The Horse's Mouth and Other Fallacies:
Insights from supervision and examining in the fields of language education and intercultural communication

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Warwick International Conference in AL
29 June 2021

Outline

1. An opportunity to reflect

2. Literature review & conceptual framework

3. 10 Lessons in communication learnt from doctoral supervision & examining

1.

An opportunity to reflect

2001 – 2021

A retrospective, drawing upon:

- **Reports (confirmation, pre-, post-viva)**

&

- **Experiences (anecdotal)**

2001 – 2021
Doctoral supervision & examining:

20 PhD / EdD these supervision / co-supervision completed
6   PhD / EdD supervision / co-supervision in progress
13 PhD upgrade (aka confirmation, transfer) examiner
12 PhD / EdD thesis internal examiner
19 PhD / EdD thesis external examiner
70 TOTAL

- **12 students (17%) were 'native speakers' of English**
- **6 students (9%) were UK nationals**

Caveat - Supervision and examining varies between:

- **Disciplines (e.g. presentations in vivas)**

- **Institutions (e.g. lead & co-supervisor)**
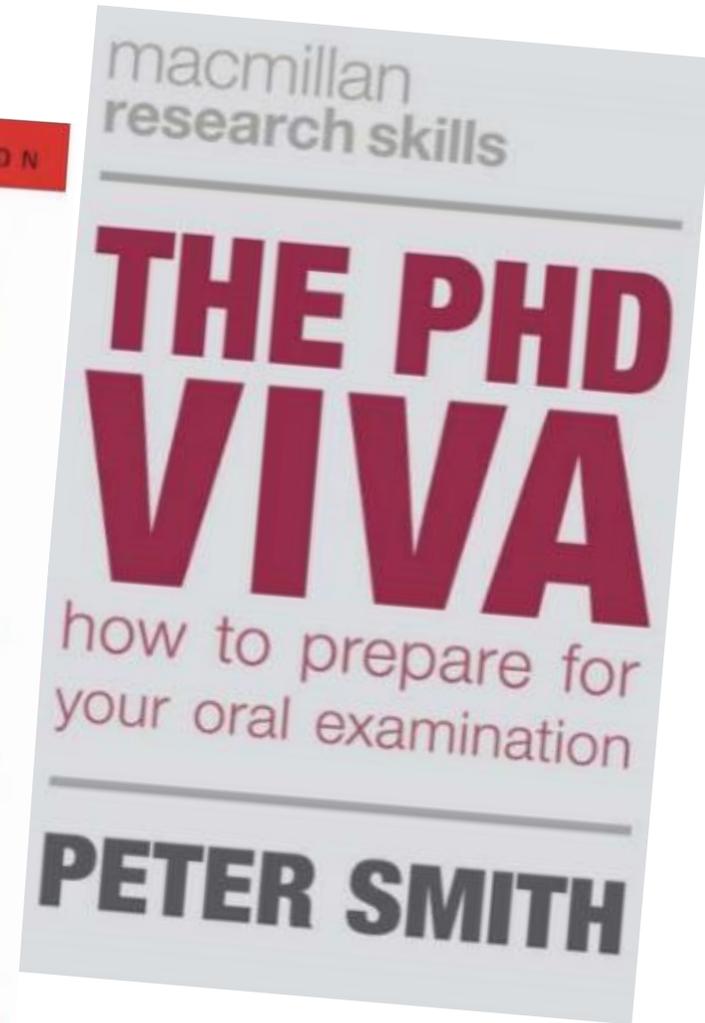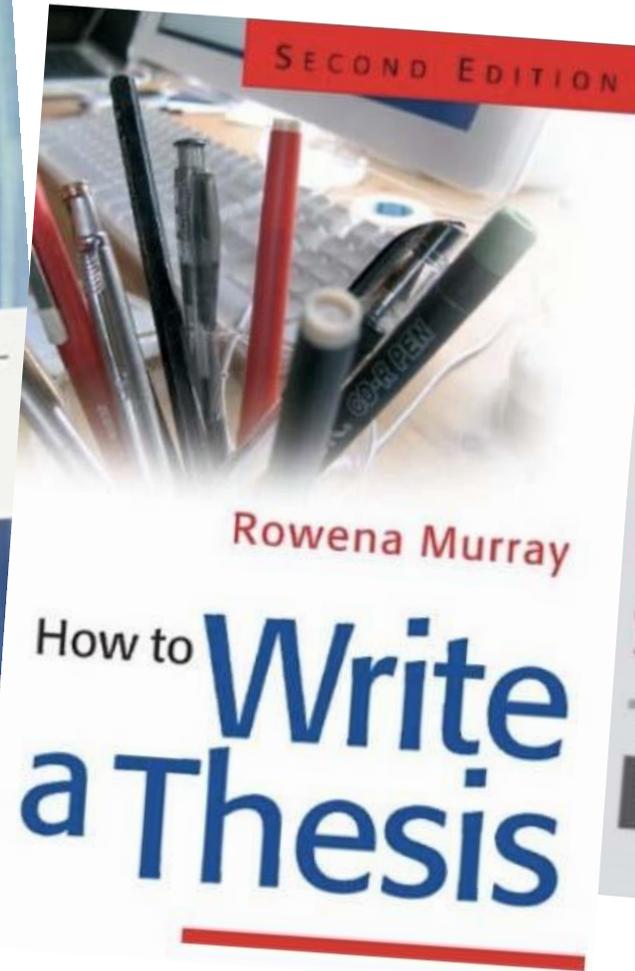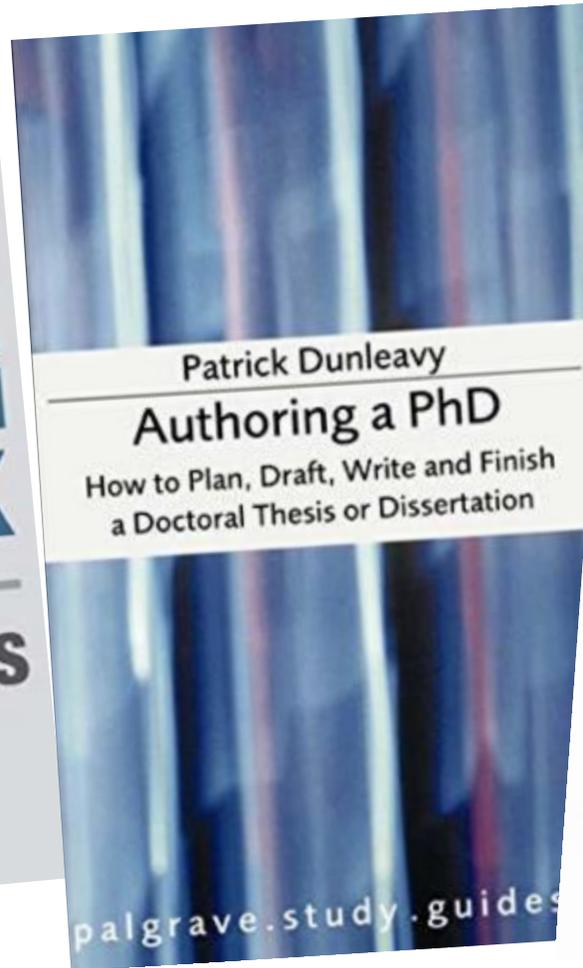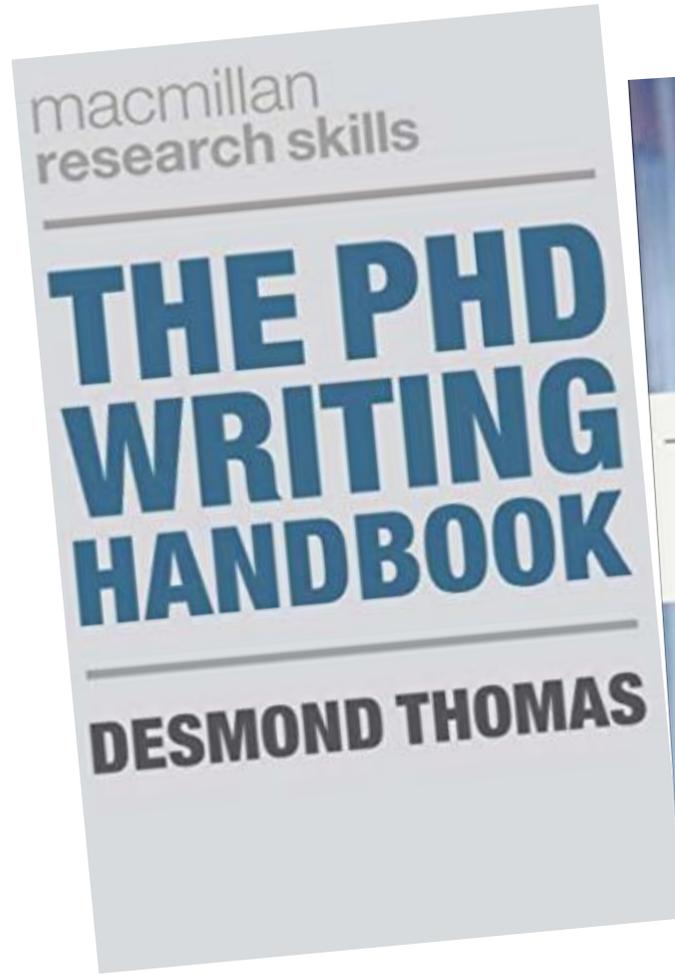
- **Countries (e.g. public defence, by report only)**

2.

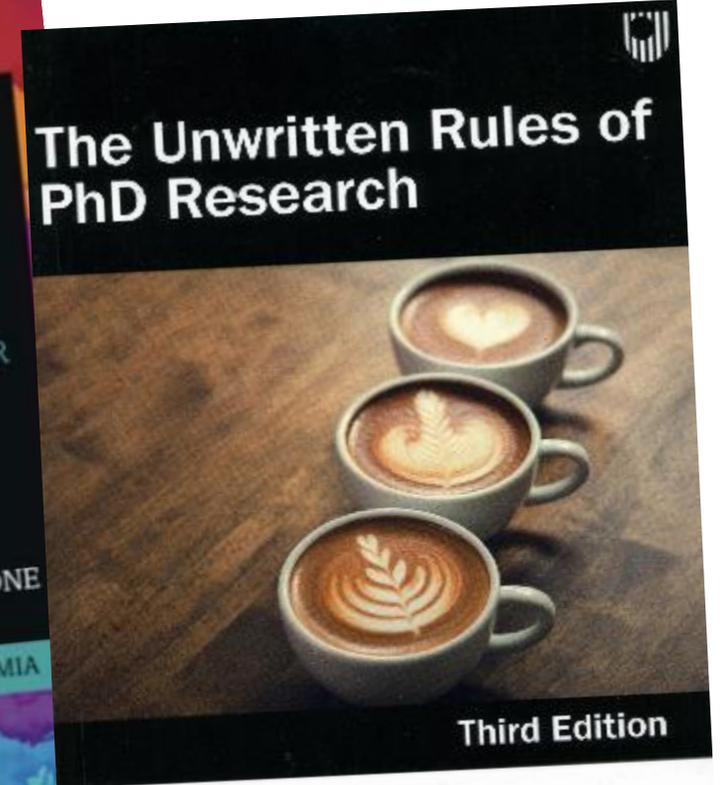# Literature review & conceptual framework
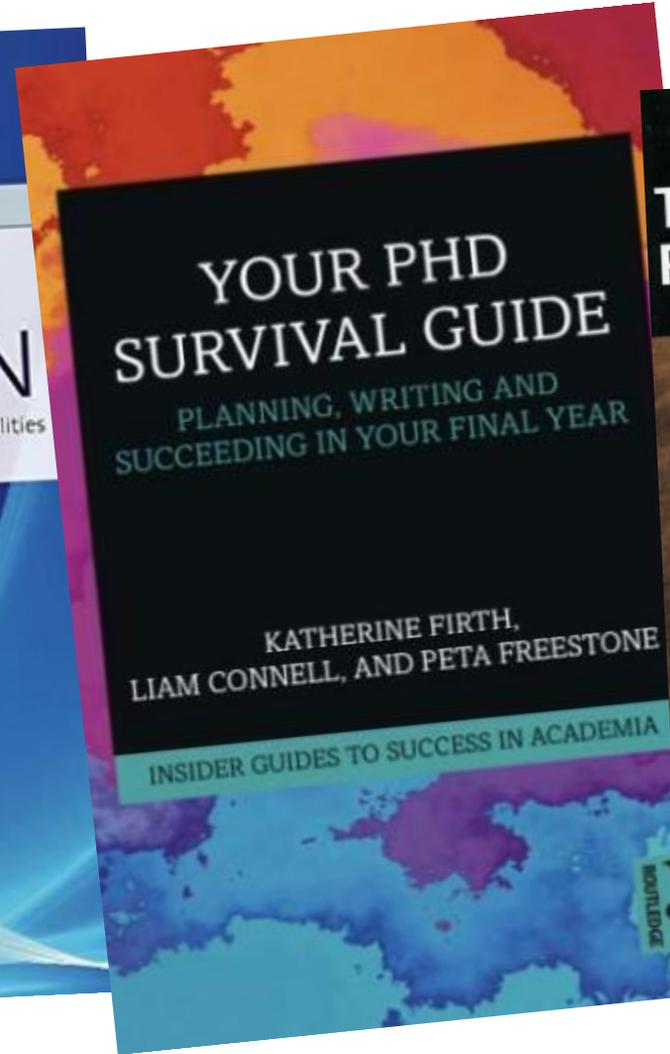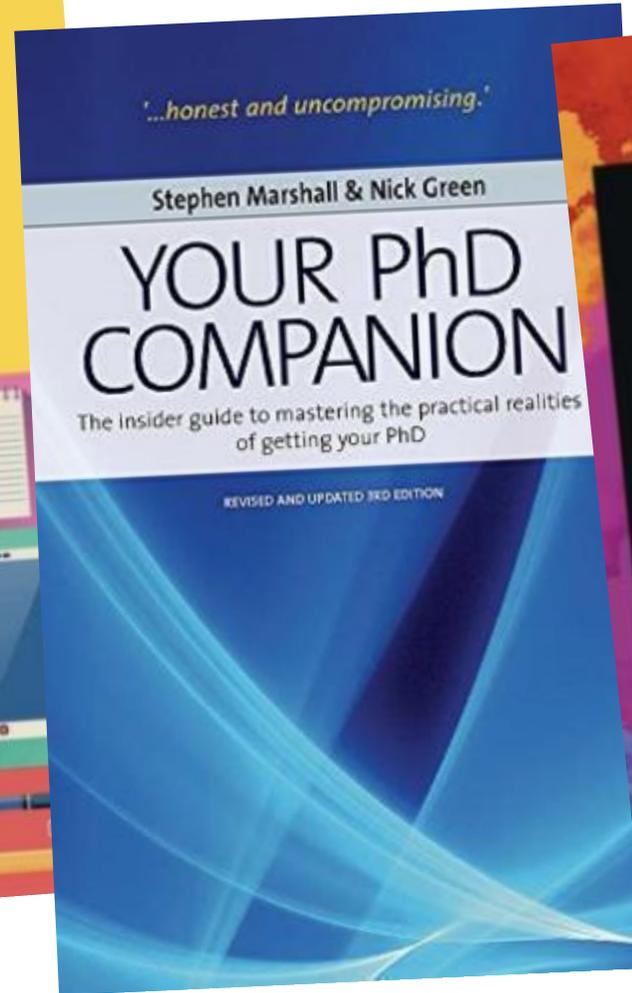
How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision

Anne Lee*

Concepts identified:

1. Functional: *How to…*
2. Enculturation: becoming a member of the disciplinary community
3. Critical thinking
4. Emancipation: students question and develop themselves
5. Developing a quality relationship: 'where the student is enthused, inspired and cared for'

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THE PHD
WRITING
HANDBOOK

DESMOND THOMAS

Patrick Dunleavy
Authoring a PhD
How to Plan, Draft, Write and Finish
a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation

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SECOND EDITION

Rowena Murray

How to Write
a Thesis

macmillan
research skills

THE PHD
VIVA
how to prepare for
your oral examination

PETER SMITH
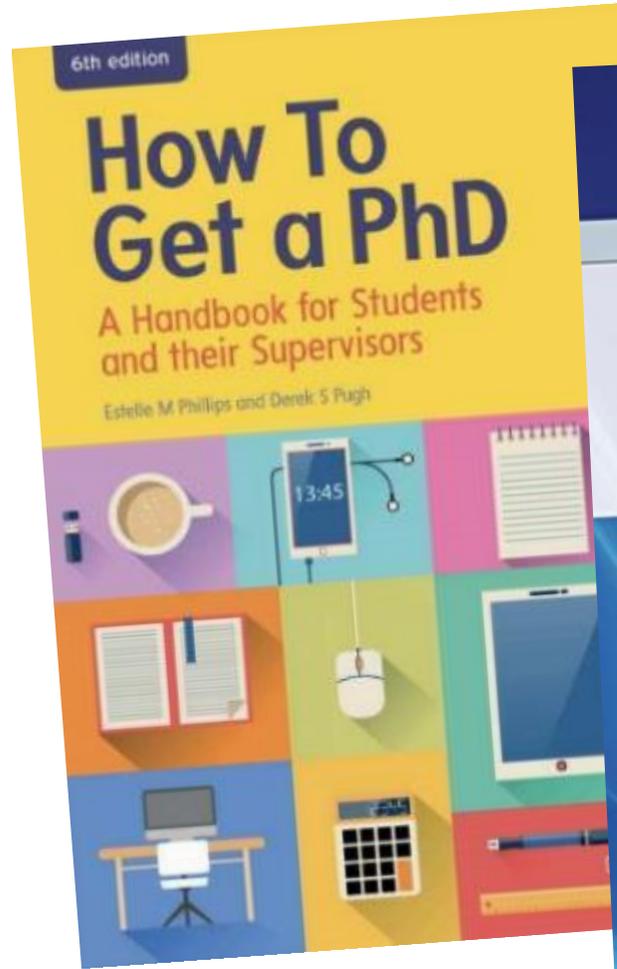
Components of a social theory of learning
(Wenger, 1998:5)

Novices and 'old hands'

Identity construction in Communities of Practice (CofPs)

'Participation in social systems [as]…
the constitutive texture of an experience of the self' (Wenger 2010:186)

Acquiring 'shared values, expertise and standards'
(Kogan 2000:210)

Becoming a Member of a Community of Practice: Postgraduate Researcher Literacy Development in a UK University

Katie Dunworth and Faisal Al Saidi

'the shared experience of both supervisor and student' (2019:48)

'feedback … as a social, situated process' (ibid:47)

Doing a PhD…

- **Culture shock**
- **Language shock**
- **Education / learning shock**
- **Role shock**

But:
Learning within a doctoral CofP may **reduce the acculturative stress of transition**

(Zhang, Grimshaw & Shi, 2021)
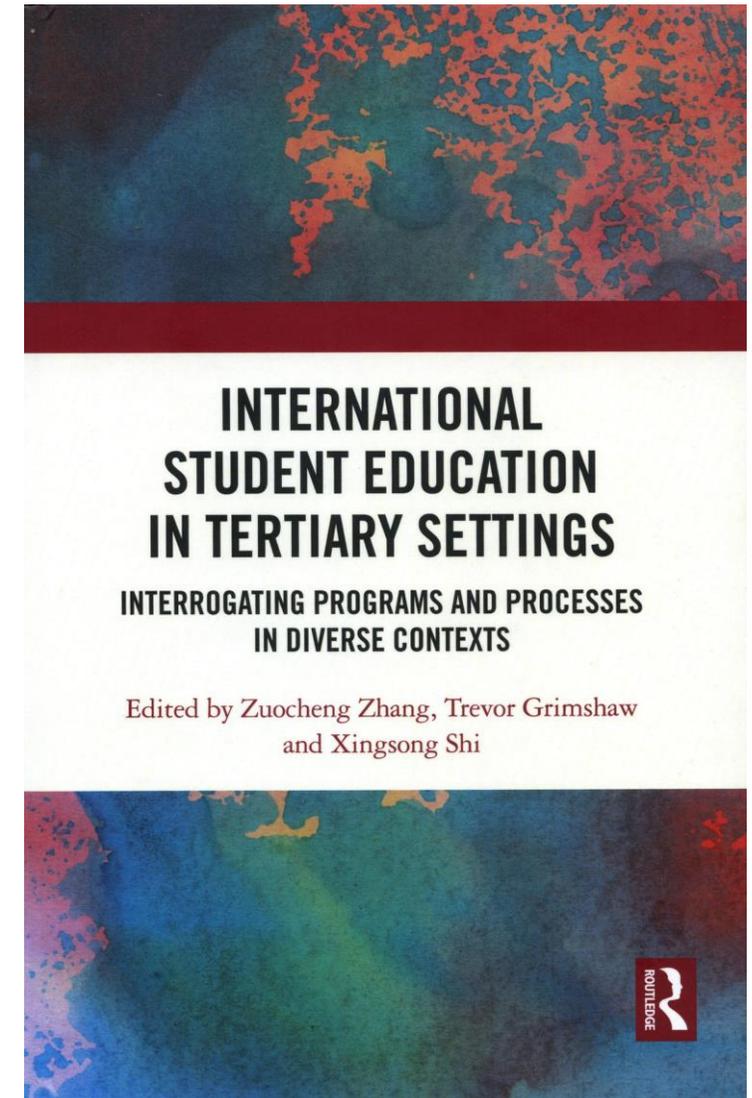
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION IN TERTIARY SETTINGS
INTERROGATING PROGRAMS AND PROCESSES IN DIVERSE CONTEXTS
Edited by Zuocheng Zhang, Trevor Grimshaw and Xingsong Shi

4th World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance WCPCG-2013

'With all my heart': Mature students' emotions while doing a research-based PhD

Ana V. Baptista [a] *

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'an intense and demanding "roller coaster"'

(see also: Ng, 2017)

An Autoethnographic Exploration of an Occupation: Doing a PhD
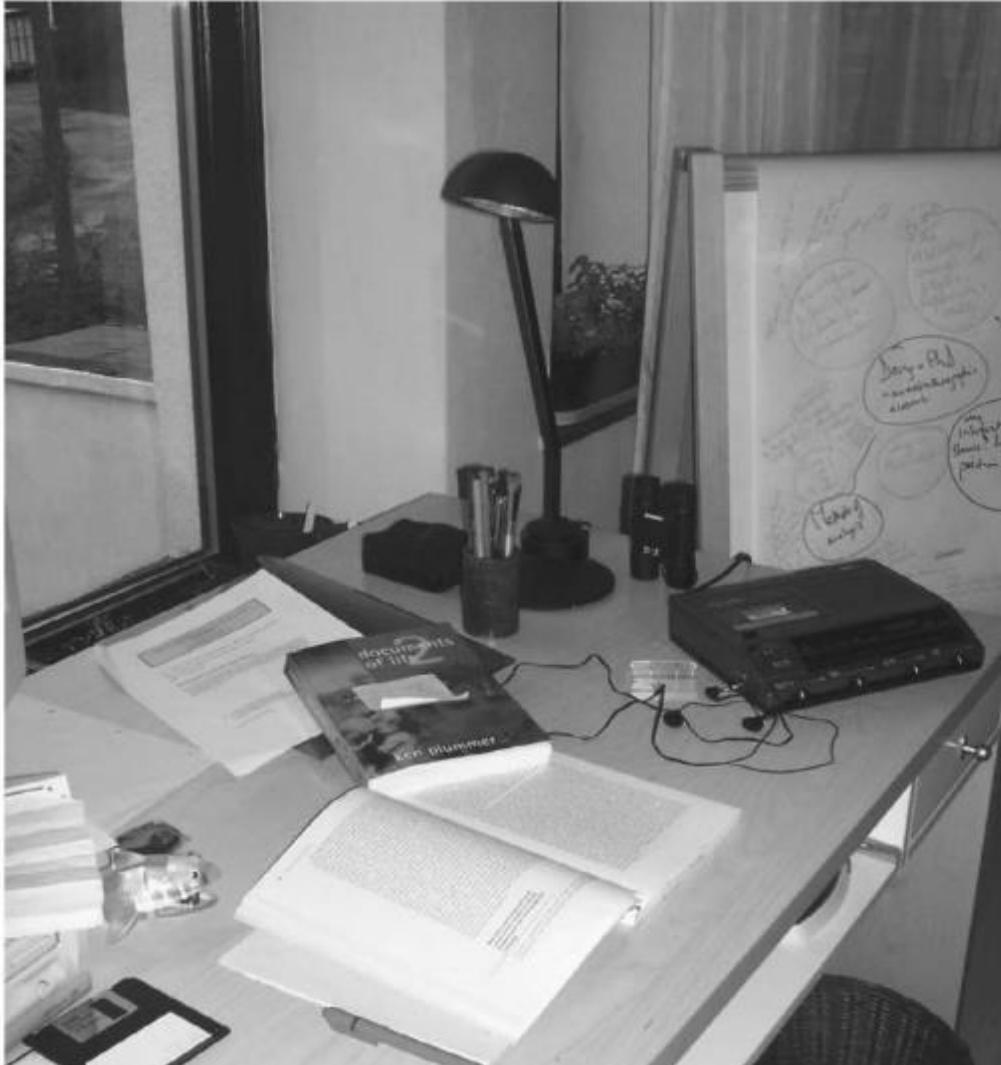
Jackie Taylor

'the occupied self'

'personal change'

'identity'

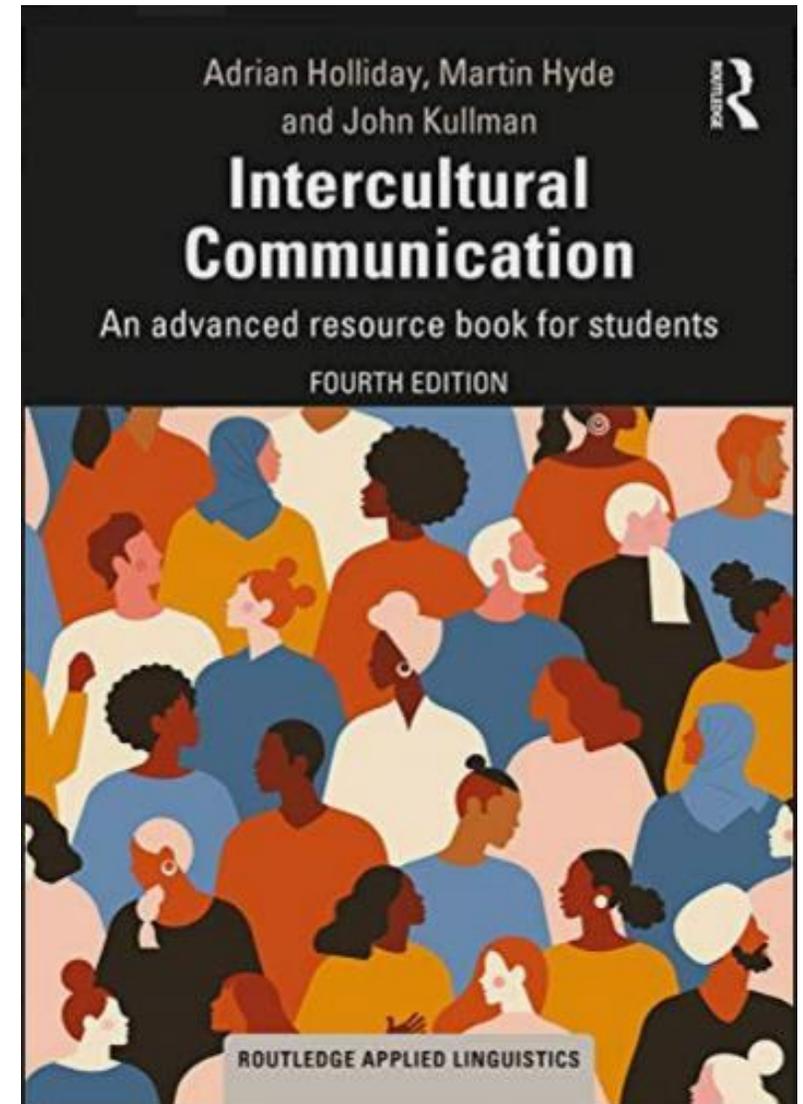Fig. 1. My desk and its array of artefacts.

1. What do these artefacts and reflections reveal about my engagement with this occupation?
2. What is the lived experience of postgraduate study? How do time, space and society have an impact on the occupied self?
3. What meaning does this occupation have within my life story? Does this occupation have an impact on my identity? Am I experiencing change?

(ibid:179)

Themes in intercultural communication can inform the process of doing a PhD

Identity

Othering

Representation

Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde and John Kullman
Intercultural Communication
An advanced resource book for students
FOURTH EDITION
ROUTLEDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS
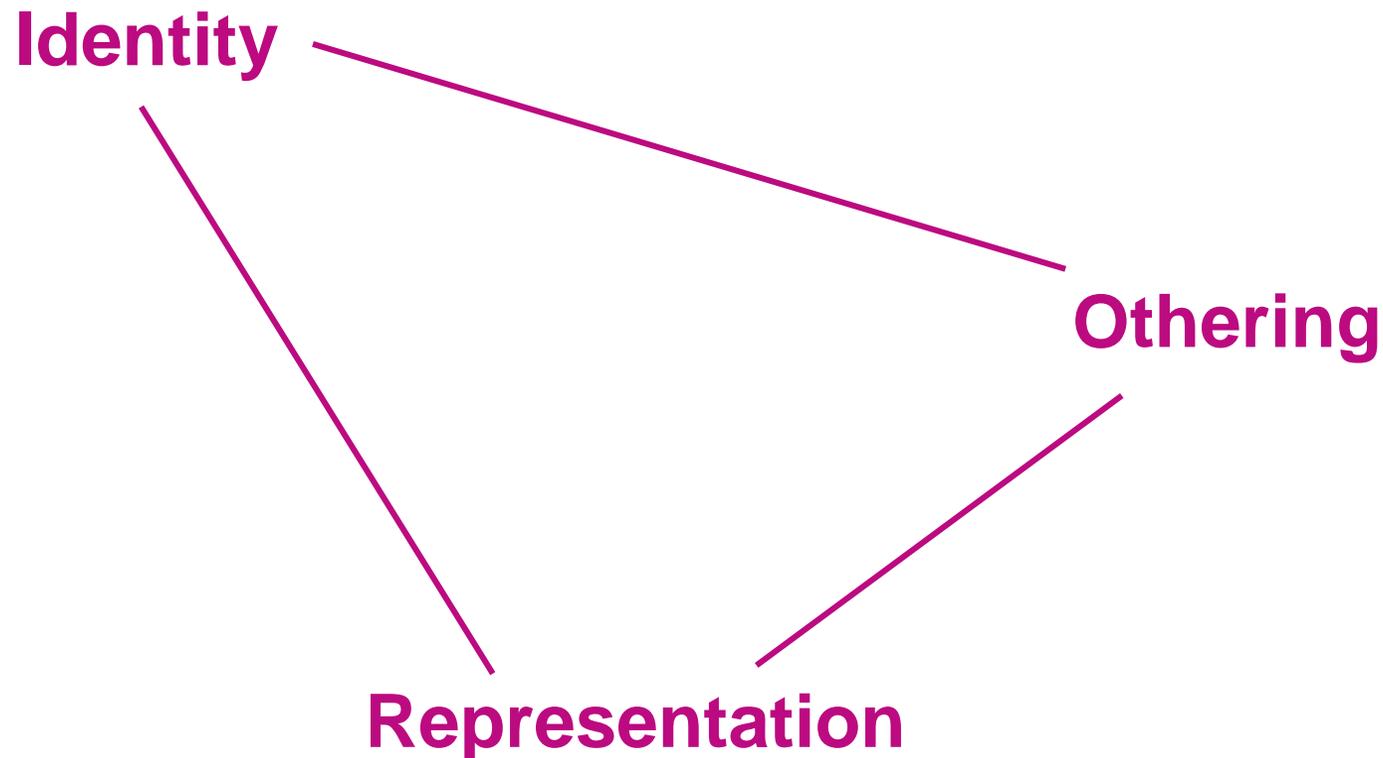
Disciplines for intercultural communication
(Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2021:59)

14. Be aware that what happens between yourself and others is influenced very much by the (environment) within which you are communicating and (your own pre-)(occupations.)

Viz. face, peer rivalry, family expectations, cultural stereotypes, etc.

The Viva

most students are given little or no information about what to expect in the oral examination. Since nobody talks about it formally, much of what they believe happens is told to them not by their supervisors but by other research students.

(Phillips & Pugh, 2015:189)

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They see it as a battle and most are terrified.

How to Prepare for a Viva on Zoom

'The PhD viva is **shrouded in mystery**.'

'What happens in the little room between candidates and examiners can be **exaggerated and turned into academic urban legends**.'

(Lantsoght, online)

**'The horse's mouth'
= direct personal
knowledge**

**Beware of the
'horse's mouth' fallacy**

**'8. While respecting whatever
people say … take what they say as
evidence of what they wish to
project rather than as [factual]
information'**

(Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2021:59)

> triangulation, corroboration

The Supervisory Relationship

'Maintaining a helpful "psychological contract"'
(Phillips & Pugh, 2015:182)

'Teaching the craft of research' (ibid:173)

The supervisor as 'mentor-teacher'

Marshall and Green (2010) include these sections:

- 'Expectations: you and your supervisor'
- 'Supervisors: the good, the bad and the ugly'
- 'Supervisors: when things go wrong'

3.

10 Lessons in communication learnt from doctoral supervision & examining

1) Supervisee – supervisor communications:

- **Communicate regularly**

- **Develop trust: be truthful and frank with one another**

- **Don't hide problems: avoid giving your supervisor unpleasant surprises**

2) Supervisors (esp.) should develop and manage:

- **Resources: e.g. sample… abstracts, viva questions, thesis correction tables**

- **Records: e.g. summaries of supervision sessions**

- **Systematic procedures (communicative routines)**

3) Reader orientation -
Most of the reports in my 'corpus' highlight the need for:

- **Further / clearer explanations**

- **More support / evidence / detail**

- **More signposting**

Esp. in Research Questions (RQs)

- **Clear syntax**

- **Consistent terminology (e.g. 'beliefs', 'perceptions', 'attitudes')**

- **Avoid multiple elements ('…and…and…') (= ambiguity)**

- **Number the RQs and sub-elements: RQ1, RQ2a, etc.**

- **Prioritise the RQs**

- **Logical relations between RQs**

- ***And…* remember to address your RQs explicitly near the end of the thesis!**
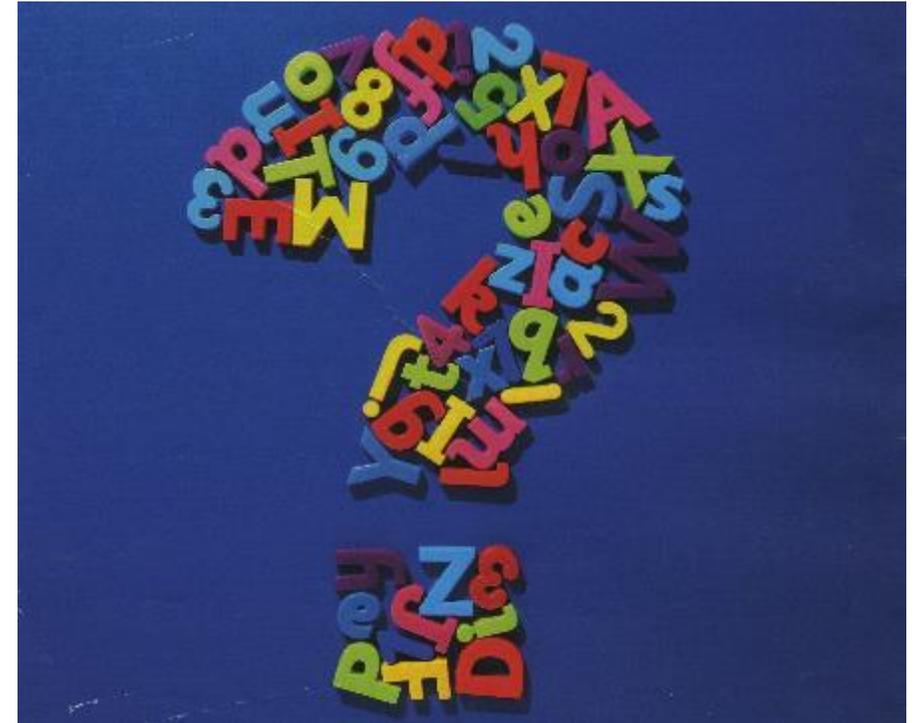
4) Coherence:
consistency; 'following through'

Description (in conceptual framework, research design)

vs.

Performance (in data analysis, discussion of findings)

e.g. Interpretive vs. normative paradigms

5) Reflexivity: conversing with yourself
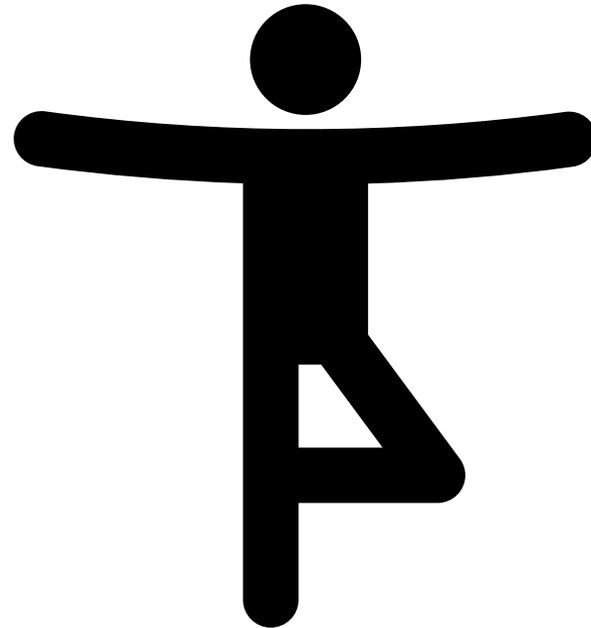
Critical self-reflection

Management of bias

Incl.:
- **Representation**
- **Othering**

of participants

6) Making claims about your contribution

Under-emphasising your contribution

Over-claiming ('the first study of its kind')

Balance

7) Translating findings into implications

e.g. for teacher education, curriculum development, assessment, classroom practice, etc.

Suggestion:
Reflect upon your own experience as an educator / learner

8) At the start of the viva:

An examiner's 'opening gambit' is not an invitation to give a full account of the study

9) During the viva:

It is okay to concede a point
(e.g. if you are unaware of a specific publication or a statement should be rephrased)

You will not necessarily 'fail' if you do so.

Be 'robust', but not 'dogmatic'
(Murray, 2016:247)

10) After the viva:
Engage positively with the examiners' recommendations

'This is not a negotiation.'
(Internal examiner to PhD candidate in post-viva feedback)

'I need to make a few changes.'
(PhD candidate to peers)

So, in brief:

It is useful to think of doctoral research as

a reflexive,

interactive process

of identity (re-) (co-) construction

and performance.

谢谢！

Ευχαριστώ!

Ta very much!

Gracias!

Merci!

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