Improving doctoral research by learning from doctoral vivas/defences

Professor Emeritus
VERNON TRAFFORD
Website www.vernontrafford.com

" To make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. "
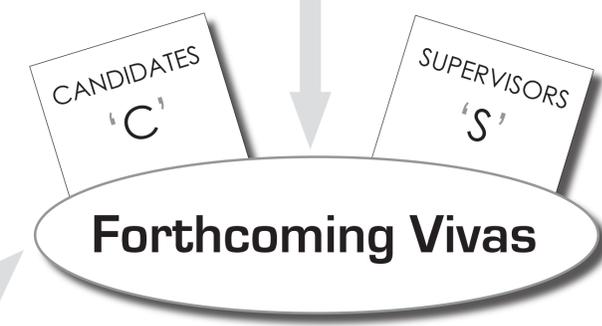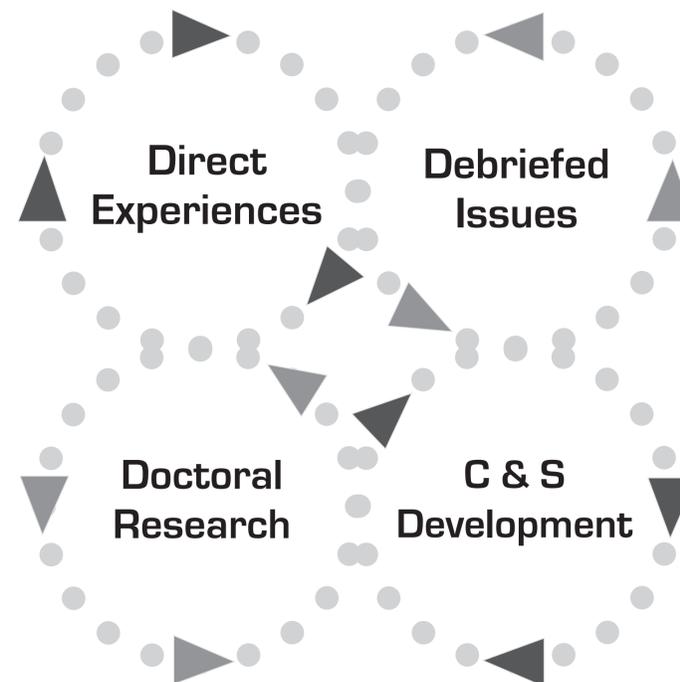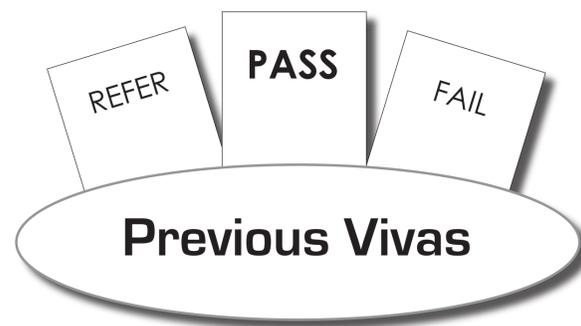
Appreciating doctoral learning

- Candidate prepares for viva from registration onwards
- Understand the summative assessment criteria
- Recognize: originality, gaps in knowledge, concepts, research methodology and coherence
- Handle the technology of theses and protocols
- Raise levels of thinking to display scholarship
- Respond to examiners' questions confidently
- Candidates' critical instances that were experienced in the viva and during the day could be recalled and noted

University avoids hearsay and reduces the mystery of doctoral vivas by providing evidence from direct experience

Evaluating direct doctoral experiences

- Candidates and supervisors debrief via reflection
- Sharing experiences in the Faculty/University doctoral communities of practice
- Identifying the pluralist roles of each examiner
- Explain the type and distribution of questions via scholarly, philosophical and technical clues
- The constant supply of evidence provides materials for workshops
- Guidelines for doctoral and supervisory practices can be reinforced

REFER **PASS** FAIL

Previous Vivas

Direct Experiences   Debriefed Issues

Doctoral Research   C & S Development

CANDIDATES 'C'   SUPERVISORS 'S'

Forthcoming Vivas

Candidates who display episteme

- Understand that research is an integrated process rather than a series of (un)related tasks
- Undertake and report on their research so that others instantly recognise its scholarly merit
- Make the linkages between key components in the research process explicit within their thesis
- Understand and address the expectations that others have of doctoral level research
- Defend originality and justify their contributions

Developing doctoral practices through learning that combines generic and discipline-specific evidence

Continuous research development

- Learning integrated into doctoral education curriculum workshops and doctoral supervision
- Understanding the nature of doctorateness and raising the level of thinking
- Appreciating the roles and functions of examiners
- Decomposing questions into layers of meaning
- Guidance in writing high quality academic text
- Learning to learn and displaying that via planned presentations, workshops, publications

" The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time. " (T. S. Eliot, 1974: 208 - Top Quote; 209 - Bottom Quote)