THE WORKING TEN POINT PLAN

A WORKING TEN POINT PLAN TO GUIDE HDR STUDENTS AT UNISA TO CRAFT THEIR POST GRADUATE PROPOSAL FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN ADULT EDUCATION AND RELATED FORMS OF HUMAN SERVICE PRACTICE

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The following is an attempt to marry a pedagogical sequence developed over some years with post graduate research students in a wide range of adult learning and education, with the four major headings of the UNISA post graduate research proposal guidelines. The first section (Section A) is cut and pasted on the UNISA research proposal guidelines. The following section (Section B) then explores a sequence that students can follow to generate the material needed under the four headings of the University's research proposal guidelines.

SECTION A UNISA RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES (RPG 1,2,3,4)

The following guidelines for the preparation of research proposals are cut and pasted from the UNISA website. These guidelines are referred to here by their paragraph numbers (RPG 1,2,3,4) The 10 point plan below has been developed to assist students create their Research Proposal under the four main headings suggested in the UNISA guidelines.

UNISA: Guidelines for the preparation of research proposals

Before the expiration of six months full-time study, the candidate must develop, and subsequently maintain, a comprehensive Research Proposal. A Research Proposal is designed to provide a structure and time frame for a candidate's research program and can be used to assess the candidate's progress at times of review. The proposal should contain the following sections, and should normally be between 10 to 20 pages in total length. The Research Proposal should indicate how the candidate intends, in performing the research project, to elaborate the Research Degree Graduate Qualities. Obtain information on the qualities.

1. Statement of the Research Topic & Rationale for the Research (RPG 1)

This section should typically include the following details:

a) Introduction in which the candidate states the nature of the topic, why it is considered important and how the research will contribute to its solution. This section should also include a proposed thesis title, and the ratio of written to artefact components, where relevant. The proposed artefact(s) should be of a nature agreed with the Supervisor and Research Degrees Coordinator.

b) Review of relevant research and theory, an integrated statement that affords some explanation of why the literature and artefacts cited are important to the research the candidate proposes to undertake;

c) The Research Topic (or Hypothesis). (The research topic should be clearly stated and provide clear indication of the focus of the research project);

d) Subsidiary Issues, which like the research topic may be stated in hypothesis form (where relevant).

2. Research Methodology (RPG 2)

This section should typically include the following details:

a) A description of the theoretical or conceptual framework to be employed;

b) Details of analytical techniques and research design to be used to undertake the research project;

c) Timetable or Project Plan for undertaking the research and completing the thesis, including gaining ethics approval and timelines for writing up the thesis.

3. Trial Table of Contents (RPG 3)

This section should normally comprise 1 or 2 pages and has the advantages of indicating to the reader the dimensions of the topic, and providing the candidate with a provisional organisational framework.

4. Brief Bibliography (RPG 4)

The chief advantages are that it enables the Supervisor to form an opinion of the quality of the sources available and to suggest any useful references which may have been overlooked. Work on a preliminary bibliography, which may include an artefact review, provides the foundation for the more comprehensive listing which will be incorporated in the final thesis.

The following explores a sequence of 10 activities each depending on the previous, through which students can construct a research proposal which fulfils the UNISA requirements

SECTION B: TEN QUESTIONS FOR THE PROPOSAL

I. *INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH ENTERPRISE*

Social science research into adult education and analogous purposive human service practices such as occur in nursing, counselling and works of social care can be examined

as a sequence beginning with a real issue the addressing of which is set out in a careful question. The question should generate a related line of inquiry which in turn requires appropriate methodology and specific methods and techniques of implementation. The findings of the inquiry need to be presented in appropriate textual form and any social obligations, promises, payments, reciprocal gifts and the like discharged before the project can be deemed complete.

Such inquiry needs to be:

PRECIPITATED:
1. **Issue driven**: What **issue** generated the question and what is the question;
2. **Filling a gap:** What research has been done already around this question?
3. **Set as an answer to a question:** What is the specific question, why is it important, what are its implications
4. **Epistemologically focused:** What kind of knowledge is being generated in this inquiry;
5. **Socially situated**: What are the circumstances surrounding the activities being researched;
6. **Theoretically situated**: What information relevant to the research question being pursued can be gained from existing theoretical approaches and research;

PLANNED:
7. **Underpinned**: On what conceptual framework or methodology is your inquiry based?.
8. **Implemented:** What methods – practical processes, techniques are to be followed in data gathering, academic processing and professional completing: promises need to be kept to complete the undertakings of the inquiry

TEXTUALLY PRESENTED:
9. **Represented**: How will the results of the inquiry be presented textually

ACADEMICALLY RESOURCED:
10. **Resourced**: What are the key academic and other resources for the existing research**,** situational and theoretical background of the project and its methodology

Each of the ten steps is explored briefly in the following paragraphs.

II. *THE TEN POINT PLAN IN DETAIL*

A. What is your research about (cf RPG 1)

1. What issue is your research concerned with

Describe the issue linked to your academic and/or professional work which of great interest to you which you are probably already informally exploring

In what ways in the project important,

2 What is the research question:

Set out the precise point of inquiry in the form of a researchable question.

Frame the words in the question so that key meanings and areas of exploration are named in it.

Show the link between addressing the question you have hammered out and responding to the issue behind your research inquiry

3 What kind of knowledge do you seek to produce

What kind of knowledge needs to be generated in the proposed inquiry? Each of these forms of knowledge has their corresponding forms of inquiry and relevant methodology.

Facts

Empirical inquiry seeks to identify, define and where possible measure events, frequencies and relationships between events. Grounded theory might fit here. Most inquiries seeking factual data are handled through so-called quantitative research which is not treated further in this paper

Experiences

Phenomenological inquiry seeks to reveal what an experience is like for the person experiencing it

Meanings

Interpretative inquiry, drawing on Symbolic interactionism and constructionism seeks to discover and analyse the meanings an event or practice may have for people in one or other human service practice

Significances

How can the information uncovered be linked to theoretical ideas. Findings from inquiry into adult educational practices might relate to various theories of learning, community development, social cohesion and conflict and mediation etc

Discourses and their structure

What discourses can be identified in the structured language surrounding policies, provision and practices of a particular form of human service practice.

Interests

Critical inquiry. Whose interests are being served in the practices or policies you may be investigating. This is often linked to Discourse analysis or critical Action research.

4   What existing research has been done around this topic

What research has been pursued?, Who did the work and when. What was the methodology, method and conclusions

This needs to be a major critical review of significant existing publications in the candidate's general area of research interest. It needs to describe, classify and critique such research looking at their methodology, method, form of representation and the recommended practices which may have underpinned current ideas and practices. It is at this point that the student can point to areas of inquiry needing attention that have either not been researched or, in the opinion of the aspiring researcher, not researched adequately. This leads to a statement of how the research question fills a gap.

5   What is the situational background of the human   activity you are researching:

Name the researcher

What kind of person am I? Where have I come from? What are my interests, affiliations? What is real for me and what for me counts as valid, interesting and helpful knowledge?

Describe the circumstances of the activity you are researching

What are circumstances surrounding and influencing the activity under Who, where, with whom, under what circumstances

Macro situational forces:

What general social and cultural trends seem to exert influence on the human service activity being researched

Meso situational forces

What sponsors, institutions have a stake in shaping the event, practice being examined

Micro situational forces

What are the actual structural rather then incidental circumstances surrounding the human activity being researched

6   Theoretical Background

Describe the theoretical ideas that have already been developed relevant to your research question:

What theories and theoretical approaches illumine significant elements of the research question being pursued.

Each of these elements has a range of theoretical interpretations available from the literature which can serve to illumine the question and to suggest, where there seems a lack of information, possible roads for further exploration.

B. what are your plans for the research (cfr RPG 2):

7.   Methodology and method

Following Crotty (1998: p4), the exploration of the *kind of inquiry* to be pursued and the kind of knowledge to be generated leads to planning out the general approach (methodology) and the actual sequence of activities planned (method).

General approaches to pursuing the inquiry:

Factual/historical inquiry:

What actually occurred; who were the participants, places and dates. What constant relationships seemed to emerge in data collection over time

Phenomenological inquiry:

What was the activity or event etc like as an experience

Interpretative inquiry:

What meanings did the experience have for the participants and what significance does the experience and the meanings attributed to it have for practical, professional and academic knowledge.

Critical inquiry

Whose interests are being served. Were there losses and gains, winners and losers in the activities being researched.

Discourse analysis

What were the dominant discourses influencing the activities being researched

8.   Implementing the inquiry

Method

What techniques and procedures are to be used to do things like:
- Identify participants/ informants
- Gather data; interviews, stories, structured and semi structured interviews etc etc
- Process data: identify themes, cluster themes etc
- Summarise
- Relate to theory already explored
- Develop into 'findings'

Approvals

What approvals: ethics and other permissions etc are required and in what way can these be secured

Promises to be kept

What promises have been made that need to be honoured Are there any obligations and other activities linked to your research which need to be planned for?

Time Line

At what time is each integrated part planned

9.   Gathering and ordering resources

What are the key resources around three areas: a) Situational background, b) theoretical background and c) research methodology.

References relevant to these three areas should be carefully gathered and ordered. Computer applications that save and classify references like End notes or In vivo can be used by post graduate students as a major resource for their research.

C. In what ways do you intend to present the findings of your inquiry? (CFR RPG 3)

10. Presenting findings: Textual genres & Table of contents

Two major textual forms or genres have been named by Reason & Hawkins (1988) explanatory and expressive forms

Explanatory writing is presented in a written report which presents the findings of an inquiry. It can pursue this work by classifying - attempting to name and classify the social phenomenon under inquiry or and attributing the causes of some social phenomenon. Explanations can be offered from quantitative correlations looking at various frequencies of data collected using statistical methods. Explanations can come as well from various critical investigations seeking to reveal hegemonic interests underpinning various forms of discursive practice.

Expressive writing attempts to create a textual portrayal where the truth claim is not about veracity (propositional truth) as in the statement: We have discovered that racially mixed communities report less violence; but about verisimilitude (lifelikeness) – whether a text purporting to create a resemblance of an experience is true to life, lifelike. cf. Garman (1996)

Ordering the final text

Provide a draft table of contents of your proposed thesis

SECTION C. GENERAL RESOURCES

Social science research resources

Somekh, B. & Lewin, C. (2005) *Research methods in the Social Sciences*. London: Sage

Creswell, J. (2007), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions,* Sage, London. Second Edition

Crotty, M. (2000), *Foundations of Social Research,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Funnell, R. ed, (1996), *A Handbook for Research in Adult and Vocational Education*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Hillier, Y (2002), *Reflective Teaching in Further and Adult Education.* Continuum International: United Kingdom

Reason, P & Hawkins,P. (1988) Storytelling as inquiry. In Reason, P. (ed) *Human Inquiry in Action: Developments in new paradigm research*. London: Sage Publications

van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching lived experience: human science for an action centred pedagogy*. Ontario: The Althouse Press.

Specialist research guides and reflections

Education

Cohen, L. Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Methods In Education* 5th Edition. Routledge/Falmer New York.

Barone, T. & Eisner, E. (1997) 'Arts-based Educational Research'. In Jaeger, R .M. (ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education*. Washington DC: American Education Research Association

Garman, N. (1996) Qualitative Inquiry: Meaning and menace for educational researchers. In Willis, P. & Neville, B. (eds.) *Qualitative Research practice in Adult Education*. Melbourne: David Lovell publishing

Greene, M. (1991) 'Blue guitars and the search for curriculum'. In Willis, G. & Schubert, W.H. (eds.), *Reflections from the heart of educational inquiry.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Willis, P. Smith, R. & Collins, E. (2000) *Being Seeking Telling: Expressive approaches to qualitative Adult Education research* Flaxton (Queensland): Post Pressed

Nursing research

Crotty, M. (1996a) *Phenomenology and nursing research.* Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.