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Relational Collaborative Autoethnography: Post-Doctoral Fellowship in South Africa

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During a relational collaborative autoethnographic process, a post-doctoral fellow (PDF) and his mentor, reflect on their challenges and experiences as mentor and mentee during a two-year PDF programme at an open and distance learning (ODL) university. They recognise the benefits of the PDF programme from both a mentor and mentee perspective, despite the challenges they faced. Credit is awarded to the sound relationship that they forged within a collaborative climate where they agreed upon common goals, which were beneficial for both parties. The focus for the PDF was the research area since great emphasis is placed it at the hosting university. Since the dominant mode of enquiry is a relational collaborative autoethnography, they were able to lay a good foundation and lean on positive psychology and mentoring and learning theories to solidify the message of their stories. In so doing they believe that the research question has been addressed and that it may lend strength to the notion of an improved PDF programme to be offered at the particular university.

Background

Post-doctoral fellowship (PDF) programmes are offered at universities all over the world; however, Lemmer (2012) explains that small-scale and in-depth studies regarding the experiences of individual academics are less common than research conducted on “megatrends in the transformation of universities”. Based on a close mentoring relationship with a PDF (mentee), a detailed account of the experiences of the mentor and mentee are shared during a PDF programme (February 2014 – February 2016) in a South African ODL university. The mentor (researcher and author of this article) explored the personal and professional mentoring experiences of both the mentor and mentee, and the influence this involvement had on their academic development.

The mentor’s responsibilities were *inter alia* to mentor the PDF’s research activities, writing of articles and the other undertakings stipulated in the PDF contract. The mentor supported the PDF in meeting job expectations and experiencing a “foretaste of benefits” that could

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develop from such a mentor/mentee relationship (Chang, Longman & Franco, 2014, p. 373, 383). Snoeren, Raaijmakers, Niessen and Abma (2015) found that “attentiveness towards each other and a caring attitude, alongside learning-focused values, promote a high-quality mentoring relationship. Mutual growth and learning takes place where there is person centredness, care, trust and mutual influence.” Both mentor and mentee adhered to these values, which provided a platform for the PDF to develop career skills and build a professional network. However, personal and institutional factors formed part of their challenges.

Key elements of a post-doctoral training programme are offered by Matthieu, Bellamy, Pena and Scott Jr. (2008, p. 245), namely the research environment, mentorship, collaboration and networking, seminars and meetings, coursework and research experience. Taking into consideration these elements, they adopted them and adapted the detail to suit their context. They considered aspects related to the research environment such as availability of office space; accessibility of university resources including technology, library accessibility, courses and data management tools; and availability of experienced investigators. Formal mentorship by the mentor was routinely conducted internally, and scheduled, and also included other faculty members. Informal mentorship took place simultaneously by the Research, Postgraduate Studies, Innovation & Commercialisation (RPSIC) office, the dean of the College of Education (CoE) and the research office, and the Head of Department (Psychology of Education). Coursework included short courses and workshops both inside and outside the department, research training and postgraduate supervision. Collaboration and networking was realised by means of conference travel, accommodation and registration support; interdisciplinary meetings (inside and outside the department), seminars, and lectures. Research experience was evaluated by the CoE research office and the RPSIC office, which monitored *inter alia* collaborative and individual research projects.

The processes and the outcomes of the PDF/mentor relationship are discussed and presented as a relational collaborative autoethnography. Firstly, literature on post-doctoral mentoring, relational and collaborative autoethnography are discussed, followed by the theoretical framework, the research methodology, relational collaborative autoethnography and, finally, the recommendations and conclusion.

Post-doctoral mentoring

“Postdocs are particularly susceptible to the changing demands of academic work life, as they mostly inhabit fragile institutional positions while they aspire to establish themselves in academia. The experience of being in a highly competitive race that requires a continuously accelerating working pace as well as a strong focus on individual achievement is central to their narratives about working for a career in academia.” (Muller, 2014).

Context is critical in mentoring relationships since it is grounded therein, and includes the circumstances, the conditions, and the factors that contribute to mentor/mentee connectedness, their interactions and learning from one another. However, contexts are multi-layered and therefore they operate in a number of contexts, each bringing their own multiple contexts which influence the mentor/mentee relationship, both across as well as between contexts. This brings the mentor and mentee to the mentoring relationship itself with its own “unique layers of complexity”. Questions that may be asked include the following: is it a formal or informal relationship, and does it operate individually or in a group? Therefore, a mentoring goal needs to consider the mentee’s context and understand the bigger picture,

what the strategic objectives are and what the mentee's priorities are. Communication and listening in learning relationships is integral to the cross-cultural mentoring experience as is the case here (Zachary, 2012, p. 34, 35, 46).

Relational and collaborative autoethnography

With relational autoethnography, the researcher shares in telling stories and conversations about others' lives. This relational practice is to place the researcher in others' experiences, taking their roles bearing in mind their history, locations and reflexive processes. In this way the researcher is able to understand why they (others) act and respond in this world as they do (Kafar *et al.*, 2014, p. 131, 134, 137).

With relational ethnography there needs to be a degree of collaboration to co-create and discuss with other people their lived experiences in order to produce research that has relational activities. This is a social constructionist understanding where meaning is co-created and narrative and accounts are supported. There is thus a move away from monological to dialogical and interactivity is brought about, linking inner and outer dialogue. Monologue and dialogue is connected to voice and in turn to a narrative in time and place, and researchers are able to situate it in a broader discourse and practice of power (Simon, 2013, p. 33, 38).

Collaborative autoethnography involves several researchers who develop their own autoethnographies and at the same time arrive at a collective analysis based on their individual findings (Kafar *et al.*, 2014, p. 131, 134, 137). This study employs elements of both relational and collaborative autoethnography and eventually unites the two.

Theoretical Framework

A family of theories inform mentoring practice such as, constructive-developmental theories and social learning theories (Law, 2013, p. 33). The researcher has selected a positive psychology and learning theory for this article.

Positive psychology

In the face of globalisation and the necessity of change in our multicultural societies, positive psychology forms a cornerstone. Positive psychology is the philosophy that underpins mentoring as it "shares a similar paradigm shift from a pathology-orientated understanding to a perspective of growth and positive development" (Law, 2013, p. 24). Positive psychology has an attitudinal shift; that is, from focusing on individuals as asocial beings to individuals as being socially, culturally and ethically responsible. Law offers three pillars of positive psychology, namely positive emotion (the pleasant life); positive character (the engaged life); and positive institutions (the meaningful life). Positive psychology encompasses enquiries about human conditions such as "happy", "wise", "creative" and strengths that (in this case) are able to benefit the mentor and mentee.

Learning and mentoring

For the purpose of this article, the researcher chose reflective learning to underpin the study. Law (2013, p. 27, 35) regards mentoring as a learning process and therefore it must embrace new values, attitudes and skills/knowledge. As a result of globalisation, social networking and virtual platforms accelerate learning and have the "potential to transform". Hence there is a shift from a mentor-directed to a learner-centred, self-directed approach to



adult learning and development. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and aims to promote critical reflection and application of the mentoring partnership. Mentoring is grounded in the mutual learning of the mentor and mentee as they both explore and discover collaboratively, that is a collaborative mentoring paradigm, a learning partnership (Zachary, 2012, p. xvi,1) A learner-centred mentoring programme is based on adult learning principles.:

- The mentor and mentee need to diagnose, plan, implement and evaluate their learning;
- the facilitator/mentor is expected to maintain a supportive climate;
- the adult, in this case the mentor and mentee, are required to be self-directed and have a specific need to know;
- both the mentor and mentee's life experiences are the primary learning resources as other experiences enrich the learning process;
- the mentor and mentee has an inherent need to apply whatever they have learned immediately and
- both parties need to have an internal motivation to learn and experience together.(Zachary, 2012, p. 5).

As mentoring can be transformational for the mentor as well as the mentee, transformation means to be open to possibilities as well as perspectives and to reflect critically on our lived experiences. This leads to new insights and changes in how one makes sense of and sees the world, which in turn results in "behavioural aligned, sustainable, and synergistic behavioural patterns and action" (Zachary, 2012, p.10). By means of reflection and action a new consciousness can emerge, and by means of the learning process one can free oneself of one's limited beliefs and "arrive at an informed and reflective decision"; thus it can be concluded that reflection is a cognitive function which can result from the memory of an experience. With reflection one can interpret one's own thinking, learning and understanding and can pay attention to one's assumptions, beliefs and values, which in turn results in one's conclusion. Reflection can be considered to be self-assessment and can be disclosed verbally to others during mentoring, or by writing an essay/letter/diary, in this case a relational collaborative autoethnography (Law, 2013, p. 35).

Research Methodology

The following research question guided the study:

How can reflections on a PDF programme, as captured in a relational collaborative autoethnography, contribute to a more effective open distance learning (ODL) university PDF programme?

In view of the research question, the researcher identified and chose qualitative research in the form of a relational, collaborative autoethnography as best suited to this study. The relational, collaborative autoethnography is divided into three phases, namely an autobiographical phase, a dialogical phase, and an interview phase. In the autobiographic phase both mentor and mentee started writing individual stories about their experiences during the PDF programme. During the second, dialogical phase, they met and discussed their writings, self-reflecting and were able to co-construct meaning regarding the unique and common experiences which they shared during the PDF programme by juxtaposing their individual perspectives. The third, interview phase consisted of direct questions posed to the PDF mentee by the mentor during an interview setup. This was in order to probe and develop a deeper understanding of his experiences, the critical incidents that shaped his understanding of PDFship, and the role the

supervisor played during the PDF programme. The questions asked during the interview emerged from the first and second phases, and PDF responses were recorded (Hernandez *et al.*, 2015, p. 536-537).

As the authors of this article memory was chosen as an investigative tool to ground their analyses as their “memories [which] inform our epistemologies and methodologies” (Giorgio, 2013, p. 406) and in this way they were able to arrive at meanings and experiences of themselves and other people involved, such as other post doctoral fellows and their mentors in the post doctoral programme.. Giorgio (2013, p. 409) describes memory as the brick and mortar of autoethnographies, hence memories were their primary data as they recorded observations of conversations and incidents and they reviewed written as well as visual materials. As they critically reflected “on our own experiences, a broader narrative emerges(d), which can be linked to larger social phenomena”. It is only through careful self-examination that they understand themselves within larger communities in which they interact (Allen, 2015, p. 35).

The mentor and the PDF’s voices tell the PDF’s story from their own perspectives and experiences, and reflect how they both developed as academics. The raw data was collected, and the narrative written directly from the raw data as the volume was manageable. The data included observations, interview data, relational and collaborative co-constructed information, and documentary data such as programme reports. Together they tell the story of their relationship without giving preference to either voice. By doing so they explored the mentor-PDF dynamic that occurred during the execution of PDF duties within the department of psychology of education at the host university. They thus chose a writing style that combined analytical-interpretive writing, with the use of theoretical and conceptual literature sources blended with personal stories (personal evocative style) which resulted in a conceptual discussion about mentor/mentee PDF programme experiences and relationships (analytical-interpretive style) (Chang, 2013, p. 119).

The research context

University XX, where this study was conducted, is an ODL institution. The core functions of University XX are research, teaching, academic citizenship and community engagement. The PDF programme was introduced in 2014. A Post-doctoral fellowship award is deemed a privilege for candidates who have recently acquired their doctorates. The candidate applies to University XX and, according to selection criteria, is awarded the fellowship. The PDF in this article is an academic at a university in Nigeria who is being hosted by an ODL university in South Africa. Not only is he obligated to abide by the duties and responsibilities set out in the contract between himself and the host university, but it also serves as a stepping stone for further opportunities in the academic arena, thereby adding credence to an impressive curriculum vitae.

Table 1: The context of difference: mentor and mentee (PDF)

Mentor	Mentee (PDF)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixty-five-year-old, white South African female. • Resides in Witbank, Mpumalanga and works from home. • Married with two married daughters and two grandchildren. • Speaks English and Afrikaans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forty-nine-year-old black Nigerian male. • Resides in Pretoria, accommodated at the hosting university. • Married with four school-going sons. • Speaks one of the Nigerian languages and English. • Academic at the residential Lagos University,



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic in a South African ODL university – Department of Psychology of Education, CoE. • Fields of academic interests: inclusive education, English second language (ESL) and foreign language learning and teaching. • Academic position: Full professor. 	<p>Nigeria and community worker in Nigerian jails.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fields of interests: emotional intelligence and youth awaiting trial, remedial and reformatory psychology. • Academic position: lecturer; enrolled for a second PhD.
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Data analysis

Once the data was collected, an analysis *process* followed as it was organised and analysed qualitatively, which ultimately resulted in a *product*, namely a relational collaborative autoethnography. In this case it will serve as a sharing with fellow PDFs, their mentors and other academics, and ultimately what they all can learn (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011, p. 320) from a PDF programme expressed through such a relational collaborative autoethnography. Importantly, it will profit other PDFs as they come to grips with their own self and engage in discussion about their own PDF successes and challenges.

The theoretical framework is used to underpin the mentor/mentee relationship experiences since it exemplifies the adult learning principles where a firm hand is held on the literary, moving through logical arguments, and making summary claims and theoretical speculations (Pelias, 2013, p. 401).. To validate the information, a fellow PDF was approached to judge and interpret the content and the meaning of the information contained in the narrative. The raw data was checked by an external evaluator to detect any biases or incorrect conclusions. The PDF was also asked to read the relational collaborative autoethnography and to comment on the accuracy and interpretation of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 452).

The relational collaborative autoethnography

In 2014 I was requested by the PDF coordinator of our department to supervise/mentor a PDF for a year (which was extended for another year after completion of the first year) in the capacity of full professor. I was challenged to expand my research agenda and include the PDF activities and research interests focused on children in conflict with the law without having to neglect my field of interest, which is inclusive education. I decided to investigate my activities and converged my research interests with those of the PDF, and invited him to join me on a participatory journey whereby our relationship involved a relational collaborative exercise. I was compelled to pay attention to his emotions, thoughts and feelings during his two-year tenure. Together we decided on a narrative approach, embedding conversations, discussions, reflections, interviews, self-observations, and proffering personal examples, analysis and documents (quarterly reports), which ultimately contributed to this relational collaborative autoethnography. It necessitated that the PDF participate during “selected stage(s)” of the process and that I analyse the data used in writing the relational collaborative autoethnography. It was important that we balance our diverse perspectives by listening to each other’s voices, examining our assumptions and challenging our perspectives (Chang, 2013, p. 110-112). As we engaged relationally and collaboratively in the PDF programme, themes emerged chronologically, which structured the narrative. Voices as well as perspectives are presented and “the nature of the mentoring relationship and how personal and professional learning evolved” follow (Snoeren *et al.*, 2015).

Mentor's motivation for participating in the PDF programme

When I was approached in 2013 to act as supervisor for a PDF and was presented with his area of research interest, namely *children in conflict with the law*, I was motivated to engage in this mentoring relationship. Initially my decision to participate in a mentoring relationship was an organisational imperative, but as I became more involved with the PDF a close relationship developed, and a core motivation emerged and I became more committed to my original reason (Zachary, 2012, p. 98).

Consequently, my core motivation to participate in this mentoring partnership was to accelerate the PDF's career path by sharing my knowledge and what I am recognised for in the academic world, but also to acquire the skills that he had to offer and familiarise myself with his field of expertise. This core motivation was also influenced during a discussion with him, by his responses below.

PDF's motivation for participating in the PDF programme

During an interview session with the PDF, I asked him what had motivated him to apply for the PDFship and he answered: *"One of the reasons was to give myself an international exposure ... so I applied for a PDFship to give me an opportunity to have an international exposure to improve my research capability and to make international connections. I also look for greener pastures ... possibly get a permanent job in South Africa or outside South Africa."*

He elaborated in a written document, by referring to his career goals:

My career goals include being one of the leading researchers in the world in the field of Counselling Psychology with specialisation in remedial and reformatory psychology. One of my career goals is also to produce and encourage emerging researchers across the globe. I also desire to initiate collaborative international research projects and to become involved in the research activities of the United Nations, World Bank, and UNESCO. My area of research interest is employing positive life skills such as emotional intelligence training and creativity thinking skills to improve the cognitive, social, emotional and general well-being of individuals that will make them live fulfilled lives, thereby making the world a better place to live in.

There is a professor in the University XX, Prof YY, who just sent me messages that there is a post-doctoral fellowship opportunity within South Africa. The opportunity for me to learn more and being exposed internationally was important as back at home people always have preference for people with a qualification from overseas.

Mentor's reflections on personal challenges

Both the PDF and I were faced with challenges right from the beginning, starting with the PDF having difficulty in acquiring a visa. It was also important for the PDF to apply for a critical skills certificate at the Department of Home Affairs. This delayed the process by a month and jeopardised my annual work plan and also had an impact on his plans.

As the PDF programme was the first in the CoE, there were teething problems such as uncertainties surrounding both our responsibilities and performance expectations, which were often inconsistent/ambiguous and most of the time it was a matter of trial and error. With a



fragmented guideline of our responsibilities we conferred and decided on the responsibilities the PDF needed to prioritise within the university's focus areas, namely tuition, research, academic citizenship and community service, with an emphasis on research. As mentor I needed to arrange for office space (which was limited), to procure a computer and internet facilities, and cater for other needs.

It was also left to me to prioritise both our activities and to meet the deadlines within the department, but also to distinguish which were imperative to earn the PDF's future tenure. Seeing that I (mentor) live in a city far from the university exacerbated the challenges as we were not able to work on a daily face-to-face basis. In addition, the PDF was often faced with personal challenges such as finding safe accommodation and his personal safety (having been attacked by hoodlums in his living quarters), which required much of our contact time. Furthermore, I suffered a heart attack in July 2014, which stripped me of all reserve energy and forced me to rest for the latter three months of my retirement year. However, this did not deter the PDF as he diligently continued to meet his responsibilities and simultaneously supported me in my academic responsibilities.

In one instance the PDF's one article was accepted for publication; however, due to his limited financial means, I contributed a substantial amount from my personal funds towards the publication fees. This was also the case for conference attendance as I used my National Research Foundation (NRF) grant funds to sponsor his conference attendance and accommodation.

For the PDF to enter a strange university, in a strange country, is to experience many "unfamiliar practices and a limited knowledge base" and can result in a great deal of stress in the quest to achieve success. First things first, he needed to apply for a university security access card and personnel number, which also allowed him access to the library and other facilities. In University XX, which is an ODL university and has approximately 400 000 student enrolments, the PDF was faced with great challenges while familiarising himself with the organisation, such as the teaching, scholarly and service responsibilities, and getting to know the personnel, the governance of the university and the social, cognitive and affective components of the work, as well as the operational requirements. (Simonsson & Muñoz, 2012, p. 322).

PDF's reflections on personal challenges

The personal challenges started with the timing of the letter of offer. I got the offer letter through my e-mail on 23 December 2013. The next thing that I needed to do was to start processing my visa to travel to South Africa. Unfortunately, the South African Embassy in Nigeria closed for Christmas and would only open in January 2014, so I had to wait for more than two weeks. I was able to secure the South African study permit for one.

There was this tension that if I did not assume duty on 1 February 2014, the PDF contract would be terminated, but eventually I was able to call one of the staff members in charge of PDFs. She assured me that some other PDFs from Kenya and other countries were also having challenges procuring a South African visa. I was able to secure a study visa by mid-February 2014.

Now, having secured the South African permit, I could not disengage immediately because I was involved in some academic activities such as being a part-time lecturer and assisting some lecturers as an *ad hoc* lecturer at one of universities in Lagos. I had to round off some of

the assignments.

I arrived in South Africa on 24 February 2014, with my flight landing at OR Tambo Airport at 5:30 am and a friend of mine came to pick me up. I was anxious because I was not sure whether my PDF contract was still valid. On arrival in Pretoria my friend suggested I open an account with Absa; the system was quite different from where I was coming from. I had to take a taxi to University XX. I saw this huge structure, so I did not know where I was. I asked the security for directions to the Research Directorate office where I did all my documentation.

I slept over at a colleague's in Sunnyside because I did not have an apartment. I stayed with him for a few days in February. On 1 March 2014 I moved into a rented flat very close to University XX, which I shared with other people. That was my first experience living that kind of life. Back in Nigeria it is either you take a flat on your own, or you and your family live together but I was able to adjust to this pressure. The transportation system was also a challenge. I had to do a lot of walking. In Nigeria you can get a tricycle, a bike or drive your own car, but here I had to walk. Also, the weather was cooler. I was so anxious to get everything documented and then I also had to get some personal things, like bedding.

PDF's reflections on challenges at University XX

One of the challenges I had was the ability to connect to the internet. I took my signed PDF contract to the Human Resources Department and it took a while before I had an access card. This denied me the opportunity to log on to access to various security ports.

There was not too much orientation offered. I felt that somebody who is new at University XX should be given some form of orientation as to where certain facilities are, such as the library and the cafeteria. Then there is the use of the Xerox machine; back in Nigeria I am not used to operating a Xerox machine, so it took a while before I was able to master the use of it.

We also had a challenge to access the library. I got a letter of introduction from my mentor, Prof NN, who wrote a letter to introduce me as a PDF. This also posed a kind of a challenge because people do not understand who PDFs are.

The hard part was that there was so much pressure to get your articles published. If you do not get articles published your contract may not be renewed. Also, as a PDF the expectations are that you might wish to have more time at University XX; the PDF experience is just for two years and after the two years the contract is not renewed. You may wish to get a permanent job. Some of the PDFs did not get their contracts renewed for the second year. There are some things that I would not have been able to achieve if I have not had this PDF experience. For example, the conferences that I attended and some of the training workshops I attended, which cost about R25 000 per participant. There is no way I would have been able to afford that. Supervising some of my mentor's PhD-students in addition to meeting people and learning from other colleagues has been really, really fulfilling for me. The other side of it is that, as I said, the emphasis is on publication. I longed to get one of my articles published in a high impact journal. One of the frustrations I also had, without any reasons being given, was that some of the articles I submitted were rejected, and I also had to use my personal money to pay for publication fees. I presented a paper at an international conference at Sun City and hope to publish the paper.



PDF's reflections on the mentor/mentee relationship, activities and personal developments

So, Prof N (Head of the Department of Psychology of Education) told me that my supervisor is Prof NN. He used his hand to describe her; she is of a small height. I am going to work with her. She is excellent, and she is a hard worker. Prof N also told me that Prof NN works from home. On a Monday she came around and that was our first meeting.

At my first meeting with my mentor, as I said, I discussed with her the area of work I wanted to concentrate on. She introduced me to people from different departments and different colleges. She encouraged me to interact with people and introduced me to people in the Department of Criminology and the Faculty of Law, because my area of focus is on prisoners' rehabilitation. I told her that I was going to work on that: conflict with the law.

We were three PDFs in the Department of Psychology. We were not too sure what exactly needed to be done. I did not know whether I should write articles from my PhD thesis, or whether we should start on new research; there is so much conflict. But one day Prof NN told me that I must just get started somewhere. She informed me of her method and that she works from home, but that did not mean we cannot relate. All I needed to do was to send whatever I have done via e-mail and true to her words, every time I send an e-mail I get a response, if not that same day, the following day, but she would ensure I received feedback and made suggestions. By the time I went through the corrections I saw that I could become a good researcher and that I knew how to do this work. I felt that her comments were usually too harsh. Initially I was taken aback; what is all this? But after a while I understood that it was in my own interest to attend to those comments and send corrections to her. Later we got to know that we were supposed to write articles, so I would start writing from my PhD thesis. There was no clarity; nobody gave us advice on what is expected of us as PDF and mentor, or what a mentor and a PDF need to do.

Thereafter I had to fill in an ethics application form, which Prof NN provided. My mentor introduced me to everyone saying that this person is from Nigeria, and the first approach made me feel like home, I am in safe hands. Some of my colleagues were jealous; they wished that they had a mentor like mine. Although Prof NN only comes to University XX every Monday, she makes a point of asking about my work. She kept insisting that I must be diligent, I must be exact, I must avoid mistakes because the members of the ethics committee are very thorough, and I must follow the instructions. It was a difficult task, but I was able to pull through due to her persistence. I remember vividly the ethical clearance!

Since my assumption of duty (February 2014) as a PDF at University XX, I have attended workshops and seminars on various aspects of research, which has further sharpened my research skills. Currently, I am involved in a collaborative research project between University XX and Zhejiang University, China. In this collaborative research project, I have been involved in data collection (observation, interviews, designing of interview and observation schedules, reflecting on reflections) and data analysis.

Recommendations to improve post-doctoral fellowship

Holness (2015: xvi-xviii) refers to Sawyer who cited "the provision of a "soft landing"" that may be "effective in promoting research and research capacity development in African universities". Holness explains that researchers who come from particular domestic, social, emotional and economic contexts need to be taken into consideration and to be

sufficiently supported in order to develop research and to set realistic goals. It is important that tangible needs, such as selecting an appropriate journal in which to publish an article and planning to attend a conference, be met. On the other hand, existential needs may arise such as time management for research possibilities, and setting research goals and how to reach them in an environment that is not supportive. The PDF's needs may range from monitoring to coaching to counselling or all three, whereas emotional practical support has been cited as imperative to develop as researchers and generally to be successful as academics. Mentoring (a seasoned senior for a new staff member), in the case of a PDF, is necessary to transfer skills and to introduce the PDF to networks in academia. The PDF needs to be inducted into the community of scholars for collaboration purposes, both nationally and internationally. New academics should not allocate more weight to research *in lieu* of other core activities such as teaching skills, but should strive to dovetail them. Mentors should encourage PDFs to develop their own capacity and skills and to develop as researchers in their own right.

The PDF makes the following recommendations:

There should be an orientation programme to educate these PDFs, and also clarify what University XX is all about. I also want to suggest that to try as much as possible based on performance to encourage the university management to absorb some of these PDFs into the mainstream of the university, so that they can deploy the experience they have gathered during their experience back into the university system.

I thought that I was going to be absorbed as a permanent staff in South Africa. I applied for posts, I knew that I have all the qualifications but the experience... unfortunately I do not, I am a foreigner. It affects me as a person, because I do not belong to a particular nationality. I have some experiences, but the land is full of challenges, I must move on. I want to be an accomplished researcher, just like my mentor, Prof NN. I hope to maintain my relationship with her and also my relationships with some colleagues she introduced to me and some who can have the influence.

Simonsson *et al.*, (2012, p. 330-332) explains that much of the mentoring in higher education is delivered by means of *inter alia* short faculty orientations, workshops, brown-bag sessions and administrative training. Apart from individual face-to-face mentoring, the PDF was exposed to similar activities, often having to sit through tiring workshops. The researcher concurs with Simonsson *et al.* who recommends firstly developmental-level support. It is incumbent upon the department head to match junior with senior members and for them to work together on research, teaching, and services such as community service that can enhance the productivity and growth of the department. Secondly, the development of PDF's mentoring relationships can allow both parties to become familiar with the research agendas of the department; identify what their mutual interests are; collaborate and manage time for common objectives; and to co-teach and engage together in common service for the department. Thirdly, socialisation of a PDF of colour, which in this case was applicable, Since the PDF was a black male foreigner, it was important for the mentor to afford him the opportunity to develop in educational leadership, which in the past was only for elite white males and it was important for the mentor to open her life and career to benefit the PDF in this area.

Conclusion

The completion of this PDF programme can be considered successful based on the outcomes achieved by the PDF. More importantly, the continuous support of the supervisor



and respective authorities and colleagues enabled the PDF to run the race to completion. He complied with the strengths in the six dimensions for a mentee proposed by Peterson and Seligman in Law (2013: 25), namely knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. Moreover, the flexibility of the PDF programme, the pre-requisites to qualify for a PDF, the good relationship between the mentor and mentee, and the tight regulations proved the programme effective.

As a mentor/mentee team, they investigated the processes and the outcomes of professional, reflective learning, which enabled the PDF to engage in the discourse of academia, advance active research agendas and leverage his position in the academy (Butcher *et al.*, 2006, p. 68; Hernandez *et al.*, 2015: 533). Considering that research is pivotal to a university's agenda, it was an area which they agreed would be one of the main goals of the PDF programme. It thus afforded the PDF opportunities for "...networking with senior investigators, building on the mentors' line of research, receiving feedback on research methods and publications, and learning from the decision-making and problem-solving process used by mentors" (Matthieu *et al.*, 2008, p. 246-247). As a result, the PDF was empowered to initiate his own research project with the provision that regular meetings were held with the mentor to establish his progress in terms of his PDF predetermined goal, namely to build an independent research portfolio with a view to apply for a job as a researcher at a university.

After a two-year tenure both the mentor and mentee can safely claim that the PDF is more knowledgeable about research capacity within the CoE, which will enable him to gain support and external financial sustainability. Based on his newly acquired research skills, such as research project management, publications, peer reviewing, funding/grant applications, and consultations during the PDF programme, he has more clarity relating to his career goals. As a result, he has gained the confidence to apply for a research position in the CoE and to strive to be recognised as a rated researcher (grant-funded).

The researcher believes that by means of this relational collaborative autoethnographic narrative, the research question was answered as the mentor and PDF reflected via the narrative, on the PDF's tenure from the mentor's and PDF's perspectives. This post-doctoral fellowship can be likened to what Law (2013, p. 215) as asserts, in that "Participants gain from having time to think, reflect and review their learning in a safe environment, to the benefit of the organisation as well as for their personal developments." In addition, Butcher and Sieminski (2006, p. 60) explain that this exerciseserves to "tighten the structure of the programme in order to frame student development", in this case PDF development. Not only does the mentee benefit, but the mentor's benefits are "improved performance, greater satisfaction, loyalty and self-awareness, and leadership development" (Law, 2013, p. 215), which can contribute to a more effective ODL university PDF programme.

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