dealt with in my thesis would be very hot issue by the time I finished it; and this proved to be the case.

Student A was determined to get a good education, but to cross that river she was willing to take things one stepping-stone at a time, though it was more a pebble. From her own training experience, Student A found that there were two advantages to working on a PhD project that was situated within a research project being undertaken by her supervisor. The first advantage concerns managing time constraints and saving money to pay huge fees for a luxury item like an international education. International HDR students normally spend considerable time in coming up with their research topics; and the longer it takes the more it costs. The second advantage is the significance of the research. Since the project on which her supervisor was working was part of a founding project, it addressed priorities that went beyond the interests of the individual involved.

In contrast, Student B found both advantages and disadvantages with his choice of research topic. In terms of advantages, choosing one's own research topic can help sustain one's long-time interest in a project, but this is a privilege unlikely to be experienced ever again. Since doing a research degree is a very time consuming process, interest itself can play a powerful role in assisting a trainee to overcome the difficulties during the research process, but all projects experience difficulties. In terms of disadvantages, Student B's supervisors did not share the same interests in the project, which meant he did not get much assistance from his supervisors in the project. Student A could see her supervisor on a daily basis because they worked together on the project; student B saw his supervisor twice a month for two hours, where HDR students and their supervisors shared common interest in the research topic and see its significance in contributing to theory and practice or policy, better quality supervision is provided.

Increasing understanding about doing research

Some international HDR students have misunderstandings about research (Durkin, 2005; Mcclure 2005). Students A suggested:

> I felt a bit embarrassed because I was so ignorant about research, but that was my situation … I only knew that I would need to read many books and relevant articles … My supervisor did not throw all this knowledge about research to me at the beginning. Instead, he recommended I read some books, including theories about labour mobility and accounts of qualitative research. He also gave me some key words and asked me to do a search of electronic databases. Later I realised that these seemingly disparate tasks were building up my theory, method and literature review chapters. However, when I was initially asked to do these, I had no idea of why I needed to do so, let alone any understanding of how these were necessarily interrelated. As my supervisor explained, and as I learnt through experience, my understanding of research actually grew through the process of doing it. In particular, much of it came through the countless naïve questions I asked my supervisor in the many meetings and discussions I needed to have with him. He gave me the opportunity to explore issues by myself as well as giving me purposeful and contingent scaffolding to help me move forward. He also provided direct and explicit help when I was really struggling and couldn't move forward.

Student A's understandings of what it meant to do research was blurry from the start. But her supervisor impressed on her the possibility that her university education, and her research training, could open up the possibilities for her to go anywhere in the world. She learnt that it would not be impossible for her, the learner of English as a foreign language to teach native speaking student-teachers how to teach English literacy. She faced a challenge in writing the literature review, especially in the use of citations:

> I did much paraphrasing and prepared many summaries of the research literature but did not put any citations in the text. Later when I showed what I had done to my supervisor, I was asked to include all the citations. Now I realise this is the rightful thing to do. That experience really taught me a

good lesson. I went back to all the articles I had read and tried to find the sources of the ideas I used in my writing. It took me a long time to recover most of the citations. However, there was still one idea left and I could not find where it came from. I tried hard but with no result. Either I needed to delete it or I thought I could just insert a citation to some one else's work. I loved that idea because it was most pertinent to my study so I decided just to insert some relevant source but not the exact one. Finally, I wrote "Lovat" with the date in the bracket. I decided to try my luck. I went back to show my literature review to my principal supervisor, this time with all the citations included in the text. However, I was caught out by supervisor, "You have to go back to check this citation. I would be more than happy if Lovat said that, but I seriously doubt it. It is absolutely essential that you be honest and accurate in your use of all primary and secondary sources in research". I was so surprised that I was zhuang dao qiang kou; I had been hit on the muzzle. I thought, "Is it just an accident that he happens to know this person's work, or is he a genuinely knowledgeable scholar? As my study progressed I found that it was the latter.

The issue of citations also brought Student B considerable trouble when he started to write literature review for his thesis. This misunderstanding about the use citations was result of what they learnt about publishing in China. When he wrote his Masters dissertation, he did not have to put any indirect citations in the text. He only needed to provide a list of references at the end of the dissertation. This is consistent with Durkin (2005) and McClure's (2005) research, where he found that Chinese students had similar difficulties when reviewing the research literature. Student B also indicated that it was difficult for him to critically evaluate in the literature he was reviewing during the early stage of his research:

In my first draft of the literature review, I only reviewed the literature that supported my concepts with evidence and arguments. I ignored the literature challenging and questioning my assumptions. After discussion with my supervisor, I learned that in my review I needed demonstrate my critical evaluation of the research literature. This involved developing the ability to evaluate one's own thinking and making a balanced judgement between literature agreeing with my ideas and that disagreeing with my arguments.

Student B's report is confirmed by Durkin (2005) and McClure's (2005) research, in so far as they suggest that in China it has been inappropriate to criticise others, especially authority figures such as scholars. However, after receiving corrections and detailed feedback from his supervisor, student B made great progress in using citations and critical evaluation. Improving international HDR students' understanding of doing research is a key step towards quality supervision.

Valuing international HDR students' capability for double knowing
English is not the first language of most international HDR students; they tend to see their native language not as an asset but as a deficit when it comes to studying abroad. However, having done much of her PhD research in two languages, Student A generated many good ideas through her mother tongue:

A good idea from my principal supervisor was to make my modest attempt to represent my Chinese knowledge and heritage in my thesis. This is because he observed that when my English thinking was stuck, I used Chinese idioms to express my thoughts. Most of the time, I used the Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionaries to find the authoritative translation of some Chinese idioms. I chose the idiom which best described the situation as I really had no other words to use in expressing what I wanted to say. Mostly the English translations were a poor simulacra of the original Chinese ideas. I used Chinese Chengyu (idioms and proverbs) throughout the evidentiary Chapters of my thesis to gently reinforce the argument made with respect to the knowledge and knowledge networks that World English Speaker student-teachers might bring to the profession, should they be taught to do so.

Encouraged by her supervisor, Student A recognised that she might use her bilingual skills to double the knowledge she brought to bear in her thesis (Singh & Guo, 2007; Singh & Shrestha, 2004). Chengyus are a special language phenomenon in Chinese culture, being one of the most important sources of Chinese wisdom and knowledge reproduced across the generations. Unlike English idioms, a chengyu is often made up of a fixed number of Chinese characters. Many of them are derived from classical stories they have important cultural meanings. Thus, use of these idioms in Student A's thesis greatly enriched the knowledge base of the research that was reported. Everyday she learnt things that could help her capitalise on two knowledge systems she could access through her bilingual proficiency.

Student B found it was very difficult to translate some of his Chinese transcripts into English. When being interviewed, Chinese backgrounds parents both in Australia and China prefer using their native language to express their ideas. After discussion with his supervisors, both his supervisors and he recognised that keeping some different langue might contain different source of knowledge. To value knowledge from Chinese language, in his thesis original copies of Chinese mathematics examinations papers were attached.

After exchanging ideas with their supervisors, both Student A and B were encouraged to use their cultural knowledge and Chinese language. The use of Chinese idioms in particular may help students better understand cross-cultural communication issues and thus improve the quality of supervision.

Improving English language proficiency

In terms of research training experiences, Huang (2006) suggested that international RHD students found doing a research degree was a challenging but worthwhile learning experience. An important challenge they face is improving their capability for using advanced English. Student B reported:

I started to learn the alphabet in my junior high school in the early 1980s. During my studies at university, English was not my major. All I learned was just the vocabulary and grammar. The teaching/learning practices focused on reading materials related to education, pedagogy and psychology. I had little chance to use spoken English to express my ideas in China. When I arrived in Australia in 1997, I struggled with both my written and oral English. From 1997 to July 1999, as a Visiting Fellow at the University 2, I tried very hard to read as many English research books as I could. I also

talked with as many staff as possible to improve my proficiency in spoken English. I studied four courses related to university teaching and leaning designed specifically for academics working in universities. After I began my PhD, I attended academic writing classes for international RHD students.

As a non-English major studying abroad for a research degree, Student B encountered language difficulties while studying in Australia, an English speaking country. Student A, who was an English teacher, also faced the same challenge:

As an English teacher, I struggled with my oral English. That is, our learning focused on lexical items and grammatical structures. I initially learned English based on the idea that the learner accumulates all the building blocks of language one by one to eventually construct the whole language …

To help Student A improve advanced English language proficiency, her supervisor provided her with two important forms of feedback, one was error correction and the other was positive reinforcement or praise:

My supervisor was very careful in nurturing and helping me develop my ideas. I did not have to worry about my lexical or grammatical errors while developing my conceptual thing … My grammatical and other errors were always corrected by him on the hardcopy I submitted … He also asked me to take note of his detailed feedback, to check to ensure I agreed with and understood the reasons for changes, and to seek clarification where I did not … I asked myself, "why did he make change here? What's the problem with my expression? By doing such reflections all the time, my writing gradually improved.

She was unaccustomed to praise, but it gave her the courage to think, and to think that she might survive. Without this careful attention to Student A's situation, it would have been easy to destroy her confidence. Like a blade of grass growing through the cracks between stones. Student A wanted to find the space where her mind could find an opening, rather than being hammered down by the stereotypes about Asian students. Student A was also encouraged to participate in everyday conversations to improve her English speaking and listening skills; to present at seminars, conference and guest lectures were created as opportunities to help her practice public speaking:

I was encouraged by my supervisor to go to morning tea to talk with fellow staff. It was challenge to listen to them talking, especially when they talked things for which I did not have the "background" knowledge. However, I did pick up some Australian English, learning terms such as "Aussie" (Australian) and "mozzie" (mosquito). My supervisor created as many opportunities as possible for me to go to the seminars and conferences … After many times of presentation, seminar and conference talks are no longer a cause for stress … I was given many informal opportunities to practice my oral English. I was often invited to colleagues' home for parties.

For both Student A and Student B, the outcomes of doing their PhD were way beyond their modest expectations. Student A reported:

> My original purpose of doing it was to improve my English language proficiency. In fact, I gained much more than that. I learnt the method of doing research, studies a very important issue in Australian education and I gained a permanent full time teaching job in an Australian university.

This is consistent with Huang (2006) and McClure's (2005) research, which found that doing research in an English speaking country enabled international HDR students to develop advanced proficiency in English language skills and especially to gain confidence in research and academic writing.

Quality supervision and the challenges of internationalising universities

University academics and their work are under government controls exercised through regimes of micro-management. Quality supervisors are involved in efforts to track changes in government policies and their effects. By these means they refine their supervisory practices as often as they challenge their negative effects, in small but nonetheless significant way for their students. They make efforts to respond to, engage with university and government policy actors who make decisions affecting the quality of their teaching, including supervisory practices. They make these efforts within the university and externally, for instance through professional bodies, such as the Australian Association for Research in Education or the Australian Teacher Education Association. Quality teacher-supervisors work internally and externally helping to generate or otherwise sustain connections between those who can actually work to improve the quality of HDR supervision.

In response to the government driven reforms in universities, teaching-supervisors learn to engage with the changes in ministers and changes in government that give rise to policy shifts. They do this by reframing government and university policy practically, albeit given constraints on their work and working conditions, and the interests and needs of their students. They may engage in public relations campaigns to promote public, university and government recognition of the quality of their HDR supervision. To challenge government disinvestment in research and research training, it is important to draw attention to the strengths of already existing high quality supervisory pedagogies. Too often government and university policies implicitly assume that all supervisors are the major problem; they are depicted as being of a poor quality and their work is of a poor quality. However, teaching-supervisors are not resistant to change. This paper has shown that there are supervisors who engage in excellent supervisory practices, and moreover, they support and are engaged in efforts to improve the quality of their supervision. If there are concerns about the quality of supervision it must be situated in the context of university management and government research policy, funding and compliance regimes. In effect there are quality supervisors who could offer their universities leadership for professional development and policy making in this area. This is so, especially as they are also engaged in research into issues concerning the place international students' play in internationalising university education. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates this much.

Quality supervisors are engaged in advocating policy initiatives, as well as generating and providing professional development opportunities for other supervisors of HDR students, including participating in international efforts to do so.

Quality supervision of HDR students is likely to find its strength in multiple approaches. This might be preferable to having supervisors redirect their skills and knowledge from one area of government priority to another. Rather it may mean making changes by seeing how the multiple and distinctive approaches to supervision might unite around changing university and/or government policy agendas. While this paper has given an account of one instance of quality supervision, such supervision might itself be strengthened by multi-pronged approaches to it. Collaborative and mutually supportive approaches to RHD supervision within the context of recurring policy change and diverse organisationally demands may be more productive than a system organised around the rhetoric of 'best practice.'

Quality teaching-supervisors of international HDR students move beyond the university to pursue community engagement at the level of international collaboration in research supervision, so that they might learn more about the students with whom they are working. They participate in international programs for the professional development of HDR supervisors in the countries from where their international students come, usually for minimal recompense. Working as volunteers they interrupt the notion that research education is necessarily and always a tradeable commodity. This provides them with important opportunities to learn about the global flows of education policies, especially those driven by post-neo-liberal politics. Upon return they bring with them research methods books in their students' first language and use these to scaffold their studies in English and their first language through making them objects of critical analysis (Singh & Fu, 2007). In terms of change, the question is what infrastructure might today's entrepreneurial universities and its corporate managers provide to support the honourable work undertaken by HDR supervisors.

Despite the criticisms made in the research literature, the findings presented in this paper suggests that there are quality supervisors of HDR students at work in Australian universities, and they are working hard at making efforts to improve their supervision. Thus, this paper is not a call for changes that would narrow what is constituted as quality supervision. Instead, it calls for broadening recognition of such valuable work that is already being done, and encourages other graduate international HDR students to highlight the wide variety of practices that they do find helpful, and whether or not the organisational and policy environments helped or hindered. That is to say the quality of supervision must be considered in relation to the conditions of academics' work. The findings presented above point to a teaching-supervisor who was often working against the grain of such impositions.

Conclusion

This paper has explored two key features of quality supervision that are pertinent to the internationalising of research training. The first related to mentoring students to the timely and successful completion of a really useful thesis. The experience and methodology brought to bear in supervising international students can build on their bilingual proficiency; work to extend students' prior educational knowledge throughout the thesis and help students deepen their knowledge of advanced research processes. The second feature of quality teaching-supervision concerned designing students' future career trajectory as an integral aspect of their research training. This involves mentoring students about the most worthwhile topic and direction for their research project in ways that articulate their work-life aspirations. This includes creating part-time research employment opportunities to reinforce their research studies; leading them into the international research community through encouraging the presentation of research at seminars and conferences; introducing them to a range

of leading scholars of the area, and supporting them in the production of jointly-authored publications during their years of study. In conclusion, we recommend that it is vital for universities and HDR supervisors to shift their focus from these international students from Asia as being budgetary constraints requiring further cost-cutting or linguistic problems requiring remediation. Australian universities and HDR supervisors should renew efforts to make sense of the educational cultures, the research cultures and the writing conventions from where these students come; engage their knowledge and knowledge networks, and take a future-oriented perspective on the trans-national labour market for which they are preparing students.

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