

Our Unique Journey

by Habib Habiburrahim

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Quality in Postgraduate Research

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**QUALITY IN POSTGRADUATE
RESEARCH CONFERENCE:**

*Narratives of Transition:
Perspectives of Research Leaders,
Educators & Postgraduates*

**17-20 April 2012
Stamford Grand Adelaide,
South Australia**



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April 17-19 2012

1 QUALITY IN POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

Narratives of Transition:
Perspectives of Research Leaders, Educators and
Postgraduates

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2012 QUALITY IN POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Adelaide, Australia

April 17-19
2012

Edited by
Margaret Kiley

Narratives on Transition: Perspectives of Research Leaders, Educators and Postgraduates

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Editorial

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Regular participants at the QPR conferences would be aware that there has usually been a specific national or international development in research education that has been the focus of the conference. For example, the first conference in 1994 related to the introduction in Australia of *the quality agenda, hence the name of the conference. Then in the late 1990s, the agenda* related to the changes in funding research education through the Research Training Scheme. However, for this year's conference the organisers chose the more general theme of Narratives of Transition: Perspectives of Research Leaders, Educators and Postgraduates. This theme might suggest two things. Firstly that there was no specific agenda or secondly that there are so many current agendas in research education that there were too many to select just one, hence the focus on transition and perspectives. You might draw your own conclusions as you read the papers included in these proceedings.

One thing that the 2012 conference had in common with previous conferences was the quality of the international speakers invited to address participants. This year we were very fortunate to have two speakers: Professor George Walker and Professor Eli Bitzer. Professor Walker, previously Director of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, walked us through the development and implementation of the Carnegie project and encouraged us to consider similar activities. Professor Bitzer from Stellenbosch University, South Africa took us through a vivid portrayal of education in southern Africa and the various achievements and challenges facing the education systems in those countries, particularly South Africa.

Again Alistair McCulloch managed to enlighten and entrain us with a hypothetical this time on university management, and again based at Arkaroola University. He had a very informative panel including:

- Terry Evans (School of Education) Deakin University
- Max King (Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Research Training), Monash University
- Joe Luca (Dean of the Graduate Research School), Edith Cowan University
- Michelle Picard (Director, Researcher Education & Development), University of Adelaide
- Laura Poole-Warren (Dean of Graduate Research), UNSW
- Chamonix Terblanche, National President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)

Again the conference attracted a number of international participants and presenters including from New Zealand, South Africa, Nigeria, UK, Denmark, China, and USA.

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The proceedings are formatted with the keynote/plenary addresses first followed by refereed papers, unrefereed extended abstracts and abstracts. Refereed papers have undergone peer review as outlined at the commencement of this document. Other than those who had been informed that their paper had been accepted as a refereed manuscript, presenters were invited to take their abstract and to revise it either as an unrefereed paper or extended abstract. For those who chose neither of these options, we were able to include their original abstract. The papers, extended abstracts and abstracts are published in alphabetical order.

As always it is fascinating to look at the major themes addressed in the conference papers and to note the steady increase in the number of research-based papers.

Papers related to research supervision were among the most common, along with papers on quality assurance and management. In one sense, this emphasis on supervision and quality is not surprising given the aims of the conference. Also, given the developments in many countries related to employability and skill development, it is probably not surprising that the third most common topic for papers related to employability issues. For example, the paper by Schaffarczyk and Connell addresses skill development and employability by surveying a number of Australian universities regarding the programs that they offer their candidates. Maguire and Torrie, on the other hand, outline the program designed by the Australian Technology Network of universities. From a different perspective, Hargreaves and Walsh provide insight into the employability agenda in the UK.

In a similar vein, a topic discussed by a number of presenters was coursework, but in this case not specifically related to employability skills but rather to areas such as research methods and various research training programs. As examples, Tuovinen and Buxton describe the particular courses introduced at Tabor College, and McCulloch and Weinstein describe the 'engaged PhD' at the University of South Australia.

Papers on writing were also quite common, and if papers that adopted a narrative approach are included in this category, then they should be positioned above coursework in terms of frequency. Writing has been a common theme from the early days of the conference; however, in the early days the work was often in relation to working with international candidates who had difficulty with writing. In the 2012 conference, the papers have a focus on the importance of peers in developing writing skills. For example, the paper by Yusoff and Behrend explains the value of writing circles and Gregoric and Wilson explain how working as peers in a writing group was enormously helpful in their development as researchers.

Given the sub-title of the conference, it is not surprising that a number of papers had the term 'narrative' in the title or adopted a 'narrative' approach: most of them were also narratives of candidate and/or supervisor experiences. For example, Bowden et al used narratives to examine the various perspectives of candidates, supervisors and editors and Fadliadi, Habiburrahim and Bartholomaeus wrote regarding their experiences as candidates (and supervisor). Nguyen presented a narrative of her journey from lecturer in her home country to research candidate in Australia. In a different vein, Symons had two papers related to the analysis of narratives as a means of evaluation.

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A final group of papers provide some insights into current debates in doctoral education, for example: the use of technology; monitoring progress and providing feedback; risk; and issues related to the disciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of doctoral education.

Organising a conference is never an easy task and this one had an additional challenge in that for personal reasons the Chair, Professor Tania Aspland from the University of Adelaide had to hand over to Professor Alistair McCulloch from the University of South Australia only a matter of weeks prior to the conference. Members of the committee and the conference organiser worked hard to ensure that the event progressed without a hitch. The staff, particularly the technical staff, at the Stamford Grand assisted in the smooth running of the conference as did many of the 'old hands' at the conference who made sure they introduced some of the newer participants to others.

A particularly exciting development was the creation of the Doctoral Writing Special Interest Group (SIG). Sincere thanks to Claire Aitchison for this excellent initiative. Certainly this marks a new development for QPR and hopefully is the beginning of a number of other SIGs.

The conference evaluation gave the Conference Committee a number of issues to consider for the future. One in particular relates to the different of the participants, who include for example both administrators to researchers. The suggestion is that the program give more details about the papers being presented, including by providing the abstracts in advance of the conference.

The Conference Committee is meeting soon after these proceedings are published to decide on dates for the 2014 conference, although they have already decided that it will be in Adelaide and so details will be forthcoming through the QPR Mailing List (see http://qpr.edu.au/?page_id=6804).

One person I anticipate will definitely be attending in 2014 is Sofie Kobayashi whose poster *Supervisors' approaches to supervision and how these relate to conceptions of research* (with Østerberg Rump and Brian Grout) won the conference poster award which is free registration for the next conference. Congratulations Sofie and team!

Refereed Paper

1 Our unique journey in pursuit of a PhD ®

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Flinders University of South Australia
Australia

Abstract

The Aceh government is committed to rebuilding Aceh (Indonesia) post the tsunami, and sending students to study overseas is one of many initiatives to enhance the quality of human resources in the province following the tragedy. This paper illustrates the journey of two students from Aceh who are undertaking their PhD at Flinders University where their decision to study differed from the reasons students might typically have to pursue the PhD degree. As do others who are chosen by the government, the students have responsibility to accomplish that specific mandate. The government and the people in Aceh anticipate the new ideas, novel concepts and ways of empowering the province that the students will bring back to their province upon the completion of their study. Pursuing a higher degree, particularly overseas, is seen as blessing for many people including the students. Meeting new people and experiencing a new study and research environment always brings added value for them. As well as cultural considerations, undertaking a PhD also involves professional and personal issues. Shifting roles from professional teachers to become postgraduate students is part of the process of undertaking the degree, and this brings with it a number of challenges. As international students, these challenges encompass cultural, along with language adjustments and academic barriers, in addition to family issues. This paper employs a self-narrative study approach to report the PhD journey of the two students. This journey is examined from three dimensions: cultural, professional and personal.

"We create our own stories, which help us see ourselves and our world and to make sense of self and experiences over time." (Ari, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010, p. 469)

Introduction

The long domestic armed conflict between the Aceh Movement for Freedom (GAM) and the Indonesian government for over 30 years tore Aceh apart. Difficulties the province faced increased when the tsunami hit on December 26, 2004. The destruction caused by the natural disaster is well documented in the literature. Part of the devastation was the loss of skilled and educated people in the province including educators, government and non-government officers, and business people.

The Aceh government has a strong desire to rebuild the province. With the implementation of the Law of Governing Aceh (UUPA) in 2006, Aceh has more opportunity and power to regulate, govern and meet the needs of the Acehnese. One government program is to rebuild education in Aceh after the conflict and the tsunami. This is evident in the allocation to education of 40% at provincial level and 60% at the district level of total revenue from the production of gas and oil in the province. Also a further 20% of the Aceh Regional Budget (APBA) and the District/City Budget (APBK) is allocated for education (International Development Law Organization, 2008). Some of the budget is allocated for scholarships for students to study overseas including for undergraduate degrees and postgraduate degrees (Masters and doctorates). This is an initiative to replace those skilled and educated people killed in the events in order to hasten rebuilding

the province through empowering human resources in the province, particularly the education sector, which is behind that of other provinces in Indonesia (I. Ibrahim¹, personal communication, November 13, 2011). Since 2005 the Aceh government has provided full scholarships for 1887 students to study at 33 leading universities in Indonesia, and overseas at universities in 18 countries including Australia, Germany, Egypt and the USA (Izhar², personal communication, November 14, 2011).

Fadliadi and Habiburrahim, the two students who are the focus of this paper, were awarded Aceh scholarships to study in Australia for PhDs. As for many others, undertaking doctoral studies is a privilege. They are perceived in Indonesia as role models and people others can count on for advice and motivation on how to guide their children to be successful like them. Even in the institutions where they work colleagues and students approach them for advice on how to succeed in academic life, including how to get a scholarship to study overseas.

The reason for pursuing studies for a PhD varies among students (Moltschaniwskyj & Moltschaniwskyj, 2007). For some, successful completion of a PhD will contribute to future career development. Indonesian tertiary education institutions are changing their focus from teaching to becoming research universities. Teaching staff need to master research skills to retain their status as lecturers. However, a PhD for these students is also to equip them to contribute to rebuilding Aceh. This paper includes personal narratives by Habiburrahim and Fadliadi and analysis of some of their experiences and obstacles faced to this point in their doctoral studies at Flinders University in South Australia.

The PhD Learning Journey Model

The PhD journey is a lengthy and challenging experience for those who undertake it. Commencing candidates bring a diverse range of experiences, skills and abilities to their candidature and these shape the journey to successful completion of their PhD studies (Moltschaniwskyj & Moltschaniwskyj, 2007). Prior experiences may include work on smaller research projects, knowledge that will facilitate good management of a large research project, familiarity with forms of communication utilised in research work (Rizvi, 2010), depth knowledge of educational theory and relevant literature, professional roles held, cultural values, and personal circumstances that will shape life from the commencement of the candidature. Successful completion involves more than the production of a thesis. Callaghan (2009) had highlighted the fact that the successful PhD graduate should achieve more than the completion of a thesis, but should also emerge from the learning journey of doctoral studies as a creator of knowledge, who shares their work with others, and is equipped to be an effective researcher (Grant & Pearson, 2007).

Callaghan's points about the qualities of the PhD graduate and the role of the supervisor have been developed into 'The PhD Learning Journey Model' (see Fig. 1) to provide a tool for analysis and discussion about the journey Habiburrahim and Fadliadi are experiencing. The model identified three stages in the life and development of the successful PhD graduate. The focus of the beginning stage, where the candidate is entering doctoral studies, is what the students bring into this new role and this new large research project, in particular the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) they bring to their studies. The learning journey covers the stages of the research development and completion of the research project and the

¹ Idris Ibrahim is the advisor for the Aceh Human Resource Development Committee

² Izhar is the chief of the Aceh Human Resource Development Committee for the program implementation

1 relationship between student and supervisor, and the transition to a successful PhD graduate detailed in the final stage of the model.

Recognition of the diversity amongst commencing students, and the qualities expected of graduating students, is a reminder of the complexity and diversity of the learning and work of doctoral students, and the complexity of supervision (Vilkinas, 2002, 2008). Callaghan (2009) proposes that the relationship between doctoral student and supervisor resembles an apprenticeship where the supervisor(s) works alongside the student in a mentor-apprentice relationship (demonstrating, explaining, modelling) and the candidate asking probing (fearless) questions. A successful apprenticeship enables the candidate to take increasing control of their work, transitioning to being a new master of the craft of research (Renshaw, 2003) and finally being more knowledgeable than their supervisor(s) on the topic of their research. The PhD Learning Journey Model, drawing on Callaghan's outline of the characteristics of the successful PhD candidate, and of the nature of the supervisory relationship between students and supervisors offers some productive ways of thinking about the experiences of Fadliadi and Habiburrahim part way through their studies and as they look to their goal of successful completion of PhD studies.

Methodology

This paper employs self-narrative as the methodology. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010) to use narrative is to focus on stories told by individuals with the aim of understanding these lived experiences. In this paper the term self-narrative is used to indicate there is a storying of personal experiences. Here the self-narratives of Habiburrahim and Fadliadi, as PhD students at the School of Education, Flinders University, are told to present several insider perspectives of international doctoral students on their doctoral studies. These journeys are presented in two separate narratives to allow space for 'individual perspective' and 'style' (Batchelor & Napoli, 2006). As with any memory work or recollection these stories may not be capture all significant events (Ary, et al., 2010). It has been a long process recalling and documenting experiences perceived as important. Talk about cultural, professional and personal factors that have impacted on candidature, drafting narratives, discussion about how these fitted with the model, then redrafting, followed in an iterative process. The final narrative texts can be viewed as what Denzin (2000) has termed performances, or restorying of experience in the process of selecting and presenting parts of these lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Developing these narratives, or performances, has been a complex process, with the editing and transforming of the original texts steered with the intention of retaining some of the language and rhetorical features of these international students. This priority was accepted as a response to the issue of representation and the desire to retain an element of Habiburrahim and Fadliadi's voices (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). The different language and rhetorical features of their narratives are also illustrative of the language and cultural learning required of them during their candidature (Brown & Holloway, 2008).

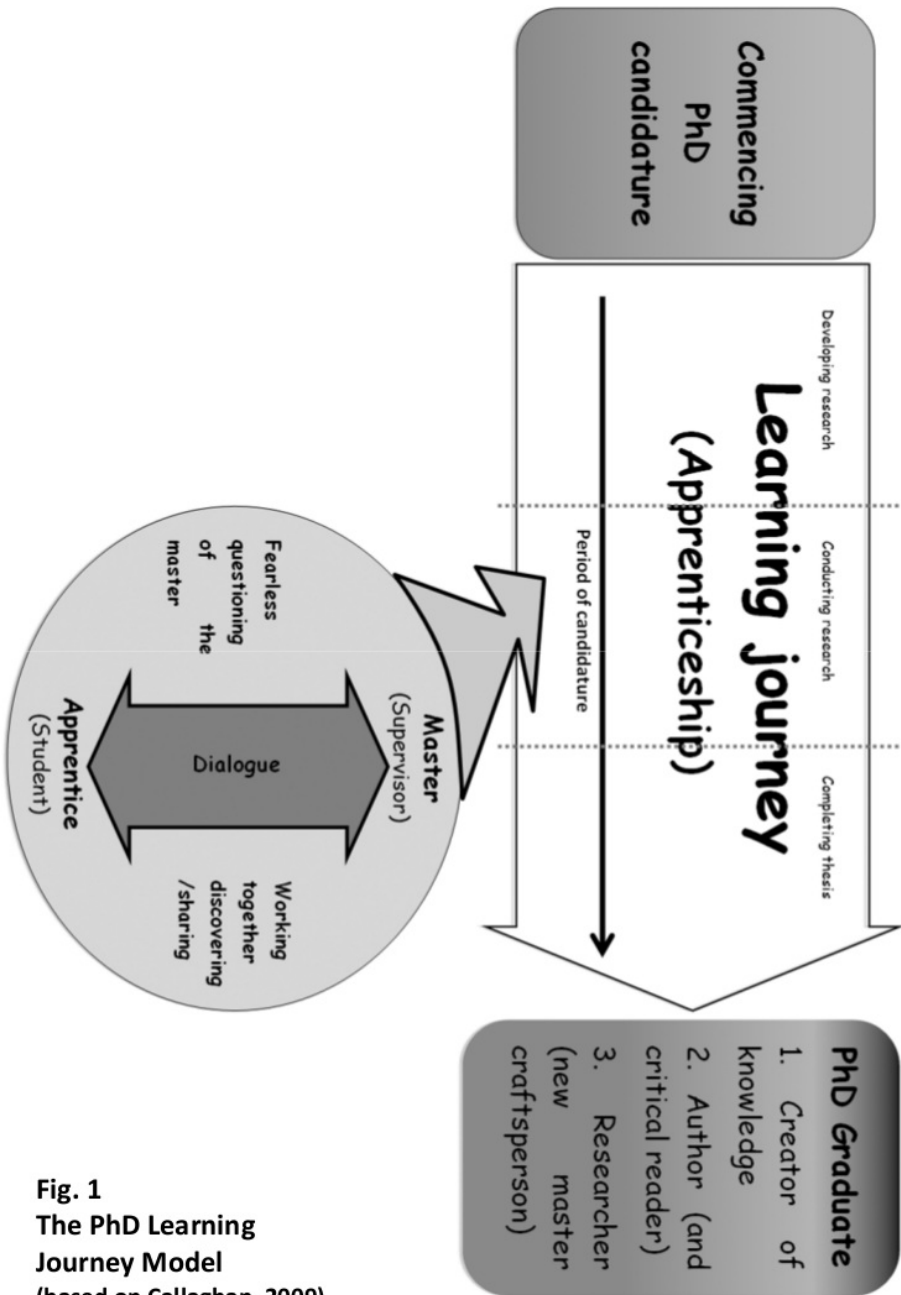


Fig. 1
The PhD Learning
Journey Model
(based on Callaghan, 2009)

Analysis has concentrated on themes identified in the narratives, with a focus on those which fit or contrast with the model and the different stages of the candidature, using the cultural, professional and personal dimensions. Cultural influences include what students bring to their studies such as understandings about the world and community values, and including language and ways of working with oral and written texts (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Gee, 2012). The professional dimension includes knowledge and experience students bring to their candidature, in particular their professional identity (Rizvi, 2010; Thomson & Walker, 2010) and academic background and experiences (Kiley, 2007). The personal dimension relates to the individual, their personal characteristics and family situation (Rizvi, 2010).

Narrative one: Habiburrahim

I was inspired to pursue PhD studies when I studied for a Masters degree at Texas A&M University in USA from 2006 to 2007. When I studied in the USA, I met several great people including Professor Yvonna Lincoln and Dr Robert Gates. I was impressed by the way Lincoln approached the teaching and learning processes. Even though she was very busy she allocated sufficient time to meet students and discuss various educational issues. Gates also inspired me to pursue PhD studies. His leadership skills and management of Texas A&M University made him well-respected. Due to his leadership and management competency, the USA Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama appointed him Secretary of Defence. At the local level in Aceh, I was inspired by the late Professor Safwan Idris³, the former Ar-Raniry Institute Rector, to pursue a higher education degree. He used to encourage all lecturers to keep on studying to empower ourselves, our community, our educational institution, and our nation.

Now, I have been in Australia for two years. As a sojourner, various experiences, problems, and crises have been met and resolved. In the first few months of my new life in Australia, social and academic problems were among the most prevalent hurdles I had to confront. Social problems in the process of cultural transition such as less family and friends' support, deficient social communication competency, deficient knowledge of the host culture, norms, values, and non-verbal norms are part of the tangible impediments I faced. However, academic problems including academic language and educational methodologies have become my biggest concerns. I realized that the unfamiliar educational methodology applied in my host country may impede my successful study. To cope with this I read various books and articles about successful study in Australia.

Having read literature on educational approaches, I understand that being an active classroom participant is always encouraged in Australian universities. To some extent this approach contradicts with my former teaching and learning experiences in which I was taught to be "a quiet learner". It is commonly known that the education approach in Asian countries is result-focused, where students learn by listening and memorising, while in Australia it is student-centred with students encouraged to engage in independent learning, to question, criticise, and develop critical thinking. Also, Asian students view teachers/lecturers as experts or models, but Australian students regard them as a facilitator or friendly critic who promotes autonomous learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). I was in this fearful stage the first day of study in Australia. However, my motivation to successfully accomplish my degree remained high. I believe that

³ Safwan Idris was both a very highly respected academic and Islamic scholar in Aceh. He obtained his Masters and PhD degrees from The University of Wisconsin – Madison, USA. He supervised Fadliadi's undergraduate thesis and was an examiner for Habiburrahim's undergraduate thesis at the Ar-Raniry Institute – Aceh. He was murdered on Saturday 16 September 2000 during the intense armed conflict in Aceh.

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Narratives on Transition: Perspectives of Research Leaders, Educators and Postgraduates

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motivation to succeed is needed to press towards better integration and thus conquer the problems I am facing.

To release the unbearable tensions, my academic supervisors recommended me be an audit student. I participated in two topics: Approaches to research and Qualitative research methodologies. Taking these courses gave me a better overview of the teaching and learning process used here. This also gave me a chance to adapt to a new study environment, to meet other people, and make friends, and slightly reduced my anxiety.

In the classroom I noticed that the lecturers provided a friendly teaching and learning environment. Students could argue with their lecturers whenever they disagree. This reminds me of the first time I met my supervisors. They asked me to brief them about my research interests, what I was planning to do, and how I was going to do it. They listened to me carefully without interrupting. They let me finish my story until I say, "This is the planning I have".

At the end of the meeting they asked me to re-send the research proposal I had drafted when I was still in my home country. After waiting for a week, the initial drafted proposal was returned. They asked me to stop working on that proposal, and to reread and contemplate what I was going to research. Along with the proposal return, my supervisors also sent me a thirty item reading list. I had to find books and journals to read, understand, and summarise. At first I was dismayed to read thirty books or journal articles in a very short time. But, they did not let me down; they called me for another meeting. They told me to read the books and articles that fit my interests. After reading the books and articles, I realized that the list they had supplied really helped me formulate the direction of my research.

Time passes quickly, and now I am in the second year of my studies. New academic life, a friendly study environment, and a stressful study workload have been faced and a high level of focus is required. My supervisors are challenging me to work more independently. Now it is time to build up my competency, to be an independent researcher and a prospective knowledge creator. They also strongly urge me to think critically about the educational theories that I am using. I have to be confident to criticise theories that seem slightly misleading or inconsistent.

This is a difficult moment. Shifting my approach from being guided in study processes to working independently may be an issue for me. I work best if I am told step by step how to finish my work. My supervisors are also encouraging me to have confidence to disagree with their ideas. In this regard, they want to say that the supervisors are the people who just guide students, but the final decisions remain in the students' hands. I believe that this transition will bring a great development towards my research competence as a prospective researcher and knowledge creator.

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Narrative two: Fadliadi

When I was about to complete my Masters degree at Flinders University in South Australia in late 2008, I thought I was going to have a break from formal education or studying for another degree for a while. I wanted to have a rest and enjoy my life a little after the hard work doing my Masters degree. My family: my wife and son were also very excited when I was about to finish my Masters and return to Aceh. They could not wait to have their 'normal life' back in our home in Bireuen-Aceh. For example, my son missed playing outside with other kids in the neighbourhood; rising kites, playing soccer, collecting tadpoles from the drain and catching the dragonflies and grasshoppers near our home, or having a shower under the heavy rain. My wife, the eldest in her family, wanted to be back with her mother supporting her emotionally and financially, helping raise her five siblings, an obligation as the oldest after her father passed

¹ away when she was at senior high school. And I myself, who was brought up in a large caring family of nine brothers and sisters, missed my extended family so much.

However, what I was planning changed. I was offered a scholarship by the Aceh government to do a PhD. The scholarship offered was part of the government initiative to hasten the process of rebuilding Aceh. My extended family were excited that I had the opportunity to do another higher degree and motivated me to accept the offer. Moreover, I was not very sure about doing a PhD at that time asking: "Am I clever enough for a PhD degree?"

After only four months in Aceh I returned to Adelaide on May 15, 2009 for my PhD studies. Returning to Adelaide did not mean there were no challenges for me and my family. Finding accommodation and a school for my son were difficult. To be able to convince the landlord that we were 'good people' and financially secure was not easy. One of the many things that my family and I are grateful for is that we have another opportunity to improve our English.

On May 18, 2009 I officially enrolled as a PhD student in the School of Education, Flinders University. At the beginning of my study I found it quite challenging. From the two page research proposal I was assigned to produce in our first meeting, my supervisors understood I did not have a strong research background. From that point, I had a feeling that my supervisors closely monitored my progress. They gave me extensive feedback on all work I produced. They suggested I audit the research topic 'Approaches to qualitative research'. They also continuously handed me, or instructed me to find, articles and books to read, or suggested I attend particular seminars and workshops to enhance my research and writing skills. While I have gained from attending those workshops and seminars, I also have to acknowledge that I did not get much from some simply because I was struggling with the ways the presenters delivered the materials. For example, they spoke too fast and moved very quickly from slide to slide without paying attention to the fact that some attendees, particularly international students like me, are struggling because of a language barrier.

Being closely monitored, I was grateful. But I also felt that I lost part of the autonomy I used to have when I was a professional teacher in Aceh; then I did what I wanted to do and had full control of my life. Here, I felt that my life is in my supervisors' hands. Although they said I was free to say 'no' to them, I would never be able to say 'no'. I was brought up in a culture where teachers are highly respected and students obey their teachers. To say 'no' to our teachers is considered rude. In addition, I perceived myself as having very little knowledge while my supervisors are the experts and superiors. So, I did not say 'no' and just did what they asked me to do.

In February 2010, I successfully presented my research proposal to the school committee and was granted approval to commence my fieldwork. I then spent about six months in Aceh for my data collection starting in April 2010. However, upon the completion of my fieldwork, I faced lots of challenges in my study such as I had to deal with health issues that have very much slowed me down. I was so stressed that I could not perform well for my study; on one side I want to complete this PhD as soon as possible within the three-year timeframe of the scholarship allocated by the Aceh scholarship committee, but on the other side I realised that it seems to be impossible. Whatever I do and wherever I go, this PhD thesis is always in my head. At the moment there seems nothing more important than this PhD and writing the thesis. Very often I feel guilty that I have abandoned many other things like commitment to family and religion, all because I am busy with my thesis writing. At this stage, the fear for failure has been so intense I have lacked confidence and lost direction. Even I was scared of my own supervisors' critical comments was so high, especially if I had to see my supervisors the next day. Interestingly, those sorts of feeling are also experienced by other international students. One said she was so scared anytime she was due to see her supervisors she could not eat anything until she had finished her

1 meeting with her supervisors. Another student said she had an indescribably unpleasant feeling when she needed to meet with her supervisors.

Apart from those things, I feel so lucky that my supervisors are caring and supportive, not only about academic issues but also non-academic things such as providing moral support especially in the absence of support from significant others such as my parents who I have never told about my problems in Australia including my health issues. My supervisors always lift up my confidence when I am lost, assuring me that I am okay and they are there to support me. Of course my supervisors still require me to complete tasks they assign me and comment on my work. Sometimes, they are 'tough', too. And sometimes I can feel they are stressed when they see I did not perform as well as they expect. And I feel guilty for that as I believe that they have allocated much effort and time to make sure my study is going well. This includes their struggles to understand my writing and oral language in our meetings. And I myself am sometimes frustrated at being unable to put the ideas I have in my head into written English or to speak my ideas clearly when my supervisors are seeking clarification of what I have written.

In the end I understand that this PhD is not just for me for a better career, to become more knowledgeable, or be expert in a particular field, but it is also for my family, my wife and son who have sacrificed to be with me during my PhD, for my extended family in Aceh who have high expectations of me, for the Aceh government to help them rebuild a shattered Aceh, and for my supervisors whom I believe are making great efforts to help me achieve my PhD.

Discussion

Commencing PhD candidates: From Habiburrahim and Fadliadi's narratives it is clear they have faced a range of challenges that have made progress in their study journeys different to that of mainstream Australian students. Looking at the professional/academic dimension, these students see themselves as having entered their studies lacking some of the academic skills held by Australian students, and with less knowledge and experience of computer technologies. Their focus is on what they considered they lacked, and the extra workshops, seminars and auditing of topics they needed to do, without recognising valuable skills, abilities and insights they brought to the research they were planning to do (Moll, et al., 1992). Another significant change was the movement from roles as teachers at university or school, to becoming students again; from positions of leadership and personal autonomy to being guided by and striving to meet the expectations of others (Rizvi, 2010). While the duration of scholarships varies, these students were each granted scholarships for three years of doctoral study.

These commencing students were shaped by the cultural dimension in a range of ways. In particular they have been concerned with the language difficulties they commenced with, and their limited understanding of Australian culture and values (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). Although these students had both completed Masters degrees in Western countries (the USA and Australia), they came expecting to participate in an educational pedagogy that had the teacher in the position of expert and leader (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997) and they would emerge from the candidature with a larger piece of writing on a topic they had already developed. Feelings of commitment to the development of their home country is different to the approach of Australian students where our educational system is increasingly focused on personal gain from educational success (Owler, 2010). The cultural adjustment and the challenge of reconciling some of the educational differences represent a significant challenge for these students despite their previous exposure to Western culture and educational institutions (Brown & Holloway, 2008).

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The personal challenges for these international students as they commenced their studies were also significant. The personal narratives of Habiburrahim and Fadliadi illustrate a diversity of personal issues, with the challenges for Fadliadi being more strongly foregrounded. Some students keep the personal challenges of their lives private while others struggle more openly. The families of some international students remain behind in their home country, while other students bring their families and seek to establish a life in the host country for the duration of the period of study (Rizvi, 2010). Both choices involve significant challenges and require considerable decision making and organisation at the commencement of candidature.

All supervisors acknowledge that each student is as unique as the doctoral research they wish to pursue and approach their role as supervisor with the intention of quickly assessing those areas where their new candidate is likely to need develop additional expertise. In the PhD Learning Journey Model the beginning candidate can be interpreted as a generic position or role. Despite the care that is taken to admit candidates who are appropriately prepared for doctoral studies, and who have identified an appropriate research topic and methodology, the diversity amongst students is more than many supervisors realise.

Learning journey

The learning journey is the central part of the PhD Learning Journey Model, and covers the period of candidature. The narratives of Habiburrahim and Fadliadi to this point in their learning journeys tell of progress in the professional/academic dimension. Both students have worked hard and completed a research proposal and the field work for their research. In the process they have mastered some new research skills and gained more confidence in their ability to meet Australian expectations for study and research. Their research skills have developed as they have audited topics, and participated in workshops, seminars and training sessions, although not all have been helpful. They have listed learning from lecturers and supervisors, and meeting and studying with other students, as positive professional/academic learning experiences. The significant difficulty is the pressure of the three year scholarship and the expectation to complete their research within this time frame.

Social and cultural understanding remains a significant difficulty for these students. They still feel unable to say 'no' to their supervisors (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997) and so are not having discussions about why a particular task is being recommended (Goode, 2010), or that explore the students' preferences for aspects of their research. Despite the recognition that the relationship between students and teachers is different in Australia, and encouragement to develop a relationship with their supervisors that resembles more that of person who has already mastered the craft of research and who is mentor and guide to the new apprentice, the change is proving difficult to make. Language continues to be an impediment. This includes vocabulary, plurals and tenses, and being able to clearly express ideas verbally in meetings and in written text (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Cultural and language issues mean that for these international students, and for many students from Southern and Eastern Asia (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997), the type of relationship between students and supervisor identified as productive by Callaghan (2009) does not fully develop. The dialogue, 'fearless questioning', and discovering and learning together, does not come to completely replace traditional teacher-student relationship (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Robinson-Pant, 2010). Instead they continue to feel concerned about meeting their supervisor's expectations.

With the emergence of health issues the personal dimension of the life of a PhD candidate can be the source of significant difficulty and anxiety. In these circumstances anxiety and fear of failure, and the ups and downs of confidence that are a usual part of the learning journey of

doctoral students (Crawford, 2003; Kearns, Gardiner, & Banytis, 2009; Owler, 2010) are increased. Yet, these students are working without the support and encouragement of their extended family. Other elements of the personal dimension that are important for these students are family and religious responsibilities and the obligation they feel to those supporting them; their families, supervisors and those who will benefit from their research.

Conclusions

These students still have much to do before they arrive at a successful completion of their studies. The PhD Learning Journey Model has aided a more structured examination of the experiences and concerns expressed in the personal narratives and reminded us that the completion of a PhD should be more than finishing a lengthy thesis. Callaghan's (2009) text led to more discussion about the importance of language and culture, particularly the relationship between student and supervisor. We have been reminded that what these students brought into their candidature has had a significant impact on their learning journey. Personal factors and cultural factors, including language, will continue to impact on the way their progress to the completion of their doctoral studies unfolds.

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