



TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CROSS-CULTURAL PHD SUPERVISION

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this paper is to explore the rich potential for transformative learning, for both supervisees and supervisors, that is embedded in cross-cultural supervision.
Background	Our example is an analysis of experiences from a five-year long cross-cultural supervisory relationship between a Tanzanian PhD student and a Norwegian supervisor.
Methodology	In the research, we followed an action research approach, informed by the following question: “How can we account for and improve our supervising–supervised practice?” We analyzed our supervision experiences with the aim to explore the transformative power of cross-cultural supervision.
Contribution	Studies on supervision collaboration between Scandinavia and Southern Africa are scarce; hence, our study adds insight into the value of collaboration across continents and economic divides. Furthermore, we argue for greater research into the impact of cross-cultural supervision on supervisors as well as supervisees.
Findings	We have identified seven factors as central to mutual transformative learning in cross-cultural supervision: shared unhomeliness, shared uncertainty and trust building, otherness, shared second language, cultural differences relating to hierarchy, being in context together, and finally, flourishing. For the mutual transformative processes to unfold, building trust in openness to differences seems to be a crucial foundation. Hence, we believe that the qualities in the cross-cultural supervision relationship that we highlight can serve as a reminder to become aware of differences as a valuable source for mutual learning and expanded horizons.

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Recommendation for Practitioners	Our recommendation to practitioners is that they are receptive to and welcoming of differences, find common ground, and explore the value of learning from and with each other in supervisory relationships.
Recommendations for Researchers	Equally, we recommend that researchers inquire into how differences in gender, race, religion, and professional fields in supervisory and collaborative relationships can hold potential for valuable knowledge creation.
Impact on Society	Academic's awareness of the value of otherness as addressed in this paper might foster new ideas for dealing with challenges in our turbulent time through transculturation.
Future Research	More studies are needed on the potential for growth and the impact of mutual knowledge creation arising from cross-cultural doctoral supervision.
Keywords	PhD supervision, cross-cultural supervision, transformative learning, transculturation, action research

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing body of research exploring various aspects of mutual learning in cross-cultural supervision (Bitzer & Matimbo, 2017; Manathunga, 2011, 2017; Singh & Meng, 2013; Tkachenko, Bratland & Johansen, 2016). Although awareness into the value of cross-cultural supervision has increased over the years, there remain gaps relating to the impact of supervision and culture (Acker, 2011) and into supervision relationships across diverse countries. This paper aims to contribute new knowledge to the field of cross-cultural supervision, specifically in the domain of doctoral studies, through exploring a Scandinavian–Southern African doctoral supervision partnership.

This study is the result of reflections from the authors on a five-year supervisor–PhD student relationship, ending with Ahmad, the supervisee, obtaining his doctorate (Ahmad, 2016). The project he conducted was an educational action research project aimed at revitalizing education for self-reliance in rural Tanzania, by strengthening connections between schools and local farms. Sigrid, the supervisor, had just finished her own degree, conducting an action research project within her practice and organization in teacher education in Norway (Gjotterud, 2011; Gjotterud & Krogh, 2012). We first met in Tanzania, when Sigrid visited the university where Ahmad works to meet him and decide whether she wanted to be involved in research in Tanzania, together with her colleague Erling Krogh. The supervision took place in Norway where Ahmad spent up to three months each year, as well as Tanzania when Sigrid visited at least twice per year for a couple of weeks, and otherwise by e-mail. Sigrid and her colleague were supervisors on equal terms. However, the authors conducted a separate study of their supervision experience resulting in this paper.

While being involved in this Norwegian–Tanzanian supervising relationship, we asked the following question: “How can we account for and improve our supervising–supervised practice?” Together we have analyzed our experiences and identified seven categories that give meaning to and explain the values, conditions, and supervising strategies that emerged from the supervisory period. In our analyses, we were inspired by the categories identified by Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014) as often influencing cross-cultural supervision: language, cultural differences in dealing with hierarchy and other cultural differences, separation from the familiar and from support from others, stereotypes, and what happens when the candidate returns home. Although Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014) paid attention to the joy and learning cross-cultural supervision might foster, their main emphasis was on the challenges. In this article, we have chosen to highlight transformative learning potential and in doing so, have identified factors contributing to transformational learning for both the PhD student and the supervisor.

The scope of this paper is to investigate and discuss organizational strategies and interpersonal factors that can create potential for mutual transformative learning in a cross-cultural supervising rela-

tionship. We aim to inspire others to experience the reward of mutual learning and transformation in the process of cross-cultural PhD supervision despite, or maybe because of, the challenges involved. To unpack these rewards and challenges this paper will next discuss the supervision approaches we adopted and the potential transformative learning emanating from such approaches. We then briefly present key characteristics of the supervisory relationship, which we have explored, followed by methodological aspects of the study. Finally, we present and discuss factors we found to hold transformational power for both supervised and supervisee.

SUPERVISION APPROACHES AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The approach adopted by the supervisor in this study drew on a reflective supervising tradition (Handal & Lauvås, 2006) that conceives supervision as a pedagogical and relational process. Reflective supervision often takes the form of dialogue built on humanistic values (Tveiten, 2008). The main aims are that the supervised will discover and experience mastery, and hence develop self-confidence and independence. The intention is to create conditions for what Arendt (1958) calls new beginnings, or for the student to come into the world, as described by Biesta (2006). For this to be possible, the supervisory relationship must build on mutual respect. In his philosophy, Buber (1923/2004) established the notions of two primary words: I-it and I-Thou. In the primary word I-it, *it* is an object for the *I*, the way we experience the world around us, while “the primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relations” (p. 13). In an I-Thou relation the other emerges from a “stand in love”:

[i]n the eyes of him who takes his stand in love, and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement in bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forth in their singleness, and confront him as Thou (Buber 1923/2004, p. 19).

Buber (1923/2004) here states that love has the power to enable us to see the other as a full being, not reduced to our experiences of her or him. In a pedagogic relationship, encountering each other as infinite human beings allows for possibilities for mutual learning and discovery, for crossing boundaries. Buber (1923/2004) espouses love as the foundation for the pedagogic relationship.

Similarly to Buber (1923/2004), Mitchell and Edwards (2013), two black American scholars who also studied their supervisor–supervisee relationship, explore what they call a “radical ethic of pedagogical love” (p. 102). Underpinning their notion is Freire’s (1970/2000) thinking that love is what can hinder the oppressed to take the oppressors position in the fight for breaking free from the role of the oppressed. Because this as an armed love (Freire 1992/2014), Edwards and Mitchell (2013) call it a *radical* love and write: “Love radically, on purpose and pedagogically. Love with the intent to teach and learn” (p. 111). In line with Buber (1923/2004), they state that “a radical ethic of pedagogical love” neither involves eros nor romantic love, but “asks for unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, and volitional love” (p. 106). As we understand this, Buber (1923/2004) argues that we have a choice. We can decide to take a stand in love, the same way Edwards and Mitchell (2013) urge their readers to love radically – on purpose. In this paper, such a purposeful wish to create a supervising relationship built on pedagogical love formed a base for our supervision relationship

Pedagogical love also offers affirmation and resistance, both crucial for growth (Gjötterud, 2009). According to Kvalsund (2003), resistance is necessary for reflection and that without resistance, the phenomenon of experience can be reduced to an “immediacy in continuously free flow” (p. 8). We see that resistance can direct reflection and hence enhance the significance of and learning from the phenomenon of experience. Equally, we understand affirmation as important to raise awareness of the significance of an experience, which can also induce reflection.

Approaches to doctoral supervision can be diverse and can have a powerful impact on student engagement. Alongside the reflective approach described above, the supervisor drew on insights from Bandura (1986), pointing out the value of learning from role models, regarding herself a role model

as action researcher. However, not in the sense of the role model being an indisputable expert, which was the foundation of the supervising practice most common for the supervisee in this study. According to Orellana, Darder, Pérez, and Salinas (2016), approaches to supervision can align with certain student and supervisor behaviors affecting student autonomy. While Ahmad was used to an authoritarian supervising style, which aligns with the active direct supervising style in Orellana et al.'s (2016) supervision model (Table 1), the supervision approach in this study transitioned between direct/indirect and active/passive, depending on the situation. An active direct style was, for instance, tied to periods of writing for international journals, where specific guidelines need to be followed. When discussing the project, finding solutions, discussing the methodology, and analyses, we mainly practiced an active indirect style, while there were periods when the student was autonomous, and we adapted a more passive indirect style.

Table 1. Alignment of supervisory style and student autonomy (Orellana et al., 2016, adapted from Gurr 2001)

	Direct	Indirect
Active	The supervisor generates an initiation process critiques, explains, and directs the student	The supervisor... asks for opinions and suggestions from the student accepts and expands on the student's ideas requests explanations and justification of statements from the student
Passive	The supervisor... does not give input to the student does not respond to inputs from the student	The supervisor... listens and waits for ideas to be processed and problems to be solved by the student

Unique to the approach adopted by the supervisor in this study, is the appreciation for difference in this cross-cultural supervision context. In this context, communication and interaction across differences were incredibly important to ensure a productive and enjoyable relationship. Dewey's (1916/1997) notion of communication-as-participation is useful to explain the practice of common meaning making through interaction and involvement. Biesta (2013) wrote that Dewey's understanding of communication-as-participation "has important implications for education, both at micro-level [...] and at the macro-level of the interaction between cultures and traditions or, with a more general phrase, the interaction across difference" (p. 5-6). Viewing communication-as-participation as interaction across differences, may allow for a two-way supervision leading to mutual transformative learning. Although cultural differences may result in unhomeliness, understood as "cultural alienation, sense of uncertainty and discomfort" (Manathunga, 2007, p. 98), differences also hold the potential for creating new insight and knowledge across cultures. Differences in cultural backgrounds, gender, and race give way to discovering through participation in each other's life worlds. When what we take for granted is mirrored, new insights may arise, the unfamiliar may be unveiled and horizons may expand (Gadamer, 1979). Manathunga (2011) uses the post-colonial term *transculturation* to explain how such expanding horizons might emerge "as moments of creativity when 'culturally diverse students' [...] carefully select those parts of Western knowledge that they find useful and seek to blend them with their knowledge and ways of thinking" (p. 369). This can also be a reciprocal exchange when the supervisor selects or discovers useful knowledge from the student, for example in African (Tanzanian) knowledge as is the case presented in this paper, that can change and enhance their ways of thinking.

Through the supervisor's reflective supervision approach, grounded in pedagogical love, and amenable active/passive and direct/indirect style, a foundation for cross-cultural supervision is established for mutual learning. The term *transculturation* can help us to better understand the expansion of horizons and transformative learning involved in cross-cultural supervision, not only in the student

but also in the supervisor. According to Mezirow and Taylor (2009), transformative learning can be defined as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (p. 22). We show and discuss how we have experienced cross-cultural supervision as a unique opportunity for expanded horizons leading to mutual transformative learning containing transculturation.

STUDYING THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

The relationship is a primary factor in the success of PhD students’ completion of their tertiary degree (see, e.g., Arslan Lied, Chen, & Reikvam, 2013; Jones, 2013) and holds significant potential for mutual learning. The supervisory relationship we explore in this paper can be described in dichotomies, such as supervisor–supervised, white–black, Nordic–Southern, Christian–Muslim, and female–male. These differences are part of the diversity allowing us to expand our horizons. We could also focus on our similarities: we both are employed at universities, are married with two children, live in nice houses, and have well-used cars. Returning to our differences, one of us has constant access to electric power and internet connection; the other spends a considerable amount of time trying to connect. One never has to worry about the water supply, while the other struggles to find water during dry seasons. There are also cultural differences between us, but more often, the conditions for work and life in general differ. We have chosen to use Sigrid’s (the supervisor) given name, and Ahmad’s (the PhD student) family name, as this reflects the two cultures, and at the same time makes a point of the non-hierarchical relationship we developed.

PhD supervision is never easy. Everyone knows that obtaining a PhD is a struggle involving a considerable time commitment, hard work, moments of disappointment and despair, but also joy and mastery. The environmental conditions implied above add to the struggle. In the study presented below, we explore how dealing with the hardships is part of the rewarding process. Our aim is to analyze the successes we experienced critically, to learn from them, in order to build on the knowledge of cross-cultural PhD supervision. The key successes being that Ahmad completed his PhD and that by showing the impact of action research through his project the first PhD course on action research at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) was established at the department where Ahmad works (www.suanet.ac.tz/drpgs). The cross-cultural encounters fostered transformative learning in both of us, and after explaining how we have investigated our experiences, we explore both systemic and personal factors influencing and providing the rich learning potential.

METHODOLOGY – HOW WE EXPLORED OUR EXPERIENCES

The driving question of this study is “How can we account for and improve our supervising–supervised practice?” This question has been part of Sigrid’s professional practice for many years. The practice of living life as inquiry (Marshall, 1999), continued in collaboration with Ahmad while involved in the cross-cultural supervision. In documenting and analyzing the supervising practice and seeking to improve it, we have created our own “practical theory of practice, from which others can learn if they wish” (McNiff, 2017, p. 9).

In our analysis of our practice, we have adopted an action research methodology. Action research “is a practical form of enquiry that enables anyone in every job [...] to investigate and evaluate their work” (McNiff, 2017, p. 9). Action research often follows a cyclic strategy of plan, act, observe, and reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Heron and Reason (2008) denote this cyclic structure of phases is distinctly shaped by systematic planning, acting, and reflecting, to start a new phase with re-planning on the background of insights gained from the previous phase, the Apollonian mode. What they call the Dionysian mode “uses the presentational forms of knowing to review the previous action phase, and intentionally allow that learning to emerge in creative actions that arise spontaneously in response to future situations” (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 377). Our inquiry process was in line with the latter Dionysian mode, as we reflect on the supervision (act) regularly, recapturing experiences and seeking to understand how we mutually influenced each other’s practices and learning.

These reflections helped us to be aware of the kind of supervision called for by the PhD student in each particular situation, rather than us planning a specific strategy for the upcoming phase. Heron and Reason (2008) further state that “in a successful inquiry group co-inquirers develop a sense of pre-conceptual communion or resonance in their shared lifeworld, as ground for subsequent reflection together” (p. 369). It was in this spirit of shared life-worlds the reflections in the study was carried out. Although we continuously discussed the supervision and regularly videofilmed supervising sessions, it was not until the last years of the supervision we conducted a systematic study.

We frame our action research as a case study. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context and copes with the situations in which there will be many more variables of interest than data shows (Yin, 2009). This certainly is the case here, as the supervising relationship is continuous, lasting for five years. A complexity of persons and situations, not captured in our data, also influenced the supervising relationship, not least the other supervisor. Yet, there are limited units of common time and space within extensive networks belonging to each participant’s working and living spheres (Fox, 2009). Within this complexity, the phenomena we explore are structural and relational qualities that enabled mutual transformative learning to take place in the process of cross-cultural PhD supervision.

We have gathered data in the form of diary notes, audio and videotaped supervision sessions, and written feedback on course papers, articles, and extended abstracts, and we have both written reflection notes, reflecting on questions we have addressed to each other. Examples of such questions asked by the supervisor include: “What would you say to prepare one of your Tanzanian colleagues before starting his or her PhD with Norwegian supervisors? What are the main challenges you have experienced? What would you like to ask me? How can we help each other to develop this practice of intercultural guiding further?” While the student asked questions such as: “How prepared were you to guide students who you knew for sure would be from a different social and educational background? Did you expect a major difference in guiding students from a different culture from guiding students from your own culture? Do you think your methodological orientation made it easy for you to get along with others? Do you in any way stretch yourself beyond your expectations to guide us?”

Through asking each other such questions, we have subjected our experiences to reflexive and dialectic critiques, which Winter and Burroughs (1989) argue are core principles of doing action research and ensuring the validity of the study. Reflexive critique implies mirroring, reflecting upon, and asking questions to unveil a taken-for-granted practice. Dialectic critique implies looking for contradictions within our separate statements and between them. In addition, we have conducted *explorative dialogues* to inquire our experiences further. Both the written questions and the issues that we discussed face to face were aimed at investigating the phenomenon of our lived cross-cultural supervision experiences (Van Manen, 1997).

After the supervisory relationship ended, we analyzed our experiences further by condensing our experiences into stories of significant moments (Kvale, 2008), first independently and then together. The following content analysis was partly theory driven, in that we started to sort by *themes* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were the categories identified by Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014): language, cultural differences in dealing with hierarchy and other cultural differences, separation from the familiar and from support from others, stereotypes, and what happens when the candidate returns home. After identifying the themes, the analysis was data driven, as we looked for *keywords* across the themes revealing organizational factors, emotional engagement, and learning experiences. From the keywords and themes that emerged, we created our own *categories* that we found covered essential qualities of the supervisory relationship and situations affecting the process and results of the supervision. Our concern was to focus on qualities that held learning potential for both the supervisee and the supervisor. The categories we identified were: shared unhomeliness, shared uncertainty and trust-building, otherness, cultural differences in relating to hierarchy, second language and academic demands, being in context together, and finally flourishing.

Our study is a single, in-depth case, inquiring into two individual perspectives of a shared process. How can we claim that the categories we found to have educational value are valid? Habermas' (1991) criteria for social validity has guided our analyses. The validity claims comprise four questions commonly used to judge quality in action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 294). The first question is whether what we do and find makes sense to ourselves and others – whether it is comprehensible. Hence, our findings have been related to other, similar studies, for what Kvale (2008) calls analytic generalization. The second and third questions are whether our understandings are true and authentic. To ensure truthfulness and authenticity, we have defined and refined the categories we found, many times, until we both thought they were as accurate representations for our understandings as possible. We have chosen to present evidence to this claim, and for the reader to judge the truthfulness, in form of extensive use of quotes from our material. The last question is whether the account is appropriate. Although we have gone back and forth between the whole body of data and experiences and the categories we identified, separately and together, the categories are the result of our own experiences and must be validated further by the readers' evaluation related to their experiences. Hence, we subjugate the account to public critique for further validation, depending on whether the readers find the study to have value in the field of cross-cultural supervision or not.

FACTORS IMPACTING CROSS-CULTURAL SUPERVISION

In this part of the article, we present and discuss the seven categories that we have identified to explain and give meaning to our transformative cross-cultural supervision experiences. The categories are: shared unhomeliness; shared uncertainty and trust-building; otherness; cultural differences in relating to hierarchy; second language and academic demands; being in context together; and finally, flourishing.

SHARED UNHOMELINESS

Ahmad met Sigrid's colleague Krogh when he visited SUA (Tanzania) and he was fascinated by his interest in experiential learning and farm/community-school cooperation. They immediately bonded and Krogh flew home, applied for a quota stipend and, in a short time, Ahmad became a PhD candidate at a Norwegian university with two appointed Norwegian supervisors.

Krogh was aware of the risk of cultural alienation creating uncertainty and discomfort (unhomeness); therefore, we (the supervisors) facilitated shorter stays in Norway than were the standard for such PhD paths, implying short periods for coursework and writing in Norway, and extended periods for fieldwork and writing at home in Tanzania. Still, Ahmad had to leave his wife, son, and daughter for at least three months every year of the study, the first time his daughter was only a few weeks old. We managed to incorporate the PhD project in a NORAD (The Norwegian for Development Cooperation)-funded project, which allowed Sigrid to visit Ahmad at his university and join him in the field regularly. Hence, we created *systemic structures* to ease the burden of unhomeness for the PhD student, and at the same time the supervisor could get involved in the student's context and culture. Both the supervisor and supervisee were *separated from the familiar* and *from support from familiar networks*, which Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014) see as restricting factors in cross-cultural supervision. Although the periods were more extensive for the student than for the supervisor, both experienced unhomeness. Being away from the familiar provided opportunities to become familiar with each other's workplaces and working cultures, as well as to befriend each other's families. For Ahmad, the non-academic ties were meaningful and bridged the social and academic relationship with the supervisor.

You gave me close personal attention, and you cared about me as a person, and not just as a student [...] Informal encounters with you from time to time made it easy for me to cope.
(Ahmad's reflection note June 2016)

The host and caring role became a dimension of the supervisory role because the students came to a foreign country and needed help to establish. The guest role was also evident as they [...] invited us into their families. (Sigrid's reflections September 2015)

The cultural alienation was eased by reducing the time spent away from home, but also by becoming friends and hence becoming part of a mutually supportive network: "[...] encouraging social contact and providing social support goes a long way in minimizing the effect that social isolation has on students" (Ali & Kohun, 2007, p. 42). Learning about each other's family structures, daily challenges, environmental obstacles and possibilities, power structures, and so on contributed to broadened horizons.

Furthermore, the structural strategies ensured that Ahmad was a part of his team all along, reducing the challenges students educated abroad often faces when coming home, because they have become alienated from their home environment, as pointed out by Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014). Ahmad could continually share and discuss ideas emanating from his work, hence his colleagues could benefit from the broadened horizons gradually.

SHARED UNCERTAINTY AND TRUST-BUILDING

Although we were able to establish structures to reduce the isolation, and over time, built relationships that were supportive, the process was laden with uncertainty for us both. Such uncertainty is related to unhomeliness, yet we see it as a separate category.

During the initial meetings and discussions with my advisors, I noted that I had very few points to contribute in the discussions. I noted that I did not understand many issues concerning research and especially supporting my positions within established knowledge (literature). This was frustrating, as I felt my advisors might feel that I may be a burden to them. (Ahmad's reflections, January 2017)

I was afraid that my guiding could cause problems in your system because I did not know the "cultural codes" or the institutional codes. I was afraid that you would not tell me if I stepped on your or your colleagues' toes because I was aware of the power-relations you were used to. I was afraid of suggesting actions [...] that were inappropriate in some ways, since I was not at all familiar with your context, with your field. (Sigrid's response to reflection questions from Ahmad, October 2015)

In the first quote, Ahmad revealed his uncertainty regarding his competence and his fear of letting his supervisors down. The first part of the statement is what most PhD students feel at the start of their PhD project. The second part may be influenced by the underlying expectation of supervisors as experts and hence the hierarchical structure of power relations to which the student was accustomed.

Sigrid's quote reveals an equal insecurity of not being competent to complete the task due to a lack of experience in PhD supervision generally, but more importantly, because the research was based in a culture she did not know. Caputo (as quoted in Biesta, 2013) wrote that creating "like procreating, is a risky business, and one has to be prepared for a lot of noise, dissent, resistance, and a general disturbance of the peace if one is of the mind to engage in either" (p. 15). Sigrid was afraid to disturb the peace because of her cultural ignorance. Moreover, she was aware of the respect Ahmad had for his supervisors and was afraid he would not feel confident to turn down suggestions he considered unfruitful or even harmful.

Nevertheless, Sigrid decided to take the risk because she thought she could contribute and knew she could learn a lot. One condition was the shared supervisory relationship with her colleague who had research experience from Tanzania. We managed to change a structural condition at our university, and were appointed as the two main supervisors. The second condition was that Ahmad agreed to be her cultural guide.

In the beginning, I felt the need to check often that you did understand that our suggestions were only that and that you needed to judge what would function because you were the expert in your context. From there I stopped thinking so much about the heavy responsibility of guiding you because I experienced your skilled, wise, and knowledgeable decisions and actions in the field. I trusted our co-creation in the process, knowing you took responsibility and could evaluate any suggestions I or we proposed. This trust might have been a burden. Maybe you at some points had wanted someone to lean on. (Sigrid's reflection, October 2015)

This quote shows that Sigrid trusted Ahmad to consider any supervision suggestions through his cultural knowledge, hence, he had to understand that this responsibility had to overpower his respect for her as the authority. On the other hand, Sigrid became aware of the heavy responsibility she was placing on the students' shoulders. Was it too much? Overcoming fear and uncertainty by trusting that we could lean on each other was liberating, as we could invest more energy in research aimed at life-enhancing educational practices (Ahmad, Gjötterud & Krogh, 2015). The individual transformations, as we were coming more fully into the world, had the power to contribute to transformed social practices.

OTHERNESS

The supervisee is male, black, and Muslim, while the supervisor is female, white, and Christian. Gender, race, and religion are categories holding stereotyped assumptions, such as male Muslims having problems taking advice from women. The black and white dichotomy holds a long tradition of oppression and colonialism. The term otherness that we have chosen for this category is linked to the 'othering' historically practiced by the west, the colonizing powers, to marginalize the others, the colonized, defining 'them' as having less value (Said, 1978; Smith, 2012). However, when we have chosen this term, it is to point to the understanding held by Buber (1923/2004) that love has the power to enable us to see each other as full beings, not reduced to our experience of her or him. We are united as equally worth human beings, but we differ, we are 'Others' to each other. Being conscious of the otherness, then holds the potential to learn and expand our understanding of what it is to be human and to engage in ethical relationships, which Levinas (1969) states as our unconditional responsibility for the Other.

Drawing on a large body of research, Soheilian, Inman, Klinger, Isenberg, and Kulp (2014) argue that "factors such as supervisor self-awareness, genuineness in sharing cultural struggles, and openness to discussing cultural and racial factors are key to providing a culturally responsive supervisory relationship" (p. 379). In our experience, such openness about our differences laid the ground for educative communication that "ensures *participation* in a common understanding" (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 4, emphasis added). Hence, the differences, the otherness, allowed us to participate in mutual educational meaning making that provided both the supervisor and the supervisee with transformative opportunities.

Illman (2006) states that stereotypes may serve as tools for essential meaning making. The stereotypes made it possible to label differences we could relate to, and hence they became lenses for discovering and appreciating the differences as sources of enrichment and empowerment, rather than limiting our experiences. We find Biesta's (2013) discussion of deconstruction useful to understand the transformational process we encountered when he stated that deconstruction,

[...] is not simply an affirmation of who or what is other, but rather of the *otherness* of who or what is other. Deconstruction [...] is an opening and an openness toward an unforeseeable in-coming of the other (p. 38).

Through the supervisory journey, we experienced an emergent openness, allowing us both to come more fully into the world, in Biesta's terms. This was not a foreseen possibility: "I could not have anticipated [...] how my horizon would expand" (Sigrid's reflection note, October 2015). Although it

cannot be foreseen, we believe that cross-cultural supervision holds a specific potential for mutually expanded horizons and transformational learning.

Thus far, we have regarded otherness as cultural and personal otherness, but there was a third aspect of otherness that contained a well for learning. The fact that we came from different professions and hence had various areas of professional expertise expanded Sigrid's field from teacher education to include community development, while Ahmad became an action researcher with competence within the field of school and primary education. We both crossed professional boundaries. It was also when we were able to join different theoretical aspects; i.e., Nyerere's theory of education for self-reliance vs. Dewey's theory on experiential learning, that we were able to create new practices (Ahmad, Krogh, & Gjøtterud, 2014). These were moments of transculturation.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN RELATING TO HIERARCHY

The supervisory tradition that informed the supervising practice values the equality in the relationship. However, one might ask if it was desirable for the student to adapt to such a supervising culture. Was it easy?

I was used to a culture where advisors are considered knowers of everything and sitting with them is like receiving instructions or doing an oral examination. [...] At first, I felt uncertain if the more dialogic, open, and accommodative advisory culture would work for me. [...] I realized that it could. Because [...] you are always occupied, from different perspectives, with finding my ideas/goals based on my experience to get a clear direction, rather than telling me where to go. [...] However, I had to work hard to argue well my positions [...] (Ahmad's reflection note May 2015)

It was not easy to understand the student-supervisor relationship that I saw when you were supervising Ahmad in Tanzania. [...] you encouraged the student to consider the comments and use them if they were useful. It was as if you were colleagues learning together with your student. You respected him in the same way he respected you. (Second PhD student's reflection note, June 2015)

These quotes describe the differences in dealing with hierarchy when contrasted with the ideals of the dialogic supervisory style conducted in I-Thou relationships (Buber, 1923/2004; Tveiten, 2008), as discussed above. The difference is confirmed in this statement where Ahmad refers to an episode when finalizing an article:

My supervisor emailed me, pointing out the errors, and I emailed back saying yes, it was a mistake, but I think that is not the only criteria for judging our paper. Then everything was fine. I remember this because later my supervisor thought I was annoyed with the email and she apologized. This was very crucial to me, as in traditions of hierarchical power structure between a student and a supervisor, that is next to impossible to happen. This was critical since I learned that I was equally treated as a human. (Ahmad's reflections, April 2015)

Ahmad saw the apology as a crucial moment of experiencing the equality in the relationship, a sense of mutual respect between the supervisor and supervisee.

On the systemic level, we encountered many challenges, such as when Sigrid sent an annual progress report in copy to Ahmad and was reprimanded by his superior. Sharing such information with the student was not the custom in their system. Sigrid saw it as an oppressing practice, hiding information about the student from him. Openness seemed to be crucial for progress to be made. However, protesting such practices could harm the student's status at his institute. Such situations were educational and helped to identify power issues and find ways of dealing constructively with them.

SHARED SECOND LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC DEMANDS

In cross-cultural supervision, it is often a challenge that neither the spoken nor the written language is the students' mother tongue. In our case, we shared the burden of having to express ourselves in a second language. The student was more fluent in spoken English, while the supervisor was better at writing. The student comes from an oral culture, with limited writing experience. Furthermore, learning how to write academically is, in itself, challenging. Academic communities have strict practices, following their own norms (Tkachenko et al., 2016).

I remember one day we were finalizing our first article and there were some issues (format/style) suggested by one of my advisors, but unfortunately, I did not consider them all. (Ahmad's reflections, April 2015)

This situation led to the harsh e-mail referred to above and confirmed the supervisor's frustration with the lack of accuracy in the written text. On completing the article for submission, she had again spent considerable time correcting formats and spacing and given precise instructions. However, the quote also tells the story of supervision, which contradicts its dialogic ideal. The following quote can speak for itself:

Perhaps people of the same background as mine may find you very analytical, critical, and meticulous, but that is needed at the PhD level. It is a necessary evil. (Ahmad's reflection note, June 2016)

The reciprocal learning is evident in that we were struggling together, but also in that Ahmad's response mirrored Sigrid's practice, giving her rich opportunities to become more aware of contradictions and thus improve her supervisory practice.

BEING IN CONTEXT TOGETHER

We have already stated that the economy made it possible for the supervisor to visit the student's context, at the university and in the field. This seemed to be a crucial factor for reciprocal learning. The following quotes are examples to show this point.

Another example of a frustrating moment was when I was not able to start my fieldwork due to delays (project fund). I spent almost 12 months without doing much related to my PhD, and I had to meet my advisors [...]. I was frustrated since all I could present were problems, challenges, and limitations. I felt I would be labeled as lazy. [...] To my surprise, the discussion turned out to be fruitful, as the output formed a section in one of the papers and the thesis. This was possible since we approached every encounter as a learning opportunity. (Ahmad' reflection note June 2013)

We [the supervisors] came to Tanzania, and Ahmad showed us a thick folder of paperwork and told about endless numbers of meetings concerning the project money granted [...]. I felt sorry that he had to spend so much time on this matter, but on the other hand, I saw his folder as data [...]. We discussed the power relations involved in the hindrances. Hence, we saw the years' work [...] as an important aspect of doing action research [...] worth documenting and analyzing. (Sigrid's reflection note June 2013)

Ahmad was amazed that the challenges could be viewed as opportunities and said, "How do you come up with such ideas?" (Ahmad's reflections, June 2013).

The situation was creating resistance, forcing us to find solutions we could not have planned. The solutions came into being between us and the present situation. Together we learned about obstacles when doing action research in this Tanzanian context, about bureaucratic procedures in the international projects, and about local power structures. Creative problem solving was a result of communication as participation and depended on physical closeness. Biesta (2013) argues that it is because people share in a common activity "in which one really has an interest [...] that their ideas and emo-

tions are transformed as a result of and in function of the activity in which they participate” (pp. 29-30). The activity here was the conversation, taking place within Ahmad’s context. It was when we were fully emerged in the situation the best ideas arose.

Most of the time (about eight months each year), we were separately involved in our respective networks and working environments. During these periods, we maintained regular meetings through e-mails and Skype meetings. Despite our good intentions, this was not satisfactory due to unreliable connections and because we each were occupied with other tasks in our respective environments. Clearly, it was a useful and necessary channel for supervision, but it did not foster the co-creativity that the participative communication did, coming to life when we met face to face inside either network.

FLOURISHING

In our data, we repeatedly found words expressing emotions like joy, humor, fun, pride, admiration, courage, excitement, passion, respect, deeply touched, surprise, contentment, awe, and trust. We have tried to capture the essence of these adjectives in the category flourishing, as we think the words express underlying values and the positive attitude that emerged in the supervision process—attitudes that made it possible for both to be able to turn resistance and challenges into sources of learning and growth, and hence to flourish. We have borrowed the term from Heron and Reason (2008), who state that “action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes [...], and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (p. 4).

There were many joyful moments during our working together. I felt joyful every time I managed to convince my supervisors of my arguments or position related to the studies. [...] This may not sound academic, but a social part of it—you make the sessions and relationship enjoyable and fun. (Ahmad’s reflection note, July 2016)

Ahmad said something about what little we do to ease the days for these human beings are bricks in our pavement to heaven (he mentioned several terms according to various religions). This statement seemed to create a new attitude toward the orphans. (Minutes from meeting with teachers 20.03.2014) I felt admiration for how he managed the meeting with teachers from X secondary school [...] how wisely he handled the challenging conversation. (Sigrid’s reflections, March 2014)

I was deeply touched by how he narrates [...] that he as a person has developed relations and a position in this small community. (Sigrid’s field notes, October 2015)

These are examples demonstrating our sense of equality, we were colleagues discussing and finding our way, together. When it came to leading the action research process, Sigrid admired Ahmad’s natural authority, his awareness in the situation, his wise choice of wording, and the humor with which he encountered the participants. Furthermore, she loved his ability to capture an audience when presenting his project (at CARN-conferences in England 2012, in Tromsø 2014 and Portugal 2015), the way he was received in the field, at his university, and international conferences where he received affirmations of his project. Therefore, the reactions were also an affirmation of the educational process in which we were engaged, where we were both emerging as subjects and researchers.

During the whole time, I enjoyed my advisors’ attitude of approaching every moment as a learning opportunity and their constant appreciation that they were also learning in the process. This has been crucial for me, as it has always given me confidence to push to try hard not to let my advisors down. (Ahmad’s reflection notes, January 2017)

We claim that learning together, becoming aware of how we influenced each other, was motivating us to push boundaries and hence a crucial factor in the transformative learning process for both parts, leading to personal and professional growth.

THE SEVEN FACTORS

The seven factors we have identified as central to mutual transformative learning in cross-cultural supervision are partly organizational, as economic funding to travel between countries and contexts form a base for the deep level of communicative participation we see as crucial. Economic freedom permits the space for *shared unhomeliness*. The latter point makes a bridge to relational factors, as the *shared uncertainty* caused by the shared unhomeliness holds potential for *trust-building*. *Shared second language* as well as *cultural differences in relating to hierarchy* are often regarded as problematic, but as we consider the challenges necessary resistance, these factors also provide valuable sources for learning together and part of the *otherness* that is essential for expanding horizons. The transformative effect of shared knowledge is enhanced by *being in context together*. Becoming co-creative and the mutual feeling of *flourishing* are results of the other factors.

MUTUALLY EXPANDED HORIZONS – CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The way we have experienced the challenges of unhomeliness, of uncertainty, of struggling to write academically in a second language, and of having different ways of relating to hierarchy, are factors that have represented opportunities for learning. This is not because it has been an easy path without thorns, but precisely because the resistance we have both experienced has been essential for learning about each other's cultures, building trust and fighting systems in which we are operating. The context was our teacher.

Otherness can be frightening and alienating, but because we both approached the supervisory relationship and the tasks with respect in pedagogical love (Mitchell & Edwards, 2013) and approached each other as equal human beings, the otherness became the life-expanding well that Biesta (2013) emphasizes lays the ground for expanded horizons. Because we are of different colors and from different religious backgrounds and because our life conditions are so different, new insights can grow. Coming from different fields, agricultural education and community development, and teacher education and action research, could at times be frustrating because Sigrid was not sure if Ahmad was getting the support he needed. However, it was also the reason Ahmad could become an action researcher and Sigrid now also considers herself a community developer. Broadened horizons have led to emancipation in our research as well as in our daily lives. The seven factors made it possible to become co-creative in the context of the action research project. We call this transculturation.

The financial situation was fortunate, providing opportunities for us to visit each other's countries and working fields. Lack of finances may hinder mutual learning, given the importance of opportunity to visit each other's contexts. However, technology can allow for other possibilities for participation and shared experiences.

We believe the identification of the seven factors might serve as reminders for supervisors and students to investigate their supervisory situations and relationships for differences and view the differences as sources of learning and expansion rather than as threats. We believe that it is possible to make a choice regarding how we decide to confront and utilize differences. Differences can be frustrating, and it may be time consuming to uncover the causes of misunderstandings. However, we have showed that differences hold rich potential for learning when welcomed. There is more that unites us as human beings, than that which sets us apart. Most importantly, though, we acknowledge that an attitude of mutual openness, curiosity, and gratitude for being in the fortunate situation of being able to share time and struggle, learning together and from each other, is central to our transformative learning. This requires that time is allocated for dialogues not just strictly professionally,

but also personally, discussing the process and finding common ground as well as exploring differences. Time spent outside the office might be rewarding.

The seven factors influencing mutual learning in cross-cultural (PhD) supervision may contribute to a broadened awareness of transculturation and mutual transformative processes. In a world demanding that we find new ways of dealing with climatic, economic, and social challenges, we believe there is a need for research exploring the value of differences in culture, gender, race, and professional competence as a contribution to education for a sustainable future.

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