

1-1-2006

## **Boundaries Around Common Ground: Strategies In Supervision Of International Doctoral Candidates**

Andrew M. Guilfoyle  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ceducom>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

EDU-COM 2006 International Conference. Engagement and Empowerment: New Opportunities for Growth in Higher Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth Western Australia, 22-24 November 2006.

This Conference Proceeding is posted at Research Online.

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ceducom/76>

## **Guilfoyle, A. Edith Cowan University, Australia. Boundaries Around Common Ground: Strategies In Supervision Of International Doctoral Candidates**

Dr Andrew M Guilfoyle  
Centre for Social Research and Centre for psychological Research  
Edith Cowan University, Australia  
Email: [a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au](mailto:a.guilfoyle@ecu.edu.au)

### **ABSTRACT**

Within critical fiscal and social gains of diversity in hosting International Doctoral (ID) Candidates, it is important to explore boundaries around the successful outcomes related to these cohorts. Interestingly, despite this significant field, little systematic research has been published on the teaching practices of supervisors in the ID context. Set with transition research, the paper identifies the central role of supervisory practices in bounding effective transition of ID candidates. Based on data from several sources including an extensive review of literature, qualitative interviews with International Doctorates (n= 26) and a series of supervisors' workshops; key strategies for establishing 'common ground' between ID candidates and supervisors are recommended. The findings will be of direct interest within host institutions particularly for professional development of new or experienced supervisors and Doctoral Candidates' for perspective on the supervisor's role.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Transition in the tertiary environment essentially refers to a process of socialisation into the university culture where rules are not explicitly stated (e.g., Ballard & Clanchy, 1997) or more generally, to students' adjustments to a new unfamiliar environment and learning context (Evans, 2000; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Research has shown that transition factors can affect all students; especially the first year is stressful, socially isolating and disappointing (McInnis et al, 2000). However for international doctoral candidates transition pressures can substantially increase (Mullins, Quintrell & Hancock, 1995) due to a combined effect of many transition variables including the stressors of higher degree study, major cultural adaptations in academic learning style as well as work, family and other lifestyle changes (Guilfoyle & Halse, 2004).

The central aim of the present paper is to suggest that effective strategies for supervising ID candidates should be linked precisely with the range of factors that are known to affect ID candidates' transition. Guilfoyle (in press) has examined the role of the supervisor in shaping ID candidates experiences by explicating transition experiences across four levels the intra-personal, inter-group and, societal. While other work has focused on academic factors interacting with ID supervising (e.g., Wu et al, 2001), the particular focus for the present paper is on how inter-personal transition factors can interact with supervising strategies. The discussion draws on the literature of transition with some illustrative evidence from the talk of ID candidates (these data are sourced from Guilfoyle, in press, including interviews with 26 PhD/Masters candidates across disciplines, from 14 countries) and, workshops with supervisors (including 27 supervisors across disciplines who were asked to report their experiences in supervising ID candidates). First however a binding context for the importance of developing effective ID supervising strategies is identified by arguing the increasingly responsible role of supervisors in the learning and diversity outcomes associated with higher education.

### **BOUNDARIES AROUND HIGHER EDUCATION: DIVERSITY AND LEARNING**

It might seem far-reaching, but it is argued below, critical nonetheless, to suggest that the ID context highlights the need for supervisors to reflect on their position within the broader economic and social agendas framing International education. There are many acclaimed, often rhetorical (Guilfoyle & Halse, 2004), benefits for taking in ID candidates. These are related to social

exchanges such as 'diversity', or directly chartable fiscal gains and broader economic interests. Such social and economic gains can be realised at the level of society, the host institution, or more particularly the faculty department or school. However these gains are not bound to the nation or University. Individual supervisors can and do benefit fiscally and socially by the experience of supervising an ID candidate. When all is working well, the candidate is the benefactor.

The economic gains of hosting ID students have been explicitly charted (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; IDP Education Australia, 2006). These gains coexist with the increasing global movements of ID students and substantial government investment (Australia's department of Education, Science and Training, 2006; Bohm, 2003). Social gains are less easy to explicate but, generally they can be as broad as promotion of understanding, good will and an enriched experience for all students (Harris & Jarret, 1990). Others claim a mixed student population provides opportunities for the student body and staff to develop cross-cultural awareness, cultural diversity, understanding and social cohesion (Beaver & Tuck, 1998). For the student too, Stier (2003) states that "International student exchange ... (is) enriching and a path to professional development and personal growth" (p. 78).

Importantly, there is a recursive loop wherein positive social exchanges between the candidate and their host nation, institution, faculty and so on, directly bear upon future economic exchanges (see Guilfoyle & Halse, 2004). Positive social exchanges are the key factor in both successful academic progress of candidates, retention of candidates and reputation of the institution/nation. For example, positive experiences with the host country increase the academic success, rates of student retention and academic progress (Evans, 2000; Gerdes, & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Latona & Brown, 2001; Tinto, 1998). Alternatively, research shows that word of mouth is a significant player in institutional choice and positive transition experiences of current IDs affects the profile of the host and national universities through international communications generally (Bohm, 2003).

What does all of this mean for supervising though? Increasingly, modern forms of governance insist on individuals being made the responsible agents of broad outcomes (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2005). Lyotard (1984) has for example discussed the issue of 'performativity' wherein agents are increasingly pressured to perform within economic imperatives. It is important therefore for supervisors to reflect on where exactly they are positioned within their nationally and institutionally defined social and fiscal gains to be had from supervising ID candidates. It might be that achievement of many of the social and economic gains from hosting ID candidates fall rather squarely on their shoulders and, are contingent largely on the inter-personal interactions that occur between the candidate and their supervisor. The supervisor can be therefore taken as the primary responsible agent for what is described (as social exchange) above! A scary thought perhaps for some and in some ways extreme, but where this is a realistic proposition (Guilfoyle in press), it is important that supervisors develop effective strategies for the supervising of higher degree candidates. Whether the supervisor likes it or not, it might be defined beyond their control, that their supervising strategies are the pivotal factor in placing narrow or broad (diverse?) boundaries on the individual, host and national diversity and learning outcomes associated with ID candidates. While there is a range of candidate, supervisor and context factors that would prevent any singularly idealised definition of 'good supervising', below it is worth considering a number of strategies that can be generated from the work on ID transition. In bringing together transition research and supervising strategies in the space limits below, the style is brief, declarative perhaps and, to the point in its conclusions, but is not meant to be didactic. The declarations are presented as the logical extension of key transition research conclusions; however it is up to supervisors to reject, accept or reflect on any of these propositions.

## SOME SITES FOR ESTABLISHING COMMON GROUND

### Initial impressions

Transition research suggests it is important for supervisors to understand the significance of 'settling in' transition issues facing all ID candidates (Deem & Brehony, 2000; Dawson, & Conti-Bekkers, 2002; Ingleton & Cadman, 2000; Ninnes, 1999; Ostrove, 2003; Tsang, 2001; Wang, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). A strategy for supervisors therefore might be to identify how these settling-in concerns apply to each of their ID candidates. This can help position the supervisor to foreshadow and, where possible, mitigate any unnecessary barriers the candidate might experience in settling into the University, the culture and, the higher degree learning context. The suggested strategy that might be taken from the research is the need to have general one-to-one discussions about settling-in concerns. These can be linked to helping the candidate identify and better resolve any initial problems interacting with the institution. These supervisory discussions might be the first point of contact to identify, in these early days of adjustment, any additional supports that might aid their candidates.

Research has shown that it is beneficial for candidates when the supervisor plays a role in any formal inductions (Cargill, 1998). For supervisors, the concomitant first step suggested is to become aware of any formal inductions provided by the University. Knowledge of these can be transferred to ensure the candidate is aware of any induction events. Guilfoyle (in press) has identified that transition is helped when supervisors personally invite candidates or encourage attendance and, if possible, can attend with the candidate. A possible extension of this is the strategy of 'follow up'. Given the importance of inductions on transition, a good supervising strategy might be one which formally checks what the candidate 'learnt' from the event. Apart from demonstrating an interest in the transition of the candidate, this strategy also could allow the supervisor to follow up on any areas of uncertainty about the information, processes and available supports etc.

As part of a general induction in the early phases of orientation, research shows that good supervising stops to officially identify for the candidate, the rules of Doctoral study (both general rules and any institutional specific). These rules are set out by the institution, and often involve Occupational Health and Safety, Ethics, processes and milestones for candidature, Intellectual Property, Equity definitions, physical and social resources available to the candidate, and other essential sources of information on candidacy. Again the effective strategy involves a 'follow up' process. Whether the induction to these rules arrives through formal events, links to websites, or other gestures towards these, the practice of good supervising seems to be a brief at least, checking on the candidate's interpretations. The checking can include an explicit planned session to check with the candidate that they were able to access information and comprehend it – after which the supervisor is positioned to address any further questions. However for many ID supervising relationships (where for example language and cultural differences can be paramount in the early phase), it might be just as prudent for supervisor and candidate to have a 'sit down' and the supervisor can informally explain these basic rules. This strategy is direct in addressing the supervisors shared responsibility (e.g. AV-CC, 2005) in the candidate comprehending these rules. This more personal strategy can link with a broader strategy. It is efficient for supervisors to draw on their own experiences of the core elements of the rules, this avoids misinterpretations and the candidate having to waste time negotiating their interpretation or other administrative processes etc bound within the rules. The supervisors' experience can alert the candidate to an effective path through the rules and identify for them any quirks of the system. The advantage of going through the rules of Higher Degree study early, in the relatively quiet time, is that this discussion can form the basis of reminding the candidate of the rules at relevant times in candidature

Though research shows the importance of formal inductions, other research claims it is important not to rely on the formal inductions as the only source of induction. Guilfoyle (in press) identified that transition is aided when the supervisor is 'hands-on' in showing the candidate around and, for some this includes providing their own specific inductions to the faculty and department/school. The strategy suggests a supervisory investment in spending time on arrival, in effect, treating the

candidate like a visiting scholar – as, essentially, in the diversity agenda of international education; this is exactly what the ID candidate is!

In fact, my supervisor on arrival took me around familiarisation, all the various places. Then we sat down. Then okay this is what is happening, I think in that area I am appreciative. The reception is warm. The attention is there. The attention so far has been good. He has helped me a lot. He took me to the library, this and that

One particular area of transition research deserves merit for its pervasive negative affect on transition. This concerns sensitivities around the perceived unfairness in distribution of basic resources (Burns et al, 1991; Sherry et al, 2004). A strategy can be extrapolated from this research too. It seems, effective supervising means being 'functional' helping candidates in their early induction phase in setting up basic resources, such as a work space, office, desk, computer...Research is clear that a candidate who is comfortable with their working space will avoid this being a disaffection in their transition. The point is not that supervisors can control this space provision; indeed for example Guilfoyle (2006) shows that many of these dissatisfactions are due to pre-arrival misinformation shaping false expectations etc. However the good supervisor is alert to the factor of work space affecting their ID candidates' adjustment to the academic pursuit.

### **An intercultural partnership**

The transition research on ID candidates finds a common ground around the need for establishing some sort of what we might term, 'intercultural partnership' describe below between the supervisor and the candidate. Essentially positive transition is linked to supervisors who are able to accurately assess any cultural expectations for this relationship. Of course the logical first point is that supervisors must assess their perspective on whether there is indeed an implicit need for an intercultural partnership, the details of which will vary from candidate to candidate.

A range of research findings on the ID supervisory relationship (Bullen & Kenway, 2003; Cargill, 1998; Felix & Lawson, 1998; Latona & Brown, 2001) suggests that a number of strategies can be put in place for aiding the development of an 'intercultural partnership'. The first step in setting a good strategy for the partnership would appear to be, to make the supervisory approach explicit. This involves supervisors outlining clearly the type of relationship preferred or the one that has in the past at least been used to good effect. Outlining this approach can include however, describing what has formed their past approach including their own cultural background, learning values and assumptions. This strategy fails if it stop there. The flipside is the supervisor asking the candidate to outline their past experiences and what they have known or prefer. From this point, the suggested idea is to 'negotiate' preferences.

Within this negotiation time, the strategy for the supervisors is to make their own assessments in order to review the validity of their supervision approach in the context of important factors the candidate brings to the table. The dimensions for these assessments include the candidate's cultural expectations, cultural contingencies and, cultural values. More precisely, the supervisor should aim to determine any critical, cultural dimensions for building respect and trust in the relationship. A first assessment however might be more simply to check the extent to which the candidate is task or relationship focused. Some candidates, based on or, regardless of, culture have higher 'relationship' needs than others. Further in application the strategy involves also cognisance that the mere act of asking candidates to outline their preferred model for supervision (or raising the above topics) can, on its own, be quite challenging – particularly within some cultural respect models (Ninnes, 1999). Whatever the mode of discussion, research concludes it should be open, honest and comfortable. Supervisors can be explicit about the asymmetrical nature of the conversation, suggesting it is a learning context for both in trying to negotiate the best approach and, that the candidate can influence strategies as much as the supervisor. Also, it is important given known cultural differences in normative bases for power in interpersonal relationships (Deem & Brehony, 2000) that tactfulness is considered in order not to offend. Depending on the cultural background of the candidate, it may be necessary within some relationships to explicitly provide the candidate license to debate. The intercultural relationship falls flat if it is unable to negotiate something mutually acceptable.



A range of research has shown that for some cultures', candidates are concerned about questioning authority (Rambruth & McCormick, 2001). The supervising strategy generally also is to make sure the discussion itself does not threaten the candidate or put them on the spot. A more subtle strategy asks the candidate to reflect on their supervisor relationship models, essentially to jot these experiences down at some time, such that they can form the basis of a discussion. Or it might be that a general discussion about the impact of cultural norms and past experiences is warranted in the first instance.

Also the formation of the partnership need not be a one off meeting! These discussions typically take place as an intensive series of early meetings, or, unravel through general and informal discussions about home context and culture too. A good strategy is to suggest to the candidate, that the relationship will evolve. The aim is for the supervisor to suggest to the candidate that ultimately, the discussions will demarcate respective roles and responsibilities and protocols clearly, establishing reasonable expectations for the partnership and will be the subject of ongoing review.

### **Evidence of a poor relationship:**

My supervisors but I don't blame them because they are very busy with their own students too. I'm not so sure whether it is the gap (?) that we have here or sometimes when we ask questions they will tell you oh well what do you think you find out for yourself. Okay my God I'm asking a question I need some kind of answer. Because sometimes being a student you feel very silly because I come from a background where I teach too but whenever my students they come to me I try to reason with them you see. What I think is that maybe what they need to be is a closer relationship. But of course I'm not so sure, people are busy, they don't have much time to spend with you. Or maybe it is the cultural difference...But now I am very alone and very vulnerable. And sometimes when I need help and I am going to the department they are not being helpful

To use the cliché, it takes two to tango. Essentially, engaging ID candidates in higher education should be a reflexive practice and developing the basis of an intercultural relationship is a time for supervisor self-reflection also. The point of the negotiation of supervisory preference is not to suggest adaptation whole scale, to one party's preference or the other. Indeed some supervisors might simply not be receptive to change and, some candidates might prefer a model which gives all power to the supervisor. Nevertheless, if we really are to traverse cultural boundaries of higher education there is a need to critically engage with cultural values and how these might impact supervision - and the best time for this is early in the transition stage of their candidates. This early phase has been identified as the opportunity to truly engage with culture and reflect on educational strategies in light of the culture of each candidate. Reflections allow decisions about how the supervisor can match their supervision with the candidates' cultural knowledge. This forms the ground for what can be argued as an ultimate reflection - identifying areas where these do not match and either seeking further cultural knowledge to extend learning or, identifying whether or by how much, the supervisor is prepared to adapt?

### **Interpersonal factors**

A subset of issues within the above defined 'intercultural partnership' strategy is those that monitor specific norms of social behaviour and, interpersonal respect and trust in the light of any divergent cultural values, which might tend to offend the candidate (or supervisor!). Overall, the strategy involves an ongoing review of any potential differences in values and behaviours with an eye on exploring misunderstandings. It is likely that within small interpersonal spaces 'diversity' can flourish but if this is true then conversely, any unnecessary breakdowns in interpersonal interaction are the barriers to candidates' positive transition and its rewards.

In particular research shows that a good strategy for supervisors is to be cognisant of any divergent customs in interpersonal interactions involving status and gender (Jones, 2003). For example, Sherry et al (2004) describe how many ID candidates suffer from negative transition related to perceived loss of status when interacting with others in the University. Supervisory behaviour patterns which might for some be considered trivial, such as answering the phone during a supervisory meeting, appearing to be too busy, not reading drafts beforehand, closing supervisor

meetings early, the lack of or too much eye contact and, generally a range of unintentional subtle cues, can – depending on the candidate, have a large and damaging impact on their self-concept. Essentially this suggests therefore a good strategy in the ID context is followed by supervisors who are able to watch carefully, or be sensitised to, not transgressing behavioural norms important to the ID candidate. The point is to be aware that such behaviours have potential to offend, and therefore to check with the candidate if there are any points for possible interpersonal misunderstandings. This allows the supervisor to act early to prevent these building into a negative pattern. A good supervisor will check with the candidate directly to determine if there is anything potentially offensive in the interactions, or, check with other members of the culture when in doubt about certain behaviours, their cultural interpretations, or norms. One specific area suggested by research is potential concerns over the candidate's perception of neglect (Guilfoyle & Halse, 2004; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Based on this, a strategy for supervisors is to clearly detail their own professional schedules to the candidate, identifying exactly how the candidate is important within these. It might, based on this discussion, be necessary to check and negotiate how much time is appropriate for supervising activities.

Good ID supervising also means self-reflecting on one's own cultural values. It might be that the potential source of a relationship breakdown is simply that the candidates' behaviours appear overly rude, expectant, dramatic, non punctual or uncommitted, through the supervisor's cultural lens. Good supervising works by stopping to clarify expectations with the candidate in this case.

### **Life issues**

Perhaps of all ID transition research the most pervasive refers to the impacts of major life changes that occur within an international study sojourn. The problem for ID supervisors relates to increased potential for substantial life changes to impact Academic progress. There are many life impacts which can become more acute for an ID candidate compared to domestic peers; including family concerns back home, or the transitions of family who have accompanied the ID candidate, unexpected problems of costs and affordability necessitating large amounts of paid work outside of study or, more simply, the professional career based motives of the ID candidate to gain work experience within the host country (Wang, 2004).

While there is an important point to be made later about how far a supervisor should go into entering the candidate's personal life – the suggested strategy is for supervisors to be sufficiently aware of these external contingencies and, how they are impacting Academic progress. There are many advantages in being able to fully understand and predict factors that are holding up the candidate's progress. The primary benefits being the chance to intervene and support the progress with these contingencies in mind. The alternative is that the candidate can struggle both emotionally and socially under the radar of the supervisor, building to a point where progress is being severely restricted.

The strategy for good ID supervising grounded by research therefore, is gaining background on the ID candidate's general history and motives for Higher Degree study abroad and, explicating the contingencies faced in this pursuit. Specifically, it is important for supervisors to discuss the ID candidates family situation and any needs for paid work or general financial constraints impinging on their study time (Mullins et al. 1995). The strategy involves supervisors not only identifying these but formally discussing with the candidate how these contingencies might enter into their progress. Like all the suggested strategies in this review, those that work the best are ongoing and require continual monitoring. One strategy is to have a series of special 'time out' discussions to check how the candidate is progressing in context of their nominated external contingencies. That is, good supervisors tend plan to mix up some formal and informal sessions in order to stop and check their candidates' life space.

The aim of these 'life discussions' is to position the supervisor in resolving any identifiable problems related to such contingencies before they loom too large and, concomitant cycles of self-doubt about completion begin. Of course such discussions need to be sensitive, empathetic and, tactful. As suggested above, relationships take time to build and discussions about personal life factors are most productive once good communication practices have been established. From

these discussions the supervisor is positioned to rely on more than intuition when things don't seem to be progressing at the rate they should be. Rather the supervisor can refer to their own systematic, organised and, explicit assessments of important external factors impacting the ID candidates' progress. A supervisor who is aware of their candidates' outside contingencies is better placed in designing plans for time management, or to re-adjust any pre-determined timelines with these contingencies in mind. The supervisor can also counsel the candidate if needs be, about the need for keeping outside impacts in perspective of their Academic goals.

Procrastinations in the ID context might not be due to personal concerns related to family or the need to find outside work etc. External contingencies can include the candidates problematic interactions with the community more broadly or specific interactions with the services provided by the University, or others on campus. Research suggests one particular area of concern, supporting the strategy of supervisors being aware of external contingencies, is that many ID candidates can find within their interactions with University services, a sense 'relative deprivation' of being deprived compared to other candidates in department or University environment generally. A supervisor who is aware of the candidate's motivations, past professional status, resource and support needs etc, is better able to pick up on signs of dissatisfaction and able to develop strategies to dispel any problems.

I spent my whole time stuck in a lab or the postgraduate room in a cubicle with others I hardly new and never really talked to, they had their own culture and clique, I didn't have any access to printing which was a real pain, and I didn't even know where I could go to make a cup of tea...in my own country I was senior person within the hospital and here I felt like the undergraduate students had better status than me..

At this point of the current review, many supervisors might put up their hands with exclaiming palms out; suggesting it is both inappropriate and just not their style to get personal with the candidate! None of the above suggests a necessarily overly personal relationship. The assessments can be made in an objective manner. A relationship that is relaxed enough to talk openly doesn't assume the relationship is too personal. Rather it suggests a quality supervising strategy that responds reflectively to transition research evidence. Nevertheless it is because of the connotations of the word 'relationship', that it is worth addressing any ideas of being too personal further.

### **How personal?**

It is important to consider the topic of how personal the relationship in the ID supervising context for at least three related reasons, a) supervisors might not desire this as part of the intercultural exchange, b) candidates might overly expect a personal relationship as part of their exchange and, c) cultural discrepancies between supervisor and candidate for perceived level of 'closeness' that is appropriate in the ID context can affect candidate transition significantly (Deem & Brehony, 2000)

Commonly, supervisors' response to the question of how close to get in a supervisory relationship is - not at all! A series of workshops conducted with supervisors on the topic of ID candidates (Guilfoyle, forthcoming) shows that most supervisors easily cite the risks of a 'too close' relationship. These include – the concern with candidates "continually unloading their personal issues and it how easily this gets out of hand". From another perspective, that supervisors are "not a trained counsellor and don't want to be". Others more generally cited their own personal and professional needs suggesting that they "can't be all and everything to every candidate". Or as one put it pragmatically, "I can be sympathetic to their isolation and confusion – but I don't really know how I can help?"

However there is no requirement to get overly personal or overly social, to appreciate outside contingencies. Quality supervising involves knowing the external contingencies facing the candidate in the context of treating the candidate as a 'professional peer'. It involves being aware of their external contingencies, their cultural or other past experiences shaping expectations of the nature of the relationship and, appreciating the 'host' status of the supervisor, the 'visitor' status of the candidate, and planning a working relationship within these. The strategies suggest supervisors



become aware of the ID context by setting well reflected boundaries about how much extra-curricular support they can give, how much they will own the candidates problems and, how far they are prepared or can go, practically, personally, professionally in taking an interest in these problems. The next step is communicating these boundaries to the candidate. This is the bottom line of the present review. It means simply setting clear, mutually agreed boundaries re supervision – heedful of the transition factors faced by the ID candidate. Indeed there is no suggestion that any supervisor must shift their boundaries, though research suggests some shifts seriously aid transition, rather the overall strategy is about having explicit discussion with the candidate about what the relevant boundaries are, can or should be.

We can take one example of a supervising activity which combines knowing the candidate well, while being professional, rather than personal. In setting up supervisory meetings, some supervisors prefer set times being allocated whereby, within this, the supervisor and candidate can negotiate the frequency of meetings. For others an 'open door' policy is fine.

### **Open door policy**

Firstly my principle supervisor is right across the hall from the PG room. Whenever I have any problems regarding anything I just knock at his door and say excuse me I'm in trouble here. And another good thing about my supervisor is not its only academic issues I'm able to discuss with my supervisor. Social issues as well. If I want just want to talk I am able to go there and talk. They assist me. I appreciate that ...

The suggestion is not that the open door suits all. The strategy in the ID context is to make sure in the arrangements there is an appropriate balance, negotiated between the supervisor and the candidate for both formal and informal chats (if the latter are required). This might mean making sure there is a place for some informal, not always business like, chats within the formal meetings. Or, the supervisor being available for informal discussions, while aiming to strike the right balance between these and formally documented meetings. A good strategy within the latter is therefore to keep a record of formal meetings and keep an eye on the nature and content of any informal meetings.

The extended supervisory strategy is to have a set of strategies for recognising if any personal discussion has potential to go too far. The strategy might specifically recognise if a candidate is apt to taking advantage of sympathetic hearings, with the discussion losing any functional purpose in resolving issues as they relate to Academic progress. Good supervising doesn't perpetuate any unhealthy culture of dependence – this is against the chartered responsibility of building a successfully independent Academic (AV-CC, 2005). Further, strategies are required to handle complicated situations, particularly those which involve complaints about other staff or the University processes or system (Sherry et al, 2004). The general strategy for good supervising is to have at the fingertips (not shelved away in the recesses) the range of professional support services available within the University. The strategy is to be prepared to refer candidates to these if there is a perceived need (and to refer earlier than later). Above I have argued this perceptive ability will be enhanced by the presence of a good intercultural partnership. A good supervisor knows the University codes of practice, including those involving Equity Equal Opportunity etc and the variable channels of complaint, in order to advise candidates appropriately if need be.

Some supervisors prefer to delay any 'close and friendly' relationship until later in candidature when they can sight the independent and professional work of the candidate. For others it is vice versa. In this case a close relationship in the beginning foregrounds developing an independent and professional candidate in an ongoing way - perhaps becoming more distant as work gets on its way and the candidate develops their own academic identity. Whatever the strategy a supervisor can be detached – but the extrapolation from research suggests, this should never equate to appearing rude, disrespectful, or offensive.

Our supervisor is very dominant. I work as a teacher there 23 years. I was in the high position level 7 out of 11...he got to change, he put this, put this. Is not the same as how we have in talk at home, because he is very dominant, and I'm like I'm confused. The supervisor told me shut-up. So

that is what happens...it is very hard to deal with. Very rude to you, it is extremely rude...as a teacher if you are the spirit of teacher you should not do like that. It is very bad. My experience of 23 years I have never told a student to shut-up. So that is what I understand as the problem the personality that is a barrier, so hard to deal with.

Finally a good strategy is to be aware that there are many strategies which are useful for helping the candidates' 'personal' development which don't require the supervisor getting too personal. One of these is the supervisor introducing the candidate to their own, or other broader peer networks.

### **Peer supports**

A wide range of research has identified the benefit on positive transition from peer supports in the ID context (Choi, 1997; Latona & Brown, 2001; Thomas, 2000; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). As a supervisor the key is to know of the candidates needs for and, be positioned to point towards relevant specific peer support opportunities. Or it might be that the supervisor at least communicates the value of these peer supports to the candidate to encourage participation in extra-curricular activities. For many supervisors this can occur simply by suggesting to the candidate the value of maintaining good interactions with friends and others who can offer help and support. For the ID candidate in particular any specific cultural-support networks can be nominated. Of course this is contingent on supervisors knowing what sorts of cultural programs occur within the University/community.

A range of studies has shown the value of community engagement (Abramovitch et al, 2000; Tsang, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ying & Liese, 1994). A good strategy is to check what community supports and links the University offers through International Student Offices etc. Many ID candidates seek professional links outside the University as an essential part of their sojourn (Wang, 2004). There is thus a case for good supervisors to be prepared for nominating useful professional and industry links and opportunities such that their ID candidates can engage these to maintain a sense of professional development.

Many ID candidates desire engagement in professional networks, not for mere socialising per se and, but to connect to these productive learning environments (Guilfoyle, in press). It is important also to know possibilities for professional/peer networks within school, faculty and University and suggest these. Supervisors should consider the full range of possible peer networks – including senior staff, other interested candidates, and other Doctoral students outside of the immediate department / school. As Tinto (2000) suggests, supervisors should introduce IDs to their own 'communities of practice'. Essentially this can involve a broader assessment of the 'research culture' within the school and introducing ID candidates into this (assuming it exists and doesn't need to be created!). Good supervising involves inviting ID candidates to relevant forums, identifying advertising channels for peer networking, accompanying candidates to some key sessions and, encouraging the candidates to have their say in these forums. It also involves follow up checks to determine if the interactions within sessions were positive and generally ask what the candidate gained from the interaction.

### **Is there enough space for common ground?**

An initial strategy in undertaking supervising of ID candidates is a thorough assessment of whether the sort of common ground needed to produce a productive working relationship, can be found. This includes supervisors undertaking a solid review of personal motives, skills and abilities and, cultural interests, current time, teaching load and other contingencies impacting the supervising space. Essentially this can mean a thorough review by the supervisor of motives and decisions for accepting/rejecting ID candidates. The reflective questions for the supervisor surround decisions based on career motives, personal interest, does the ID candidate fit nicely into their research agenda, or is the decision based purely on a voluntary or alternatively, somewhat pressured duty within the faculty?

It could be argued that because of the demands on supervising in an ID context, supervisors should not add to the complexity of their task by taking-on candidates whose thesis topic strays

from their familiar content area or technical expertise. Generally, limited content expertise and ID supervising is a bad combination. Also, in similar vein, the ID context is not one where inexperienced supervisors should go it alone and, a co-supervising relationship is a good idea for the inexperienced supervisor. Experienced supervisors though might more wisely agree 'never again' if consistently their pattern of experiences supervising ID have not been positive. Thus if and where possible, a good supervising includes a careful review of the supervisors own position and, executing a right to veto acceptance of the ID candidate where the pressures to perform are outweighed by capacity to perform. It is a fine motive to take on an ID candidate for 'cultural interest', 'challenge', in the name of 'diversity' etc, but when research shows when supervising of ID is done poorly, it doesn't achieve any of these outcomes nor, do justice at the individual, host or national levels. Thus a capacity to supervise an ID candidate should be carefully assessed at all levels, bearing in mind a bottom-line that the supervisor is a primary responsible agent in the social exchanges available to the ID candidate.

## CONCLUSIONS

The discussion above, focused on some interpersonal aspects of strategies for supervising ID candidates, might for some appear overwhelming (though it is not intended as didactic). However in conclusion, between the lines, most of the strategies above do not actually require great amounts of effort. Notwithstanding the need for supervisors to properly assess their position and aptitude as it were, in taking on an ID candidate, once engaged in the activity of ID supervising; many of the strategies cited throughout the paper argue for simple responsibilities. It is not much to ask "how was the induction session, was it useful for you?" yet we know from transition research that this simple question can demonstrate a highly caring, supportive, interested supervising agent and, can make all the difference to a candidate who is feeling isolated, culturally removed, pressured by their external contingencies, confused or unsure about their next steps in their candidacy. The argument has been that the supply of such comments or any of the other ID supervising strategies suggested above can if supported, be best placed when the supervisor is aware of any significant transition concerns the ID candidate faces.

Good supervising can help bridge transition boundaries – especially when supervisors are aware of the potential significant negatives surrounding unchecked transition. Supervisors who can develop supervising strategies to fit with their candidates' transition variables will maximize the learning and diversity outcomes achievable for themselves and their candidates (and any substantial flow on effects cited with these). On the other hand, negative transition places significant boundaries on the aims of ID higher education. Supervisors who are unable to engage with transition factors known to affect their ID candidates are those less likely to help their candidates to bridge significant transitional flows.

## REFERENCES

- Abramovitch, H., Schreier, A., & Koren, N. (2000). American medical students in Israel: Stress and coping – a follow-up study. *Medical Education*, 34, 890-896.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006). Australian Social Trends. Education – Participation in Higher Education: Overseas Students. 01.10.06, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs%40.ns>
- Australian department of Education, Science & Training. (2006). International Higher Education Students – Statistics. Accessed 01.10.06, at, [www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/publications\\_resources/statistics/documents/students2005\\_pdf.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/statistics/documents/students2005_pdf.htm)
- AV-CC (Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee) (2005). Universities and their students. Principles for the provision of education by Australian universities. Accessed 01.10.06, at, [http://www.avcc.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/statements/Principles\\_final\\_Aug2005.pdf](http://www.avcc.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/statements/Principles_final_Aug2005.pdf)

- Ballard, B., & Clanchy, J. (1997). Teaching international students: A brief guide for lecturers and supervisors. Deakin, ACT: IDP Education Australia.
- Beaver, B., & Tuck, B. (1998). The adjustment of overseas students at a tertiary institution in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 33 (2), 167-179.
- Bohm, A. (2003). Global student mobility 2025: Insights into future global mobility. Paper presented at the 17th Australian International Education Conference, 21-24 October, Sydney.
- Bullen, E., & Kenway, J. (2003). Real or imagined? Staff representations of international women postgraduate students. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 24 (1), 35-50.
- Burns, R. B. (1991). Study and stress among first year overseas students in an Australian university. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 10 (1), 61-77.
- Cargill, E. (1998). Cross-cultural postgraduate supervision meetings as intercultural communication. *Proceedings of the 1998 Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference*.
- Choi, M. (1997). Korean students in Australian universities: Intercultural issues. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 16 (3), 263-282.
- Dawson, J. D., & Conti-Bekkers, G. (2002). Supporting international students' transitional adjustment strategies. *Teaching and Learning Forum 2002: Focusing on the Student*.
- Deem, R., & Brehony, K. J. (2000). Doctoral students' access to research cultures – are some more equal than others? *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(2), 149-165.
- Evans, M. (2000). Planning for the transition to tertiary study: A literature review. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9 (1), 1-13.
- Felix, U., & Lawson, M. (1994). Evaluation of an integrated bridging course on academic writing for overseas postgraduate students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 13 (1), 59-71.
- Gerdes, H., & Mallinckrodt, B. (1994). Emotional, social, and academic adjustment of college students: A longitudinal study of retention. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 72(3), 281-289.
- Guilfoyle, A. & Halse, A. (2004). Exploring the spaces in-between institutional services provided and international postgraduate student experiences, *Proceedings of the 18th Australian International Education Conference*.
- Guilfoyle, A. (2006). International postgraduate transition via expectations: Interactions with quality, outcomes and diversity in the devolved system. *Proceedings of 2006 Australian Universities Quality Forum*.
- Guilfoyle, A. (in press). Understanding key dimensions of international postgraduate candidate transition and learning experiences. *The International Journal of Learning*
- Halpin, D., & Guilfoyle, A. (2005). The attribution of self amongst Australian family farm operators: Personal responsibility and control. *The Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 36(3). 475-487.
- Harris, G. T., & Jarret, F. G. (1990). Educating overseas students in Australia. Who benefits? Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd.
- IDP (2006). Higher Education: International Students in Australian Universities Survey. IDP Education Australia. 01.10.06 <http://www.idp.com/research/fastfacts/article406.asp>

- Ingleton, C., & Cadman, K. (2002). Silent issues for international postgraduate research students: emotion and agency in academic success. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 93-113.
- Jones, S. (2003). Complex subjectivities: class, ethnicity, and race in women's narratives of upward mobility. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59 (4), 803-821.
- Latona, K., & Browne, M. (2001). Factors associated with completion of research higher degrees. Sydney: department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Lyotard, J-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McInnis, C., Hartley, R., Polesel, J., & Teese, R. (2000). Non-completion in vocational education and training and higher education (Tech. Rep. No. 4/00). Melbourne, Victoria: University of Melbourne, Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
- Mullins, G., Quintrell, N., & Hancock, L. (1995). The experiences of international and local students at three Australian universities. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 14 (2), 201-231.
- Ninnes, P. (1999). Acculturation of international students in higher education: Australia. *Education and Society*, 17(1), 73-101.
- Ostrove, J. (2003). Belonging and wanting: Meanings of social class background for women's constructions of their college experience. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59 (4), 771-785.
- Pokarier, C., & Ridings, S. (1998). Slow learners: Australian universities in the international market. *Policy*, 14, 9-14.
- Rambruth, P., & McCormick, J. (2001). Learning diversity in higher education: A comparative study of Asian international and Australian students. *Higher Education*, 42, 333-350.
- Ryan, M. E. & Twibell, R. S. (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational outcomes of college students who studied abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 409-435.
- Sherry, C., Bhat, R., Beaver, B., & Ling, A. (2004). Students' as customers: The expectations and perceptions of local and international students. *Proceedings of HERDSA 2004*.
- Stier, J. (2003). Internationalisation, ethnic diversity, and the acquisition of intercultural competencies. *Intercultural Education*, Vol 14(1), 77-92.
- Thomas, S. (2000). The ties that bind. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 591-615.
- Tanaka, G. (2003). *The intercultural campus: Transcending culture and power in American higher education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Tinto, V. (2000). Learning better together. The impact of learning communities on student success in higher education. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9 (1), 48-53.
- Tsang, E. W. K. (2001). Adjustment of mainland Chinese academics and students to Singapore. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 347-372.
- Wang, Y. (2004). Pursuing cross-cultural graduate education: A multifaceted investigation. *International Education*, 33(2), 52-72.
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23 (4), 659-677.



Wu, S., Griffiths, F., Wisker, G., Waller, S., & Illes, K. (2001). Learning experience of postgraduate students: matching methods to aims. *Innovations in education and teaching international*, Vol 38(3), 292-308.

Ying, Y. L. & Liese, L. H. (1994). Initial adjustment of Taiwanese students in then United States : The impact of post arrival variables. *The Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol 25, 466-477.