

Book Review

McKenna, S., Clarence-Fincham, J., Boughey, C., Wels, H. & van den Heuvel, H. (Eds.).
2017. *Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.

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Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision is a collection edited by Sioux McKenna, Jenny Clarence-Fincham, Chrissie Boughey, Harry Wels and Henk van den Heuvel. It emerged from the Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision (SPGS) course¹ which ran 45 times in 20 higher education institutions in South Africa. As the authors point out in the preface, the book does not set out to provide a best practice guide to supervision but, rather, to present supervision as a complex and changing pedagogy which is fostered through experience and critical reflection.

The book comprises fifteen diverse contributions ranging from personal narratives of supervision experiences to fairly theoretical considerations of the postgraduate process. Issues of equity and social justice, as well as the importance of supervisors developing their own scholarly identities, are strong threads running through many of the chapters in the book.

Boughey, Wels and van den Heuvel's introductory chapter sets the scene and provides useful insights into the thinking and design of the Strengthening Postgraduate Supervision (SPGS) course and the rationale behind the book. It begins with an overview of the history of the South African Higher Education system and its impact on policy since 1994, illustrating and emphasising the inequalities that have arisen from this context. It then goes on to focus on the postgraduate arena and the disparities that continue to impact on postgraduate supervision. These understandings of the current inequalities influenced the complex thinking and planning that went into the design of the SPGS course. Consequently, the course aimed to encourage a discussion of participants' experiences of postgraduate supervision and these were used to prompt and inform critical engagement with issues of inequality and disparity. The authors conclude by pointing to the challenges of rethinking supervisory pedagogy in the context of the student protests and calls to decolonise the curriculum.

The four chapters that follow are personal narratives describing a variety of supervisory experiences and some of the supervision practices that have worked for these

¹ This collaborative project began with funding from the Dutch Government, through EP-Nuffic and was extended through a collaborative Teaching Development Grant from the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa (www.postgraduatesupervision.com).



authors. The last of these, chapter 5, by Mamalatswa Maruma, outlines some of the consequences arising from exclusionary supervisory practices (in terms of language, age, gender etc.) and suggests ways of countering them. The next three chapters shift the focus and challenge readers to consider new approaches to supervision and suggest they should move away from more conventional modes. The first in the section, by Rob Baum, adopts a feminist perspective for emancipatory supervision whilst Theresa Edelman, in chapter 7, recommends the use of narrative theory as form of theoretical scaffolding for supervision. In chapter 8, Gillian Eagle, a psychologist, considers strategies that can be used by students to control or manipulate the supervisory relationship and suggests ways that supervisors might respond.

The next four chapters are written by a range of disciplinary specialists. The authors highlight the ways in which disciplinary norms influence approaches to supervision. Chapter 9, by Shalini Singh, is again a personal narrative which highlights the difficulties of having to supervise postgraduate students from outside one's discipline in the context of low supervisory capacity in a University of Technology. In chapter 10, a novice supervisor in Visual Studies, Heidi Saayman-Hattingh, describes the challenges she faced in her supervision and considers a range of supportive interventions which she has tried. Kirstin Krauss, the author of chapter 11, shows how she has used critical discourse analysis to assist students in acquiring the discourses and practices of her discipline. In chapter 12, Riekie van Aswegen, a music specialist, attempts to map the steps in the development of a choral group onto those of the supervision process to show how both choral education and supervisory practices can act as change agents in enhancing cross cultural understanding.

The final three chapters broaden the focus to look at ways in which institutional contexts can influence postgraduate supervision. Chapter 13 is a personal narrative by Dumsile Hlengwa, which discusses the value of supervisory training in the context of a relatively new university where the capacity to supervise is limited. Three different models of supervision are discussed by Andrew Swarts, in chapter 14. Swarts concludes that what is crucial about supervision is the development of a 'nurturing and inspiring' relationship. The concluding chapter, by Ronel Steyn and Susan van Schalkwyk, is an account of the ways the SPGS course was used to generate a wider impact on a particular institution. The authors put forward ideas for extending the impact that courses like this can have: they can lead to changes in departmental processes and structures.

This book makes an important contribution to the literature on postgraduate supervision at a time when there has been an enormous growth in postgraduate research students' enrolment in South Africa. It helps with facing some of the challenging implications of this growth in numbers and the diverse needs and inequalities for postgraduate supervision. South Africa is not alone in confronting these challenges and the book offers insights that will be valuable and relevant in other contexts and other countries. Readers might find it useful to scan the book structure section in the preface and select articles that interest them, rather than attempting to read the entire collection, particularly because the chapters cater to a range of interests. There are chapters that offer very valuable insights

into the complexities of postgraduate supervision from an institutional perspective which will be useful to policy makers in higher education institutions and in government. Other chapters will be of interest to supervisors and those involved in training supervisors.

Reviewed by

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