

Book Review

Holness, L. 2015. *Growing the next generation of researchers: A handbook for emerging researchers and their mentors*.

ISBN 978-1-77582-085-7. Pbk. Xxii + 258pp.

South Africa urgently needs more researchers (NRF, 2008; NDP, 2011). We also need a transformation in the demographics of our researchers. One indicator of this is that currently only 14% of university professors are black African, and only 2% are black African females (DHET, 2012). The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework includes a number of initiatives to drive the process of growing the next generation of academics. For example, the nGAP project has inserted 125 new posts into the higher education system in 2015, with more to follow. This project allows for new academics to undertake postgraduate study and develop as teachers and researchers through mentorship, a reduced teaching load and so on.

Given these kinds of initiatives, a book offering practical advice on mentoring new academics, based on twelve years' experience of nurturing new researchers, is a welcome addition to this urgent conversation. The book has been written in an accessible way for both emerging researchers and their mentors. It discusses critical issues that relate to researcher development in a complex academic environment. As Holness explains in the introduction, the aim of the book is 'to provide resources to help emerging researchers navigate their way into, and in, the research world' (p. xiv).

The **first part** welcomes the reader to academia and tackles issues related to understanding the field within its historical context. Holness locates research as one of the core functions of the university and explains how it relates to teaching. She elucidates the general features of the academic environment, both institutional and global, and articulates the challenges and opportunities that emerging researchers and their mentors are most likely to encounter. Holness' view of the academic environment is that it has become increasingly complex due to technological advances, internationalisation, quality assurance and benchmarking regimes, and the increasingly multi-disciplinary nature of knowledge production.

While these pose challenges to emerging researchers, her advice is that they can be utilised as opportunities to develop a strong research profile.

The **second part** of the book looks at how a novice researcher can develop a research profile and addresses issues of crafting one's research, managing it and adhering to ethical considerations. Holness identifies the structural support and tools that are necessary for personal research development. What stands out in this part of the book are the conference preparation guidelines together with the benefits of networking, where careful conference attendance planning could include research visits; building networks is highlighted as an important part of researcher development. Related to completion of postgraduate research, Holness identifies the need for funding as one of the problems delaying the time to completion of PhDs, and she addresses aspects of the funding application processes here as well. In all of this Holness presents basic information that novice researchers are often presumed to somehow already have. She explains the simplest processes in a way that makes the reader feel supported rather than patronised.

Scholarly publishing and the impact of research are discussed in the **third part** of the book. Being motivated to publish comes with a number of benefits for both the author and the institution. Holness encourages publishing in any way possible, be it journal articles from a thesis or contributing to book chapters. She presents an overview on how to select a suitable platform for disseminating one's research as well as the differences in publication processes between book chapters and journal article. The publishing process is neatly outlined for emerging researchers to easily navigate their way through what is often experienced as a mysterious system. In addition, the notion of research impact is made explicit. She warns about the long-term negative impact of seeking quantity in publication over quality in a bid to pad a CV. In this world of predatory publications, such cautions are especially pertinent. Issues related to open access and citation rates close the section.

The **fourth part** of the book tackles matters of PhD study and the supervision process. Holness reminds us that while the PhD is about research, it is examined through a written text and so we should focus on developing our writing practices from the start. Her straightforward advice is that committing to a minimum of 20 minutes of PhD-related writing every day during one's candidacy will make an enormous difference to one's progress. She also emphasises the importance of clear and short sentences and provides an insight into the typical structure of thesis

chapters. Given increasing demands for PhD graduates, linked to the need to transform higher education in South Africa demographically and in other ways, this advice for PhD scholars and newer researchers is invaluable.

To address concerns about the readiness of PhD students to engage in the long and complex research process required, Holness presents the idea of provisional registration where a student can work with a supervisor in a pre-doc process, which could have a significant impact on the poor throughput rates at PhD level in South Africa. Unfortunately, though, many South African institutions foreground bureaucratic arrangements and financial benefit over what would most benefit the novice researcher and so this pre-registration engagement is not always an option. Hopefully, though, universities will engage with issues of transformation in ways that better encompass this kind of support for postgraduate researchers, and Holness' comments here would be helpful in that respect.

Some of the perspectives Holness presents suggest a fairly traditional understanding of supervision and knowledge production, which undoubtedly reflects the dominant model in South Africa. Increasingly though, supervision happens in collaborative teams as doctoral programmes provide supportive spaces for communities of scholars. This has various implications for supervision and mentorship and will need to be carefully navigated in the process of growing the next generation of researchers. Such collaborative structures can foster a sense of collegiality and support that is often absent in more individualised approaches.

Further, assumptions around publishing in the Humanities where the scholar is expected to produce articles more or less on her own are being troubled. It seems that, increasingly, supervisors across all disciplines are beginning to see co-authorship as part of their responsibility in mentoring novice scholars into fully-fledged researchers. While this often extends the supervision workload beyond graduation, it can make an enormous difference in the development of a more diverse range of researchers in South Africa.

Holness concludes by acknowledging that not all emerging researchers are young, which is certainly the case in the South African context (Mouton, 2015). She also provides valuable supervision guidelines for both student and supervisor, which could make an excellent basis for negotiating the relationship. The ASSAf report on PhD studies in South Africa (2010) indicated that poor supervision is a key factor in

our low graduation rates and so overt deliberations around roles and responsibilities seem to be crucial.

The book focuses explicitly on academics and thereby neglects ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch, 2008) such as those working in Writing Centres, Academic Development Units, Educational Technology Centres, Quality Assurance Units, and so on. Undertaking research is central to them being able to do their work in theoretically sound ways, but they miss out on the kinds of structural support, such as sabbaticals, necessary to develop their research profiles. Also, the casualisation of academic staff (Quinn, 2012) means many people who should be undertaking research are on contract and so are not supported to do so. While this affects academics across all faculties, it is especially evident for academics teaching on extended curriculum programmes or similar who are most likely to be appointed on a contract basis to the detriment of their development as researchers (Scott, 2013).

Many books on researcher development are guilty of upwards conflation (Archer, 1995) whereby all explanations of struggles or successes are ascribed to the agency of individuals. Success and failure are understood to be almost exclusively due to the actions of the key agents, in this case, the emerging researchers and their mentors. Thus the focus of these ‘self-help’ type books is guiding these people in what actions they should take. This fails to take into account the role of institutional structures and cultures in the development of the next generation of researchers (Motshoane & McKenna, 2014). This book makes a real attempt to situate the development of the next generation of researchers within its broader national and institutional context. For example, it addresses the concerns pertinent to macro and micro planning in the research process, the procedure for *ad hominem* promotions, as well as optimising available opportunities to mention only a few.

However, the book is focused on a project undertaken at the University of Cape Town, a highly resourced research-intensive institution. The constraints and enablements of researcher development vary considerably across institutions and there are a number of considerations that do not form the focus of this text which would be a reality for those seeking to grow the next generation of researchers across historically disadvantaged universities, comprehensive universities, universities of technology, and rural universities. The South African Higher Education sector is uneven and therefore those in management and in academic development, supervision or mentorship roles need to seriously take such complexities into account when

asking the sector as a whole to improve. In spite of this critique, this book is an extremely useful resource for academics across the sector in that it provides an important and practical contribution to growing the next generation of researchers.

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