NINE DTP Autumn Induction Conference
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Research Confidence and Academic Identity

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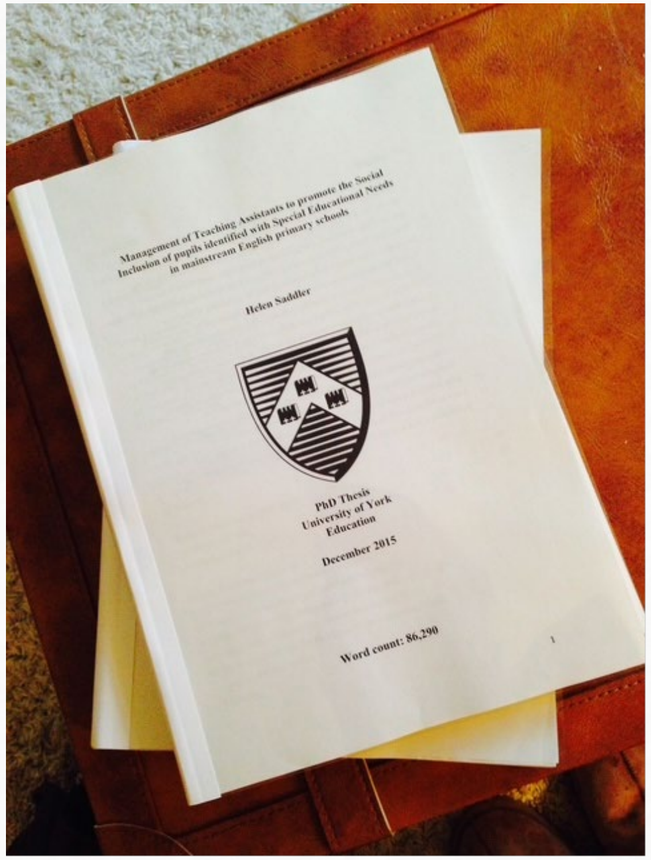
Focus of this session

- Consider ways for you to build confidence as emerging researchers
- Understand academic integrity as a foundation for credible scholarship
- Support you with strengthening your critical thinking skills at doctoral level and beyond
- We will do this by encouraging you to:
  - Consider what is meant by the term ‘criticality’ in academic work
  - Explore your own ‘thinking about thinking’
  - Consider how you might engage in ‘transformative learning’ through the course of your doctoral studies

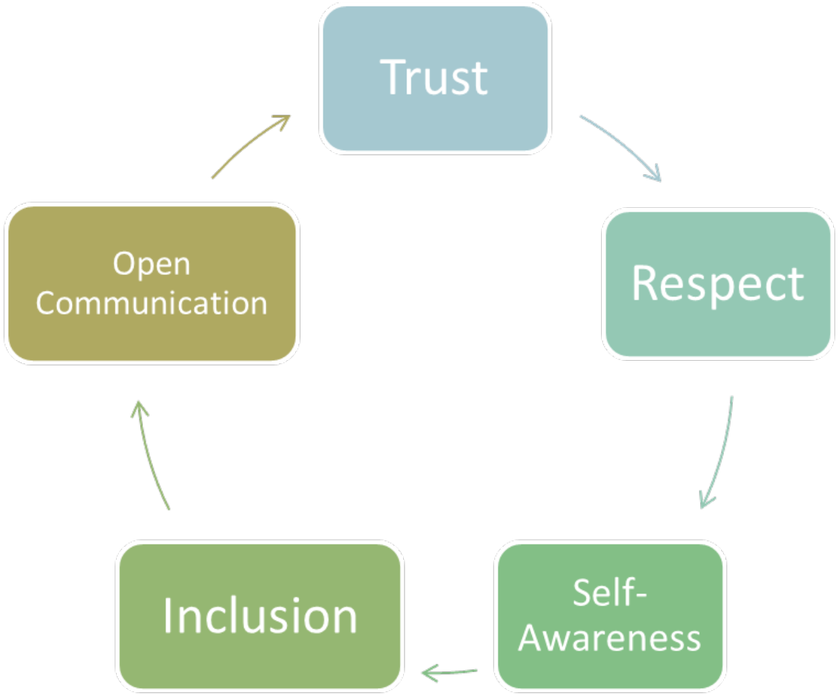
Introduction

- A little bit about my doctoral journey
  - What worked?
  - What could have been better?



The foundations of academic integrity

MindTools identified 5 key characteristics for good academic relations



Common threats to your self - efficacy

"Broad belief in one's ability to cope in a range of demanding situations" (Dore & Richards, 2020).

Responsibilities outside of studying

Confidence

Family pressures

'Imposter syndrome'

Work pressures

Skills/Training needs

Motivation

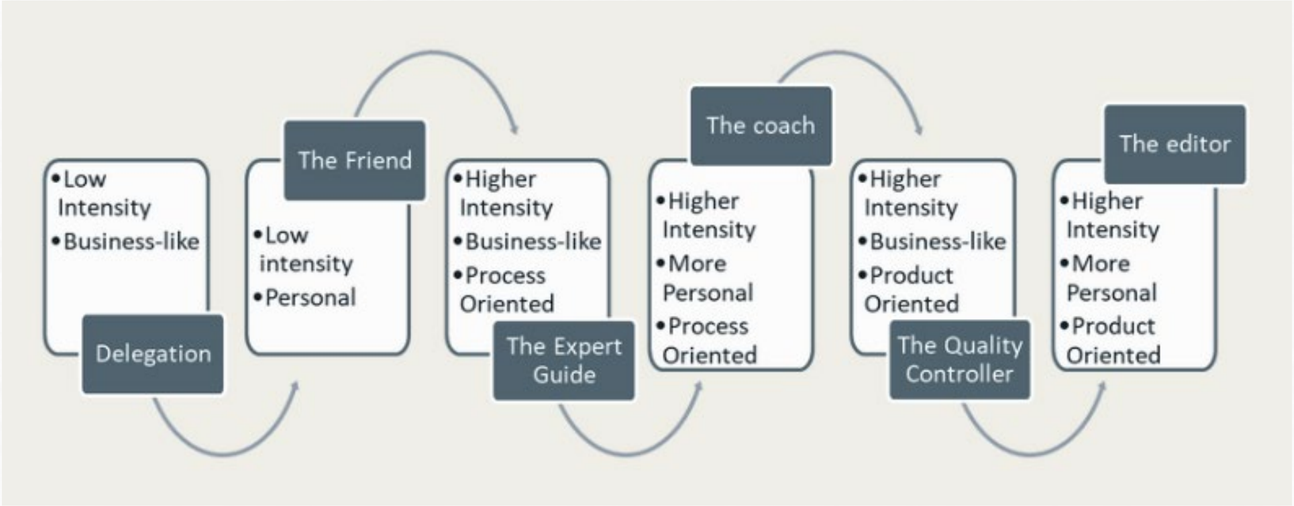
Any others you can think of?

How might you build your confidence as a researcher?

- Make use of your university's wider support services:
  - Library services (one to one study support/buddy systems)
  - Institutional Training & Development offer
  - Student Journey support (wellbeing/disability services/student union)
- Build a community with other PGR students
- Find a work space that suits you and allows for focused work as well as collaborative working
- Engage with a range of academic contexts e.g. conferences, book launches, online workshops

Support via supervision

According to a study by Ahmed A. Et al, “Effective PhD Supervision”; (Ahmed et al., 2010) there are classified six categories of supervisory approach:



The importance of critical reflection

- All level 8 students are required to demonstrate consistent criticality in both the way that they approach their research and their personal development.

The creation and interpretation of **new knowledge**, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication

The general ability to conceptualise, **design and implement a project** for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the **forefront of the discipline**, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems

A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the **forefront of an academic discipline** or area of professional practice

A detailed understanding of applicable **techniques for research** and advanced academic enquiry

Higher education focus on criticality

‘Critically analyse….’

‘Applying a critical lens..’.

‘Provide a critical discussion of….’

‘Critically compare…’

‘Criticise the following statement…’

Beginning at the beginning: Critical thinking

- *"Reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do"* (Ennis, 1987, p.10).
- *"Thinking about your thinking while you're thinking to make your thinking better"* (Paul, Willsen & Binker, 1993, p. 91).
- "*Purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference as well as explanation of the evidential conceptual, methodological, criteriological or contextual considerations upon which that judgment was based"* (Facione, 1990, np).
- "*Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them '* (Paul & Elder, 2004, p.1).

Defining ‘Criticality’

‘Criticality’ is a multi - faceted term, involving a range of inter - related concepts; these link across thinking, reading, writing, research and practice

- Objective consideration of others’ work
- Avoiding taking arguments at ‘face value’
- The term is contextual; it will be viewed differently by people with different life experiences and different epistemologies

Why is criticality important?

It can help you to:

- Identify and understand multiple perspectives of authors & researchers
- Make new connections between your ideas, experiences, thoughts and readings
- Be open minded and consider alternative approaches to your topic of interest
- Gain meaning from an educational experience you've had
- Highlight gaps or flaws in your current subject knowledge
- Identify areas in which you can specialise
- Build an authentic identity as a researcher/academic

Thinking vs critical thinking: how do you learn?

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) argued that instead of thinking about what something means in isolation, we need to instead look at the situations in which it is being used.

- The environments that we create or participate in as researchers and students are likely to have a significant impact upon the types of teaching and learning experiences that take place
- The way in which we present ourselves as researchers will also influence the nature of the research-related processes that others participate in
- A key question for you to consider is:

What supported you to learn effectively in your education to date? Was there anything that you think hindered your progress in learning?

- The above is the key to you being able to construct an environment that is conducive to you in conducting effective research

Applying our ‘thinking disposition’

Mezirow (1997)

introduced what he called ‘**frames of reference**’ in our thinking, which are defined as our core believes and values. They inform and shape our actions and thoughts. Mezirow argued that these need to be ‘disrupted’ or challenged in order to change our habits around thinking. It is only if we can challenge these core beliefs and values will we be able to open our minds to accept new possibilities and engage in a ‘**transformative learning**’ process.

Activity: Thinking about thinking

Spend 5 minutes reflecting upon your experiences in education to this point, this may be as a student and/or an educator. Consider some of the topics/issues you have explored and the work you have completed. Then consider some of the following questions:

1. Can you identify ways in which you have approached your educational experiences with a critical lens?
2. If so, did this come naturally, or was it challenging?
3. Were there some topics that you found easier to critique over others? If so, why do you think that was?
4. Have you identified any key components of your approach to criticality in your reflections?
5. Try to make a list of the processes you went through in your critical approach to thinking about an issue/topic

Discuss with the person next to you and we will then discuss as a group

Any Questions?