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ZEN AND THE ART OF  
TRANSDISCIPLINARY  
POSTGRADUATE  
STUDIES:  
WORKSHOP RESOURCES





## Introduction to the Workshop

Increasingly, researchers and research students are engaged in problems that require approaches that transcend disciplines, at least in part because problems of society are increasingly complex and interdependent and cannot be tackled adequately from specific individual disciplines – in these realms, the whole must be greater than the sum of the parts.

Supervising research students working in these ways brings particular challenges. Prominent among these challenges is the question of how to recognise and ensure quality in the processes and outputs of their labours when they are drawing on disciplines, theories, and methodologies with deeply different ways of understanding the world around us.

An ALTC Fellowship sought to shed light on both the summative criteria that might be helpful for evaluating the outputs of such research – a thesis, papers, etc – as well as the formative processes supervisors and students might use to engender such criteria. These workshop resources are intended to provide a structured way in to talking and learning about, and developing responses to, the quandaries in this space. They are complemented by two resource documents – one focused on quality criteria and another focused on ideas for good practice.

The great value of a workshop, rather than simply making the documents available to people to read at their leisure, is that it brings people's focus to the topic at hand. Adults learn, at least in part, through stories and dialogue, and a workshop provides a space for that to occur for people with similar experiences. To that end, a comprehensive set of workshop materials has been developed to complement the two resource documents.

The workshop materials can be used in many ways:

- Roughly as designed: for example, someone in a teaching and learning institute with responsibility for postgraduate supervision might pick them up and use them as a set to guide a half-day workshop with supervisors and students across the university. A faculty Associate Dean of Research might do something similar. A researcher in an interdisciplinary institute might use them to kick start a local conversation about good practice in their own supervision.
- In parts: for example, a Dean of a Graduate School might be more interested in the quality criteria, and could use and modify some of the resources to facilitate a university-wide discussion about examination procedures
- As individuals: a student who is having difficulty with her interdisciplinary supervisors might use them to gain insights into what she can do for herself, and what she can do to improve her supervisor's understanding of what it is to work in interdisciplinary ways. A supervisor working in these ways in a department that has a strong disciplinary focus might use them as informal conversation or individual reflection triggers.

Above all, the workshop resources and the two resource documents should be seen as one approach to orchestrate improving the quality of the outcomes of inter- and transdisciplinary postgraduate research endeavours. That is, it is not 'the answer' - there will undoubtedly be other valuable approaches.

## Overview of the Resources

For ease of dissemination, the Microsoft® Word documents have been concatenated into one file. They can be readily disaggregated into separate files for printing purposes. A handy trick in running workshops is to use different colours for different worksheets – it helps both participants and facilitators keep track of things. Separate files makes that easy to achieve.

- Presenter's outline, including timing and learning outcomes from each element:
  - Facilitator Running Sheet
- Discussion Guides/Worksheets for participants:
  - Resonant Criteria Worksheet for Individuals
  - Criteria Assessment Worksheet for Small Group
  - Practical ideas Worksheet
- Feedback and Evaluation Form:
  - Evaluation Worksheet

In addition to the worksheets and running sheet, there is a presentation that introduces the ideas, has further references about the nature of inter- and transdisciplinary work, and provides the visual cues for all the exercises:

- TD PGR Workshop Facilitator Slides.ppt

## Facilitator's Running Sheet

Note that the outcomes rely on participants doing an hour of preparation, reading and reflecting on 2 key documents: the quality criteria document and the 'ideas for good practice' document.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Purpose / Notes / Explanation for Participants</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Who</i>
5	Setting up the day	<p>Welcome.</p> <p>Explain focus and structure of the day.</p> <p>Explain objectives and what that means for how resources created today will be collected, collated, and disseminated.</p> <p>Talk through the suggested 'rules of engagement' – these are the consolidated reflections after 18 months of working on a transdisciplinary project from scratch for about 10 people from the full spectrum of disciplines who had not worked together before.</p>	Workshop ppt	Facilitator leads
20	Introducing everyone and connection to ID/TD	<p>[This is optional, and I'd encourage it, because it brings people to this space and gets them focusing on the workshop]</p> <p>Go round the room - In one minute or so, please introduce yourself – your name, where you're from, and why you are here today</p> <p>The facilitator needs to find a balance between keeping this short and informative/engaging. Potential triggers: tell a quick vignette about when you started to care about quality in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary work, about how you came to be wondering about quality in this context, about a moment that stands out in your ID/TD</p>	<p>Workshop ppt</p> <p>Whiteboard or Flip chart and pens</p>	Facilitator leads. Scribe captures themes

<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Purpose / Notes / Explanation for Participants</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Who</i>
		career in relation to postgraduate study, supervision and examination.		
20	Introduce Part 1: The essential criteria	Short presentation introducing the summative criteria that emerged from the ALTC project. Refer to preparatory reading. Present as ‘a’ set, rather than ‘the’ set, and focus on relationships between them and potential for interpretation in various ways.	Workshop ppt Reading list	Facilitator leads
10	Reflection on the criteria a. quiet time	How do these resonate for you in your research practice now?  Working quietly, by yourself, start with the criterion/criteria that resonate most strongly for you. Make legible notes about what it has meant in practice for you, in writing, supervising, or examining a thesis, both in terms of what has worked well or what has failed ... Then go on to another criterion and do the same thing...	Resonant Criteria Worksheet	
20	b. small groups	Specifically, in groups of 3, spend a couple of minutes on each criterion, capturing your group’s main responses to these questions: - In what ways is this criterion useful for quality in ID/TD postgraduate work - In what ways does this criterion hinder quality in ID/TD postgraduate research  And when you’ve done that, spend a couple of minutes on this: - What criterion could you lose? Why? - What criterion needs to be re-worded? How? - And what simply must be added? Why?	Criteria Assessment Worksheet	
20	c. All together	All together, go through the criteria one by one, hearing the lead ideas	Whiteboard	Facilitator

<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Purpose / Notes / Explanation for Participants</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Who</i>
		from each group on that criterion, until we have nothing to add  Leave a minute or two to check in on strong responses to the extra questions about losing/changing/adding criteria	or Flip chart and pens	leads; Scribe captures
15	Break for cuppa			
10	Introduce Part 2: formative focus	Explain that now moving focus to implications for practice as supervisors and students – pick up a couple of exemplars from preparatory reading.	'Ideas for Good Practice' resource paper	Lead facilitator
25	Capturing ideas for practice	Get together with someone like you – a PhD student in the later stages of enrolment, a newer supervisor, someone who has supervised many theses like these, someone who is just starting to work in this way, etc  Spend a few minutes sharing your big ideas for practice – things you've done or heard about or just came up with now that might help achieve those quality criteria in practice  Then, work through the 2 or 3 favourite ideas between you, filling out one worksheet for each idea. The goal here is quality (!) not quantity – the more elements of the worksheet you fill out, the more useful it will be for others to learn from your experience and practise it themselves.	Practical Ideas Worksheet	
15	Sharing big ideas	Each pair has 30-45 seconds to share their favourite big idea with group	Whiteboard or Flip chart and pens	Facilitator leads; Scribe captures
5	Summary	Run over what we've done, what we've heard, and explain evaluation		Lead

<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Purpose / Notes / Explanation for Participants</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Who</i>
				facilitator
10	Reflections and Evaluation	Participants fill out sheets, and share ah-hahs and changes	Evaluation Worksheet	Lead facilitator
5	Wrap-up and next steps	<p>Make sure participants hand in <b>all</b> worksheets and evaluation forms.</p> <p>Explain how the outcomes of the workshop will be collected, collated, and disseminated eg they'll be typed up, and each set of worksheets will be collated into one document, and distributed to all participants.</p> <p>Check that everyone is happy to share contact details – these workshops have been a rich source of support for previous participants, long after the event has passed.</p> <p>Thank participants</p>		Lead facilitator

## RESONANT CRITERIA WORKSHEET: INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTIONS: in the table below, make legible notes about **your responses** to each criterion. How do they resonate with your experience? What do they mean for you in practice, e.g., in writing, supervising, examining, etc? What works well, and what has been difficult?

Start with your favourite, then choose another, and another.... Write on the back if you run out of space.

Critically aware, coherent argument	
Critical, pluralistic engagement with appropriate literature and other artefacts	
Evidence of critical reflection/reflexivity on own work	
Alignment between epistemology, theory, methodology, claims, and enquiry space	
Mastery of the process and/or outcomes	
Effective communication for diverse audiences	
Original and creative contribution to knowledge and/or practice	

### CRITERIA ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET: SMALL GROUP REFLECTION

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS:** working as a group, share your thoughts from the individual reflections, and in the table below, make legible notes and give your group's assessment of how each criterion helps or hinders students and supervisors in achieving good quality outcomes and processes.

CRITERIA	The goal: nurturing, encouraging, and assessing quality in ID/TD postgrad research outcomes and processes	
	In what ways is this criterion useful for the goal?	In what ways does this criterion hinder the goal?
Critically aware, coherent argument		
Critical, pluralistic engagement with appropriate literature and other artefacts		
Evidence of critical reflection/reflexivity on own work		
Alignment between epistemology, theory, methodology, claims, and enquiry space		

Mastery of the process and/or outcomes		
Effective communication for diverse audiences		
Original and creative contribution to knowledge and/or practice		

And when you're done, think quickly about these extra questions:

Is there one criterion you think we could lose? Which one? Why?	Is there some wording that needs to change in a criterion? What's the new wording? Why?	And is there one criterion that is missing and simply must be there? What is it? Why ?

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Transdisciplinary Postgraduate Research



Practical Ideas Worksheet.

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**What's the (short and catchy) name of the idea?**

**What's the big idea?**

Explain the idea here – what is it, how does it work, who does what, etc

**Why is this such a good idea?**

Make a case for the idea – eg helps clarify students expectations of themselves or the thesis, ...gives the student practice in using language to develop their voice, their argument, engages a different part of the brain, etc

*PLEASE WRITE LEGIBLY*

**Which criteria does this address most effectively?**

Critically aware, coherent argument

Critical, pluralistic engagement with appropriate literature and other artefacts

Evidence of critical reflection/reflexivity on own work

Alignment between epistemology, theory, methodology, claims, and enquiry space

Mastery of the process and/or outcomes

Effective communication for diverse audiences

Original and creative contribution to knowledge and/or practice

Or does it address something else?

**When might this be most useful?**

? Working out what to do (ie early days in absolute or relative terms)

? Doing it (eg collecting 'data')

? Making sense of things (eg interpreting, making claims)

Or, is there another trigger?

**What would it take to make this work?**

eg particular orientations, epistemologies, or attributes of students or supervisors; structural elements around the postgrad program, etc

**What resources might help?**

eg favourite website, blog, article, text, author, etc, or physical stuff or

*PLEASE WRITE LEGIBLY*

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Evaluation Worksheet.

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

What resonated for you? How so?

What 'ah-hah moment/s' did you have, if any 😊 ? What changed for you, if anything ? How so?

What are you still wondering about? How so?

PLEASE TURN OVER

What clanged / clashed / caused dissonance for you? How so?

What were your expectations for today?

And how they were met? Or not?

What do you think we should do differently next time?

