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Developing Skills and Disposition for Lifelong Learning: Acculturative Issues Surrounding Supervising International Doctoral Students in New Zealand Universities

Mingsheng Li
Massey University, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This study examines the acculturative challenges facing non-English speaking background (NESB) international doctoral students in the process of discipline enculturation. Twenty NESB doctoral students at three New Zealand universities from eleven countries participated in the semi-structured interviews. The study has found that their transformative learning was the result of happiness, joy, success, and transformative disposition for lifelong learning as well as various challenges, plights and hardships. The dynamic interplay of the dichotomy fosters their intercultural competence, critical thinking, research skills, independence, and academic scholarships, and prepares them for new challenges and multiple academic demands. It is argued that developing capacities and disposition for lifelong learning should be facilitated through disciplinary enculturation, skills development, familiarity with academic conventions, and effective mentoring and healthy supervisor-supervisee relationships.

Keywords: acculturation, lifelong learning, NESB doctoral students, supervision, community of practice, andragogy

Nearly five million students travelled to study in higher education institutions outside their own countries in 2014 (Maslen, 2014). In spite of its small size of the population, New Zealand hosted two percent of the international student market share (MacGregor, 2014), with 112,000 international students in 2014 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015). The number of international students studying for a degree at New Zealand tertiary institutions has increased since 2008, reaching 30,280 (27.1% of the

total international student population in New Zealand) in 2014, accounting for 11 per cent of the total enrolments in higher education (Wensvoort, 2014). International education, the fifth largest export industry in the country, has contributed $2.6 billion to the New Zealand economy and created 28,000 jobs every year (Joyce, 2013). The New Zealand Leadership Statement for International Education has set a very ambitious goal to be achieved by 2025: to double the economic value from $2.6 billion to $5 billion by increasing enrolments (Joyce & Woodhouse, 2013).

Following the changes of international education policies in New Zealand, tuition fees for doctoral study and research are charged at domestic fee rates. More and more non-English-speaking background (NESB) international students come to pursue doctorate in New Zealand universities. According to the statistics provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2015), there were 3,838 international doctoral students studying at eight universities in New Zealand in 2014, accounting for over forty percent of the total doctoral student population in the country. When they come to study in a new educational environment, they experience challenges and transformational growth in adapting to the new academic life and in enculturating into the discourse community.

There has been a considerable body of research on the transitional issues facing international doctoral students ― the fit between international students and the host education environment and on lifelong learning, but the literature associating doctoral study as lifelong learning is very much limited. This paper draws on the theories of transformative learning, lifelong learning, and communities of practice [CoP], and examines the transformative experience and acculturation issues that challenge NESB doctoral students studying at New Zealand universities. Specifically, this study investigates the personal learning experiences of NESB doctoral students, their learning expectations, and perceptions of team supervision and supervisors' pedagogical approaches to inducting NESB doctoral students into the research community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Watson (2003) defines lifelong learning as "a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles circumstances, and environments" (p. 3). Shachama and Od-Cohenb (2009) suggest that the acculturative issues facing doctoral students as adult learners should be addressed in relation to adult learning or lifelong learning in doctoral programs. Fostering autonomous, independent, and self-directed lifelong learners requires a constructive alignment with the

environment in tune with the self-concept and self-direction, and a climate in which the relationship between teacher and learner is that of "mutuality", respect, and collaboration (Gould, 2012).

NESB doctoral students need mentoring facilitated by situated learning, learning through various forms of participation in real-life academic activities mediated by acquisition of the discourse language, and adequate exposure to the ideas and practices in the field and the discourse, and discipline knowledge and conventions (Simpson & Matsuda, 2008; Tran, 2013). As newcomers, their "legitimate peripherality" requires them to participate in the CoP, to have a good knowledge of the "culture of practice," and eventually "make the culture of practice theirs" (Lave & Wenger, 2002, p. 111). Wenger (2011) defines communities of practices as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Three important elements constitute the meaning of a CoP: the domain, and community, and the practice. Members are committed to the domain, share and value the tacit collective knowledge and competence that distinguishes members and nonmembers. They engage in joint activities and discussions, and build relationships with the community members. They are practitioners with "a shared repertoire of resources," "a shared practice" and predictability in their sustained interactions (Wenger, 2011, p. 2). A community of practice plays a crucial role in shaping the participants' identity and constructing members' linguistic and communication styles through its history, mutual sense making, common interpretation, and practice (Eckert, 2006). According to Lave and Wenger, the critical element of their "legitimate peripherality" is about access to the culture of practice, about transparency, understanding, manipulation, and decoding of the "inner workings" of the "black box" (p.117). Very often, NEBS doctoral students at an early stage "lack the language and tools necessary to engage others in the community, and … their attempts to participate fall short of the community's expectations" (Simpson & Matsuda, 2008, pp. 93-94).

Golde (1998) describes doctoral students' enculturation process as "an unusual double socialization" (p. 56), that is, socialization into the role of a graduate student and preparatory socialization into a profession. Casanave and Li (2008) add a third one, that is, immediate socialization into language and culture for NESB doctoral students. In initial socialization into the academic culture of the university, Golde (1998) states that doctoral students undertake four tasks: intellectual mastery, learning about the realities of a graduate student, learning about the profession, and integrating oneself into the department. Casanave (2008) acknowledges that NEBS students often experience challenges in their academic enculturation, such as lack of understanding of academic and discourses and genre conventions, thinking styles, socio-political and interpersonal engagement, socially and

politically grounded literacy-related activities, academic expectations, tacit assumptions, unwritten game rules, and relationships with supervisors. These challenges make doctoral students "feel lie fish out of water" (Casanave, 2008, p. 14).

NEBS students as novices experience difficulties in "depersonalized" discipline discourses and conventions (Archer, 2008, p. 265). To become familiar with discipline discourses and conventions, they must conform to discipline conventions and develop academic literacies involving "epistemology, subjectivities, discourses and institutional power relations" and negotiation of different cultural values, pedagogies, relationships, conceptualization of knowledge, and contexts (Cartwright & Noone, 2001, p. 45). Casanave (2002) notes that academic literacy is a "situated" practice involving participation and experience in local practice. Discipline enculturation requires the participants to understand the academic settings and "sets of rules, conventionalized practices and strategies" in the "serious game" that structures our academic and social life (Casanave, 2002, p. xiv). The game metaphor suggests that academic literacy is influenced and dictated by a multiplicity of games that safeguards "the unchanging reproduction of social structures and practices without giving up the notion of structure" (Casanave, 2002, p. 18).

It is "wretchedly difficult" for NEBS international students to play academic literacy games because of their cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds, epistemological orientations, prior learning experience, unfamiliarity with the game rules (Christine Pearson Casanave, 2002, p. 35), confusion with clashes between disciplinary genres and discourses, and lack of knowledge of specific academic genres and discourse conventions (Chen, 2001). For NEBS doctoral students, academic literacy practices "represent a game of survival in a fragmented environment or an introduction to the serious academic games that characterize different disciplines" (Casanave, 2002, p. xviii). Discipline enculturation is conceived as partial and fragmented and it is an ongoing incomplete process (Casanave, 2008). The straightjacket of discipline genre and discourse conventions becomes a barrier to international students' creativity and academic enculturation. Within such a discipline discourse, students, constrained by forces of conventional expectations, are allowed to be creative in content, but not so in genre and conventions, nor in lifelong learning (Allison, 2004).

To achieve academic success, there needs to be a period of enculturation into the CoP through mentoring by creating and maintaining a healthy, constructive, and productive relationships between students and supervisors (Lee, 2012) and through participation in the CoP, including "tacit conventions," "shared world views," "specific perceptions," and "underlying assumptions" (Wenger, 1998, p. 47). Belcher (1994) comments that the success of thesis writing and the gaining of membership status in the

CoP depend entirely on whether there is a match or mismatch in the research community, and whether the students and supervisors share the expectations of the discourse community. Fujioka (2008) finds that to be successfully enculturated into the CoP, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is essential, and yet, this enculturation process is heavily influenced by status imbalance where students become vulnerable to supervisors embodying power and authority, coupled with cultural differences.

Shachama and Od-Cohenb (2009) argue that the aims of doctoral study are to acquire practical knowledge through enculturation and practice, "generate new knowledge and facilitate change" (p. 283). Only by integrating the characteristics of adult and lifelong learning into practice, by taking into account both cognitive and emotional elements of learners, their experience, and their culture, and by providing practical orientation and adequate access to and involvement in the CoP, can change and lifelong learning occur.

Tran (2013) argues that for NESB doctoral students, cross-border intercultural communication involves a dynamic interplay of challenges, difficulties and barriers as well as opportunities for changes, self-transformation, self-determination and academic growth in negotiating higher education. Tran (2013) describes such dynamics as transformative learning which refers to "a changing process in which international students construct reality through revisiting their existing assumptions and moving towards life-changing developments in their personal and professional perspectives" (p. 124). This negotiating process enhances their personal agencies, transformative power, intercultural competence, multiple perspectives, and frames in adapting to the new environment and serves as a catalyst to self-discovery and life-long learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a qualitative interview approach to collect data to identify the challenges facing NESB doctoral students studying in New Zealand universities. The approach allowed the researcher to listen to the narratives of the participants in the process of inquiry to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics of their experience and complexity of the cases of their socio-cultural and academic adjustment by "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon and integrating their own experiences and the context and situations that have influenced their experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58).

Participants

Twenty NEBS doctoral students from three universities (Massey University, Victoria University of Wellington, and University of Otago)

participated in this study. They came from different parts of the world: China (5), Estonia (1), Indonesia (1), Malaysia (4), Germany (2), Russia (2), Taiwan (1), Ukraine (1), Venezuela (1), and Vietnam (1).

At the times of the interviews (May-November, 2014), five just graduated, two had graduated for two years, and thirteen others were in their second, third or fourth year. The disciplines these participants studied in included: linguistics, education management, information management, finance management, food safety and management, marketing, cross-cultural studies, public relations, international business, accounting and education.

Procedure

The interview questions were designed to elicit the participants' narratives, their views, lived experience and their responses to the research questions that were focused on their learning experiences, with a particular focus on how their learning was supported to facilitate cognitive and emotional changes and lifelong learning. The interview questions also involved their perceptions of supervisor-supervisee relationships, team supervision, teaching pedagogies, and cultural barriers. Interviews with the students in Wellington were conducted face to face, while interviews with students in Auckland and Dunedin were conducted through Skype video conferencing. A snowball sampling research technique, also called "link-tracing sampling" by Hancock and Gile (2010, p. 11) was purposefully used to approach participants whom the researcher knew in person and they in turn introduced the researcher to other participants. The snowball sampling technique was useful to allow the researcher to use a chain referral from initial participants to identify the targeted subjects until a desirable number of participants was obtained. All the interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is defined as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). The transcripts of this study were thematically classified, coded and assigned meaning for data analysis, put into logical and meaningful categories to identify significant thematic structures, analyzed through an inductive approach to let the critical themes emerge out of the data, and examined in a holistic fashion (Adams, Khan, Raeside, & White, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Suter, 2012). For ethical reasons, the interview order (P1, P2, P3…) instead of the participants' names will be used to represent the participants.

RESULTS

Overall, most NESB doctoral students were satisfied with their learning experience with their supervisors. They were very grateful to them for their supervision, guidance, research and professional experiences, and pastoral care. They saw their supervisors as their role models in the CoP. To them good supervision involves supervisors' understanding, empathy, timely feedback, constructive criticism, encouragement, expertise, direction, responsibility, management skills, knowledge in the field and the ability to convey the knowledge, availability to students, interest in the student's research and future career, and a balanced use of the hands-on and hands-off approaches. However, such expectations were not often met. Problems occurred in managing relationships between supervisors and students in terms of role expectations, team supervision, and disciplinary acculturation.

Mismatched role expectations

The supervisor-supervisee relationship is associated with role expectations and behavior. The match or mismatch in role expectations predicts positively or negatively the role behavior and perceptions of the participants. However, expectations built on role conceptualizations and previous learning and supervision experiences are not often clearly and concisely communicated and articulated. They are dynamic and keep changing at different stages of the supervision process. P4 reported that the relationship was essential to her research study and "it just dominates everything." DP6 described the relationship as the "chemistry" that could lead to harmony and disharmony when role expectations are matched or mismatched.

Associated with role expectations are the two important pedagogical approaches adopted by supervisors: the hands-on and hands-off approaches. The hands-on approach is an intervening approach leading to more effective supervision, and the hands-off approach refers to non-directive supervision aiming to foster students' independence and autonomy. It is important to keep a balance between the two approaches, as a student progresses to different stages. In this study most supervisors tended to use the hands-off approach, advising students to read and write by themselves, to define their own research problems, formulate their own research questions, without providing needed support and supervision. They believed that writing the thesis was the student's responsibility. Conflict occurred when expectations of supervisors and students were not met. Students expecting hands-on supervision often felt disoriented, unsupported, isolated, marginalized, discouraged, and largely ignored under the hands-off approach.

P3 reported that she had expected her supervisors as experts in the area to take a hands-on approach by making a detailed plan for her.

However, her supervisors adopted the hands-off approach, letting her do whatever she would like to do, aiming to develop her independent research capabilities. Six months had passed and she was frustrated. She complained, "I was never told what to do next." Although she was highly motivated, she felt that she needed directions and academic support that had never been provided. P4 told a similar story. Every time when she met with her supervisors, she did not get any useful advice from them:

> I was usually in awe of my supervisors. In Germany, we are always in awe of our supervisors. … You come with a huge awe and you realize that is not all done for your benefit and no advice was given.

She had encountered huge challenges in her research but the supervisors did not lend a hand, letting her grope in the dark until six months later one of the supervisors "mumbled" that she had bitten off more than she could chew. She was angry that the supervisor had not mentioned this earlier. Her deep trust and confidence in them had turned into anger. She believed her supervisors had not performed their roles as expected.

P6 also found that she and her supervisors were not on the same page. They did not offer her much needed help. She had not reached the stage when she could do research independently and "liberate" herself. She was frustrated that they had adopted the hands-off approach prematurely. She said,

> No one in here is to tell you what to do next. I have to learn to control what to do next, what I need to do next, and why I should do this first and not that.

She was puzzled that the supervisors did not supervise her as expected:

> No ground rules had been laid down for us to follow. No clear role boundaries were drawn. No appropriate supportive structure was set up. No clear and transparent expectations had been articulated.

P7 voiced the same view, "I was struggling on my own. I did not feel comfortable to go when I was struggling because I did not know if what I was doing was appropriate or not." Similarly, P14 was puzzled with the supervision style:

> In the first year, it was really hard for me because in New Zealand or the Western educational system they do not tell you exactly what to do. In Indonesia, teachers tell you what to do. Here they voice

their opinions and let you make your own decision. In Indonesia, teachers are more responsible for the students; here in New Zealand, teachers are more responsible for themselves.

There were huge differences between supervision in Russian and in New Zealand. In Russia, it was more of a guided stuff. Supervisors led you by the hand. Here in New Zealand, you have to take the decision for yourself. It was hard for me here. I felt like a blinded kitten and did not know where to go.

P15 was extremely dissatisfied with her learning experience because of the "ineffective" supervision:

> The first year was simply a waste of time. My supervisors did not give me any helpful directions. They sat on their hands. I wasted lots of time. I read lots of irrelevant stuff. You do need directions and support to boost your confidence.

P16, a Vietnamese student, expressed his lonely feelings because supportive supervision was unavailable under the hands-off pedagogical approach:

> I had two supervisors, one an associate professor and another one a doctor. We met once or twice in six months. They were busy people. They did not have time to read what I had written. They did not have time to support me during the four years. I felt very lonely without the help of supervisors.

P19, a Chinese student, felt that there was a mismatch in his expectations and those of his supervisors. The mismatch lay in the perception of the role of the student. Her supervisors believed that as a Ph.D. student, he should have acquired all the key research skills and have the capacity to undertake independent studies:

> I feel I am a student. I come here to learn, to receive training, to improve my academic writing. It is unfair to treat me as a highly qualified doctoral graduate, an academic writer with many articles published in A-ranking journals. Although I met the enrolment criteria, I just started my new journey. I needed my supervisors to lead me by the hand. It is unethical to let the student grope in the dark.

This study has found that more than one third of the participants said that their first year was a waste of time. They received no proper care

and support from their supervisors. The hands-off approach, when not used appropriately, could undermine students' interests in learning and research. However, a small number of students felt the hands-off supervision styles met their expectations. For example, P5 expressed her enthusiasm with such a supervision style:

> I like to be independent. I like to fight out things on my own. I knew my supervisor was happy with independent students. She kind of did leave us alone but probably I think she figured out who can be on their own and who needs more support. It was good that I was able to do my own things at my own space.

On the other hand, the extreme hands-on approach could conflict with student expectations. P6 expected to undertake an independent study, but she could not because she was doing her primary supervisor's own research project. He had a rigorous control over the research process and procedures. She complained:

> He formulated the research questions, designed the research methods and the thesis structure. He did everything for me. He accepted me as a PhD student on the condition of me working on what he wanted me to do. That was tough for me because he knew what he was doing and what I was doing, but I did not know what I was doing and why I did it. It was so uncomfortable for me because it did not mean anything to me. He did not like what I wrote. Instead, he wrote chapters for me!

In sum, different students and supervisors had different role expectations. Role conflicts occurred when expectations were unmet. The imbalance of the hands-on and hands-off approaches was considered to be one of the major problems in supervision.

Lack of supervision capabilities and disciplinary knowledge

Students' disappointment over supervision could also be seen in the students' perception of the supervisors' lack of supervision capabilities and disciplinary knowledge. In their view, supervisors, especially primary supervisor, should be an expert in the discipline. It can be a challenge for those who did not have any knowledge of the discipline in which the NESB doctoral students are enrolled. Two students reported that neither their primary nor secondary supervisors possessed the disciplinary knowledge of their studies—an accounting supervisor did not know much about cross-cultural issues, and a psychology supervisor did not know how to supervise the student doing research in applied linguistics. Five participants noted that

their secondary supervisors did not have any knowledge of the areas of their research. They were allocated such a role by the universities to promote these academics' profiles for ever being a Ph.D. supervisor, thus for future academic promotions.

Two students had studied for over one year in a university. However, the lack of supervision capacity and supervisors' lack of disciplinary knowledge had prevented them from moving forward. One had already passed the confirmation stage. Eventually, they were "tossed" over to the other school where they could find better supervision. Unfortunately, they had to start from the very beginning.

Three doctoral students complained that they had spent one year longer to complete their doctoral study because of supervisors': lack of disciplinary knowledge to guide them, ineffective supervision, and insufficient commitment and responsibility.

One Russian student stated that:

> At some stage, I had 3 supervisors because either the other ones were on sabbatical leave or another supervisor was doing some other work. The most consistent one became my primary supervisor. But none of them had expertise in the area of my research…. He [primary supervisor] was good in terms of providing me with emotional support …. It was quite an individual study for me.

Similarly, a Chinese student reported:

> Basically, my secondary supervisor does not know what I am doing. She was my primary supervisor's supervisor. She is already a professor. Frankly speaking, she is not helpful to my academic research. I am not blaming her. She is specialized in another discipline.

Student's strong enthusiasm in the research projects was dampened and the university's reputation was damaged when the students realized that their supervisors, primary or secondary, did not have expected supervision capacities and disciplinary knowledge. Being a specialist in one knowledge domain does not mean one is a specialist in other knowledge domains.

Team supervision – more problematic than facilitative

Team supervision, consisting of two to four supervisors, has been considered as an effective approach to doctoral supervision. It draws on knowledge, expertise and experiences from different people, different disciplines, and even from different universities. It is especially important

when doctoral students' research topics cross disciplines. Multiple supervisors provide different types of complementary support, such as disciplinary knowledge, theories, practices, language, administration, perspectives, and pastoral care (including emotional support). For example, P6 reported benefiting from team supervision:

> Both my supervisors had strengths in their own areas. In my Ph.D. study, I used two different frameworks. One was an expert in one framework and another in another one. … Their strengths complement each other so that that is an advantage for me.

The students, who found that their supervisors lacked disciplinary knowledge in supervision, enjoyed the complementary role these supervisors played, such as editing and corrections of students' writing.

However, team supervision was considered more problematic than facilitative. More problems than benefits were reported in this study.

Managing team supervision was found to be a significant challenge to many doctoral students. The biggest challenge to them was managing their supervisors and their conflicting views. They were frustrated when they were given conflicting instructions. P1 reported having lost her confidence and trust in team supervision. She did not know that she was the owner of her research project, and she was expected to make her decisions when her supervisors proposed conflicting views. She gave this account:

> I had three supervisors. They often had different and conflicts views and instructions. I was difficult for me to adjust who I should listen to. My Asian mind-set told me to follow whatever the supervisor says. However, I was totally confused when they gave me different instructions.

Her cultural orientation required her to please all the masters. It was not until in the fourth year did she realize that

> The supervisors' suggestions are just suggestions. It is up to the students to consider and make their own decisions. They are not a must. Different opinions were meant to help me think more about what I was doing and offer me different perspectives for me to deal with the issues.

However, such a revelation came too late. It took her two years longer to complete her study than it was originally planned.

Managing team supervision was also a challenge to a German student. She said,

Basically my secondary supervisor had a lot to say and personality-wise he is a lot bossier and my primary supervisor didn't object him. … Initially I did whatever I was told and that resulted in some huge problems for me. ... I could have said NO to a lot things. I would have made more clear decisions by myself. I needed to think more than I trusted them.

P7, a student from Estonia,had a different experience. She understood that students took ownership of and had responsivity for their research projects and they had to be "picky" with supervisors' views and comments:

I came from a background similar to here. So I did not struggle as much as students from Asian backgrounds, to stand for my own ideas and not to take the supervisors' advice 100 per cent because they often change their minds, too. It can have severe consequences if you just do what they say.

In team supervision, power struggle between supervisors was found detrimental to students. Supervisors have different styles of supervision and different social and academic status that make it difficult for students to negotiate especially when one supervisor is more powerful than the other. P8 encountered such a type of team supervision. When the conflicts escalated, his approach was, "Listen to the primary supervisor." In such a power struggle, the one in a weaker position could not offer any supervision support. The following statement by P5 is illuminating:

My primary supervisor is very famous. He was the supervisor of the MA and Ph.D. theses of my second supervisor. She respects him a lot. She always says "yes". She never offers her opinions and never contributes anything to supervision.

P20 found the power struggle and game playing between supervisors damaging to his study. In his experience, as a powerless student, he did not get any help from his two supervisors, two well-known professors. They were busy teaching, attending international conferences, doing their own research, without enough time to supervise him and to read what he had written. They often provided minimal feedback that was "useless, or irrelevant to the research project".

Supervision and enculturation

The supervisor-supervisee relationship is associated with pedagogy and disciplinary enculturation where doctoral students are encouraged to

take part in disciplinary activities, gradually gaining entry into and become a full member of the community of practice. Supervisors played a critical role in inducting students into the research community to enable them to become familiar with Western research traditions, norms, values, philosophy, disciplinary genre, research methods and conventions. It was an erroneous assumption that doctoral candidates were well prepared for the academic endeavor.

P1 insisted that academic, cultural and social integration was extremely important to NESB students who did not have adequate knowledge and skills to develop their all-around identity as a researcher, scholar, student, and a social and cultural human being. They needed "nurturing." Communicating and interacting with supervisors provided them with excellent opportunities to directly learn from them in terms of communication strategies, integrity and rigor in research, socializing skills, and interpersonal and intercultural communication skills. To P20, it was the supervisors' responsibility to teach students the "game rules" in the supervision process that remain invisible, unwritten, unarticulated but critical to the students as green hands:

> To me, supervision means teaching students the Ph.D. game rules. Supervisors themselves have mastered and controlled these hidden rules. I hate these rules but it could be a huge help to make these rules transparent to the students so that they can play and win the game.

He was dissatisfied with his supervisors for "controlling" and "manipulating" these rules. He expected them to guide him to formulate this research questions, develop a conceptual framework, address the gaps in his knowledge of the research process, develop a structure and design for his project, identify appropriate methodology and methods, analyze findings, and he also expected them to have some basic knowledge of his research area so that they could offer relevant and helpful advice, and ultimately usher him into the research community.

Enculturation involves offering workshops and seminars and creating a support network and peer support and a co-counselling system as part of the research program to help students gain entry into the professional community and fight isolation. Many students reported that they had benefitted much from the workshop organized by the department they were studying in. These workshops targeted doctoral students' learning and research needs, such as seminars on doing literature review, writing the abstract, introduction and conclusion, adopting right research methods, fighting plagiarism, writing for publication, managing your supervisors, managing supervisor-supervisee relationships etc. In these workshops,

students not only learned from others, but also socialized with others to fight isolation and to enculturate them into the CoP, which was important to their independence and lifelong learning.

Some other students, however, felt that isolation was a serious problem. Very often they were not treated as "students," nor were they treated as staff members of the school. Their supervisors were too "busy" to pay adequate attention to them. They received feedback from their supervisors that was often long overdue and thus unhelpful. They became "independent" at a cost, although they highly valued autonomy. They were isolated in their lonely research journey. For example, P10 told his story in this way:

> On this campus, I felt lonely and had nobody to talk to. My family was in China. I had four supervisors, two on this campus and two on another campus. As my research project was very unique and it was not related to the areas of the four supervisors. They did not understand my topic and they could not give useful comments. The most important thing that my primary supervisor did for me was to introduce to the New Zealand Institute of Food and I began to understand how the industry worked. This is good for my research, and for me to broaden my networks.

The above reporting indicates that in order to enculturate students into the discipline culture, supervisors played multiple roles in different contexts at different stages of supervision. Enculturation involves introducing students to the research community, building and broadening networks, participating in the community of practice as a legitimate peripheral member, and eventually gaining knowledge of the discipline conventions.

English language and culture

A large body of literature points to the English language as a major barrier in academic acculturation (Biggs, 2003; Manathunga, Commons, Chatterjee, Cotterall, & Gao, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Students needed the language to develop their philosophical concepts, ideas, theories, research frameworks through reading and writing. However, only three students reported that language was a barrier to them. As peripheral members of the community, the students encountered many other problems that were more challenging than English proficiency, such as inadequate knowledge of disciplinary discourses, insufficient knowledge about research philosophy and methodology, underdeveloped research skills, lack of a thorough understanding of game rules, expectations, social skills, and

interpersonal relationships between students and supervisors. The magnitude of these problems reduced language barriers to a lesser important place.

There is a gap between the perceived needs for different types of supervision and the actual supervision they received from the supervisors. As a result, learning support offered by universities that focused on language skills development did not prove to be helpful to NEBS doctoral students, because many of their writing problems involved mastering of discipline and genre discourses, and articulation and development of the concepts, ideas, and theories, more than linguistic features.

Culture is often blamed for the problems between supervisors and students from different cultural backgrounds (Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 1997). However, this study has not found strong evidence to support this claim. Only a couple of participants referred to culture as a barrier to NEBS doctoral students that led to misunderstanding, miscommunication and misperceptions. Most students agreed that culture was not an issue. There are two contributing factors to such a phenomenon. The first factor is that many supervisors had an extensive range of intercultural communication experiences. Many of them were from different cultural backgrounds, having received their education in different societies, and supervised students from different cultures. The second factor is that most students had acquired their higher education qualifications from countries other than their home countries, and had developed their intercultural communication skills. Many of them had studied in New Zealand for many years before they were enrolled in the Ph.D. program. For example, four students entered the doctoral program and their supervisors were the ones who had taught them in their undergraduate and postgraduate years. Years of sojourn in foreign countries had cultivated these students' effective intercultural communication and interpersonal communication skills. This explains that culture was not considered as a barrier to their doctoral studies.

DISCUSSION

This study has investigated twenty NEBS doctoral students' acculturative experiences from three New Zealand universities. The supervisor-supervisee relationship was found to be critical and most important to facilitate students' cultural adaptation and transformative learning. For NESB students, one of their primary objectives of overseas study "is to transform themselves rather than conforming to a fixed set of academic conventions of the host institutions" (Tran, 2013, p. 128). The study has found that in spite of their plights, challenges, hardship, and difficulties that students had been through in their "transformative investment," they eventually found themselves growing academically, professionally, and psychologically. The dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities empowered NESB

doctoral students to undergo transformative changes and critical self-reflection, construct the new self-image, develop internal strength, cope with multiple academic demands, and prepare themselves to meet future challenges in their career in the workplace.

However, this study has found that NESB doctoral students' transformative or life-long learning did not occur easily. The process of negotiating the discourse and discipline practices in higher education in New Zealand was largely a one-way communication. The onus of acculturation and transformation was placed mainly on international students rather than on the supervisors. The tension between students and supervisors was often the cause of disappointment. The key issues involved the role of supervisor-supervisee relationships, inadequacy of supervision, and the imbalance of power, responsibility, and autonomy (Becher, Henkel, & Kogan, 1994). Students were expected to take full responsibilities, while supervisors did not seem to have much involvement in what Grant (2001) called "dirty business" in supervision; "dirty business" because supervision involves the issues of power, desire, and difference. Within the institution, this "dirty business" occurs because the unclear and unset boundaries may be dangerously crossed by both supervisor and student, the former with more power in the hierarchy than the latter.

The findings of this study show that NESB doctoral students have a strong desire to receive academic support from supervisors to help them with formulation of research questions, discipline and discourse knowledge and writing conventions, academic norms, research philosophy and methods, critical reading and writing, and thesis structure and organization. However, the pervasive non-directive pedagogical or hands-off approaches and supervisory inadequacy that ignored students' actual needs and prior culturally shaped learning experiences and their ready responsiveness immediately threw these aspiring students into anxiety and some were rendered to be "orphans," entirely abandoned by the university. The study suggests that there should be a balance between the hands-on and hands-off approaches at different stages of supervision. Both extremes could cause serious consequences. A thorough knowledge of the students' prior learning experience, their cultural academic expectations, cultural differences, and supervisor-supervisee relationship could help supervisors to achieve the equilibrium in supervision.

Team supervision has acquired "a privileged position in the policy frameworks of many universities around the globe", a structure formed for the interests of students with its practical support, shared responsibility and workload, accountability, quality assurance, and transparency (Manathunga, 2012, p. 42). The findings of this study support Manathunga's view that team supervision could provide students with opportunities to develop their scholarships, research vistas, and multiple perspectives to view the world,

and to learn and practice discourse strategies and intellectual argument and debates, and most importantly, to be enculturated into the CoP to prepare them for the future career pursuit. This study agrees with Manathunga that team supervision is likely to cause problems and risks, when power dynamics, inter-subjectivity, and cultural differences are brought into the play and when supervisors and their students have not been properly equipped with skills for team communication, team management, team collaboration and coordination, and conflicts management. Team supervision, when improperly managed, "social loafing" in supervision emerges due to inequity of effort, loss of personal accountability, motivation loss, and coordination loss (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010, p. 163). Social loafing is connected with structural and policy failure (Becher et al., 1994). NESB doctoral students suffer heavy losses academically and psychologically, and the university's reputation is seriously undermined. Being supervised by supervisors who do not know what their students are doing, who have little expertise in the field of research, and who are not held accountable for students' academic studies can be an enormous disappointment to students.

English language and culture were often blamed for NESB doctoral students' unsatisfactory learning experiences. It masks other more important perspectives that must be considered: the game rules of discipline discourses, unspoken rules of the research fields, academic acculturation through community practice, cultural differences, research skills, theoretical knowledge, and tacit knowledge of doctoral thesis writing. Delamont et al. (1997) argue that only when students "are able to internalize skills and criteria in order to exercise judgements" (p. 108) can they master and appreciate the art and craft embedded in the tacit aspects of disciplinary genre and discourse, conventions, and the game rules. Such tacit knowledge, according to Lee (2008), can be acquired through five aspects of supervision: function support (administration and logical giving of information), training in critical thinking, academic enculturation (introduction of the unspoken rules of the research field), emancipation (self-development and independence), and relationship development (lifelong working partnerships and friendship, enhanced self-esteem, and social networks). Becher et al. (1994) argues that "all encounters are part of the contest, even supervision" and therefore students must learn to compete and "must learn and find ways to manage the harsh reality of the norms and culture of the academic world" (p. 151).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the size of the research sample is relatively small for the researcher to examine the gravity and magnitude of the issues in supervisory practices in New Zealand universities. A survey of

a larger population is needed to identify the "real" problems that are threatening the reputation of internationalization of New Zealand higher education. Secondly, this study told a "one-side story" without the stories of the other side: supervisors. The voices of supervisors could have contributed much to the understanding of the nature of the problems. In addition, the voice of a third party, such as the Doctoral Research Committees or the Postgraduate Research Committees could also play a significant role. Thirdly, the sample included the NESB doctoral students from many cultures. Students from European cultures might have different learning experiences from Asian students. Students from different cultures might have encountered different problems in their academic acculturation. Comparing their perceptions and learning experiences might shed some light on intercultural communication in terms of supervision across cultures. Lastly, doctoral learning and supervision span a long period of time, at least 3 years. The investigation focused on the memory and the moments of learning experiences and thus the findings might present themselves as incomplete or unrepresentative. Thus, a longitudinal study might help uncover the inner workings of some of the issues presented in this study.

CONCLUSION

Developing skills and disposition for lifelong learning is a critical goal in educating doctoral students in New Zealand universities. However, NEBS international doctoral students experience challenges in adapting to the new educational environment, meeting the academic expectations, and attaining their goals. This study has examined the acculturative issues facing these students in the process of discipline enculturation and legitimate peripheral participation in the academic community of practice. Many NESB doctoral students had positive learning experiences at universities where they had developed capacity for self-direction, metacognitive awareness, and disposition for lifelong learning. Writing a Ph.D. thesis is expected to embody independent research carried out by the student. Supervision and academic dialogues between students, supervisors, and members of the community of practice are vital. International students had experienced difficulties in developing such capacities and disposition for lifelong learning, including lack of the disciplinary discourse knowledge, insufficient knowledge of the game rules in academic writing and research, unsupportive supervisor-supervisee relationships,   insufficient   commitment   and responsibility, and disciplinary knowledge on the part of the supervisors, role confusion, ineffective team supervision, and imbalance of the hands-off and hands-on approaches in supervision. The benchmark of a Ph.D. thesis is its originality and contribution to new knowledge to be facilitated by effective supervision. The study argues that developing capacities and disposition for

lifelong learning requires disciplinary enculturation, knowledge of academic conventions, skills development, commitment, motivation, and responsibility, and a healthy supervisor-supervisee relationship.

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MINGSHENG LI, PhD, is a senior lecturer in communication. His research interests include international education, intercultural communication, and migrant studies. He teaches Business Communication and Cross-Cultural Communication at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Email: M.S.Li@massey.ac.nz.

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