

Nick's dissertation supervision guidelines: starting a conversation

NW 28/10/05

Intro ('framing'):

I have written these guidelines as a possible story of how our work together may unfold as you write your thesis. It is based on my previous experience of supervision, but I am aware that each project is different so the story will be a new one. I *will* ask you to respect the limitations of time available to me (reflecting the budget set for dissertation supervision by Strathclyde/CHE). I will attempt to let you know about these constraints and to negotiate a framework of support with you within this. This paper begins that process.

A possible story:

I usually devote about half day of in-depth challenge/discussion (reading your proposal then discussing it with you) at the beginning to ensure the project is framed adequately, and then check in again about a month into the process, by which time, you should have begun with your inquiry practice (first and possibly second person).

Through your work, I'll expect you to keep me up to date with developments, but I won't expect to respond in detail to this. It also won't be my job to keep you focussed – that's up to you.

There may be a critical time mid-way through where a conversation would be helpful (for example, after a few meetings of the co-inquiry group, or at a decision-making stage about how it 'fits' as you tilt towards a write-up).

You need to be planning to get a draft ready of the majority of the thesis about a month before the hand in date, leaving me time to read, offer suggestions about structure, and get back to you for final tweaks lasting about a week. You need to allow a week for binding and last minute details.... Best in planning to work back from the deadline to ensure you don't leave it all till the last minute and fall into a hole (that's happened before – I speak from experience – including one student who thought they could write the whole thing in five days who then had to take an extra six months!).

So, to summarise, I would expect to be in touch throughout, but to have major time inputs at the beginning, middle and a month before the end. I don't like email much and prefer to schedule phone talks with at least one face-to-face discussion (this might most helpfully be when you've a lot of material/experience gathered and written up in draft form and are tilting at the 'sense-making' stage).

Before the first discussion, you should have been doing some practical planning of your methodology (including reading up on action research methodology – I will ask you for 3-6 sides that will form the basis of what's conventionally called a 'methodology' section to review when we meet). It would also be helpful to begin a conversation here about how your topic relates to the field of human ecology, and what substance from the field you might like to bring to inform your inquiry.

Finally, in my experience the dissertation can be a fantastic process of growth, connection, exploration. There might well be some pain and struggle along the way and I expect to witness this process alongside you without denying or running from it. It will inevitably be a learning experience for me as well. If we agree to work together, I will be actively inquiring into ways that I can improve my supervision practice and will invite feedback from you along the way to help me in this. Let me know if this sheet has been helpful!

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