

Trainers-Trainees Relationship in Postgraduate Education - Understanding its Intricacy



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There is an ever-increasing pressure on the faculty to train postgraduates with a broader specialist set of skills so they better advance knowledge, educate professionals and resolve problems to address societal needs. However, currently, postgraduate training and supervision is, mainly focused on preparing the trainees for a career in academia only. This has a distinct disadvantage as employment opportunity, in the academic arena are available to a minority, leaving the majority facing uncertain career prospects because of lack of a wider range of skills and competencies. The reason for this is that scholars and trainees often do not learn such wider and broader set of skills from their supervisors or through attendance of courses intended to provide them with core competencies that help them to become successful researchers and to prepare them for the job market outside research and academia. In this regard, major changes in the current model of postgraduate training need to be incorporated to help both the trainees / scholars and training supervisors cooperate and learn from each other. Both the faculty and postgraduate students have a joint responsibility to accomplish these goals. The trainee is required to develop an understanding of and capacity for scholarship, independent judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual honesty. Faculty and students must work together to create an atmosphere that ensures freedom of inquiry, fosters mutual respect, and demonstrates professional integrity.

Transfer of knowledge through the ages and cultures has contributed to the progress of humanity. One begins to learn in the early childhood, first from parents, and later from society. The increase of the body of knowledge has resulted in its segmentation and consequently the need to learn about certain topics and gain skills from individuals who are experts in the given fields. There is no doubt that very exceptional and unique individuals can be successful even without supervision, and conversely, that a trainee without potential and drive or motivation would typically not get far despite the support of a supervisor. However,

these are the exceptions that prove the rule, and the rule is that most trainees will need supervisors. Even very exceptional and unique individuals would achieve more with proper supervision. This highlights the critical role of the supervisor in transferring knowledge over time in practically all areas of science and art. The supervised training must reflect the way the trainee has been trained. It must reflect improvement of the trainee's skills and behaviours. Time-management skill is the most needed on the part of the trainee. Today's postgraduate training is an education. It is no longer only a thesis or a scholarly piece of work to be written outside the departmental setting and attendance. Postgraduate education means to support the professional development of an individual. Good practice in graduate education centers on responsible interactions between the trainee, the supervising faculty and the postgraduate department.

One of the most important factors in the quality of research training is the role of the supervisor, who passes on knowledge and skills to the next generation. They have availed the opportunity of education and training and have the skills to develop proficiency as an experienced trainer. They are teachers, mentors, role-models and professional friends. They have the ability of initiating a trainee into the mysteries of his own art and skills. They possess the capability of helping trainees and young scholars in finding thesis topics, reading drafts and editing their writing and publishing their papers and even helping co-author papers with them and even getting them a job. The supervisor must involve a student in all aspects of research. For example involving the trainee in designing a research project will help the trainee learn the skills required for structured thinking, knowledge acquisition and elaboration, and developing autonomy, critical analysis and the capacity to synthesize ideas and experience. Such enquiry-based learning provides the trainee with most of the core competencies that they will need for any job.

Supervision is a relationship requiring trust and respect. Trainees have the right to expect regular, high quality advice, support and direction in their quest for academic excellence. When selecting a supervisor, do not select the one who needs the trainee. Rather it should be the trainee

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who should need him or her as supervisor. The trainee should gather information and asks questions and must make a choice with insight, rather than respond - with gratitude - to the offer of a place or supervision from one.

The supervisor must explore in detail the trainees' academic background in order to identify any areas in which further training is required. Supervisors have the right to expect a high level of commitment from their trainees. The trainees must respond positively to advice and guidance and will develop an increasing level of independence in the conduct of their overall training including research. For the supervisors, it becomes incredibly difficult to monitor the trainee in the final few months when the training is being completed as this requires complete commitment from both the supervisor and the postgraduate trainee.

A strict monitoring of the trainee in terms of punctuality, timeliness and regularity is very important. This is because, some trainees lack time-management skills and may prefer working at a place of prime priority and or partying, facebooking or tweeting, rather than reading, thinking and writing and working in the department. They should be made aware that written work is expected each week, and that they have to sit in an office with the supervisor to evaluate their work. This stress will create productive writing, research and work progress. It is better to provide a tight accountability structure for trainees with daily personal attendance and weekly meetings to accomplish the given tasks. Some trainees not interested in learning to the full depth in his / her chosen area, this kind of strict monitoring and scheduling may be taken harsh and unnecessary strict and in return they could express the derogatory comment pertaining to the role of the supervisor; "The most valuable asset of a supervisor is not a head full of knowledge, but a heart full of love, with an ear ready to listen and a hand willing to help". However, according to a good supervisor, his / her accomplishments are best measured through the success of their trainees and to them it is not what they had gathered, but what they had scattered as this will tell what kind of (professional) life he / she had lived. A successful trainee no doubt requires stringent and holistic monitoring. A good supervisor must constantly tell his / her trainee, "I have done my training and now it is yours time to do it". This will keep the trainee all-time alert, focused and on the proper track. It is critical for the trainee to keep in mind that he / she is responsible for his / her own development. Once a colleague working in a university abroad mentioned about "finishing and winding up work". I took its meaning as "leaving the place and job" and thus I asked. In response I was told that this meant the "finishing and writing of manuscript for publications based

on the researches of the students that was forcing not taking the summer vacations and literally working non-stop". I was told that students were not at that level in publishing and once they would go to practice field, all the work would be left and that probably next year, amateur trainees will not be accepted and instead it would rather be better to focus on high quality work to be done personally".

All supervisors should be functional human beings. They can be - and should be - quirky, imaginative and original. This non-standard thinking will assist student to project. However, in no way, the supervisor should exhibit social, moral or sexual impropriety. There are times during training, where the trainee will be physically very closer to the supervisor during which both the supervisor and the trainee will have to act reliably and behave with utmost decency. As trainee, there will be occasions of "sobbing" in the supervisors' office and while observing, discussing the work and writing on computer screens and on working on clinical and lab-settings, leaning on each others may be frequently occurring. The trainee must have the belief that this is meant to help him / her through a crisis and is not to manipulate him / her during a moment of vulnerability. While it is not wrong for the supervisor to be personal in sense of getting to know each students' unique and individual character, but he / she should not hang out with students in leisure time. It is important to make a clear border between the professional and the private, e.g. not to become intimate friends. As supervisor he / she will not invite students to his / her house, will not go with students to places like sauna and movie theatres and will not become close friend with them. Keeping a professional distance helps in cases when conflicts occur. When at meeting with a student, the meeting should focus on professional issues and questions and the students' work. Separate professional and personal issues if need to be discussed should always occur in another environment such as the lunch and tea room and never in isolated places. There may occur situations when the trainee private life influences the professional sphere, e.g. in case of a personal crisis such as accident, illness, divorce etc. In such case, during meeting the main part of the discussion should focus on the professional task and it is better to talk about the more personal aspects separated from the meeting. The meeting in the supervisors' office or room should neither signalize power nor intimacy.

In conclusion, the supervisor must ensure that the trainee is professionally developed and made competent not only in field but made a useful member of the society and a role-model. Proper training is possible by respecting each other and respecting office hours for learning, meetings, seminars and work.

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