



# Briefing Note

## SUPERVISING CHINESE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

*[Universities in Australia can be described as] social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other in often highly asymmetric relations of domination and subordination.*

(Pratt in Sharma, 2006, p.209)

### Developing familiarity with text-type dissertation

- Give students lots of examples of literature reviews, methodology chapters, case studies etc. This will help to develop familiarity with different types of texts and styles of writing. Our research, and work with Chinese students suggests that having an opportunity to memorise / familiarise can contribute positively to learning new text-types.
- Have them identify features of form and common phrases that they encounter in the examples. These should be recorded in a personal glossary.

### Writing

- You might like to give them a list of words and phrases, etc. to avoid (or not over use). For example *highly, shining, golden, cultivate* which are words commonly used in Chinese writing. The Briefing Note on **Common problems in English language usage** may be of assistance here.
- Use annotated bibliography with them. This can help with note taking, summarising and synopsis and is good preparation for the literature review.
- Then convert the annotated bibliography to a short literature review.
- Then have students develop the literature review into an essay.

## Teaching students to think critically and construct / deconstruct arguments

You will need to help students:

- Develop self-awareness
- Identify beliefs and preconceptions
- Consider other perspectives or viewpoints

### Strategy 1

Getting them to respond to questions like the ones below can help, particularly when trying to define a thesis topic:

- What do you currently believe or understand about (concept, issue and problem)?
- What is this understanding or belief based on?
- What evidence do you have for this belief or understanding?
- What other assumptions / considerations could there be?
- How could any of these be explored / examined/ tested?

### Strategy 2

Helping students appreciate different levels of thinking is also important. For instance, working with Bloom's Taxonomy can be useful, e.g.:

<b>Analysis</b> Separates material or concepts into component parts so that the organisational structure may be understood. Distinguishes between facts and inferences.	Analyses, breaks down, compares, contrasts, deconstructs, differentiates, discriminates.
<b>Synthesis</b> Builds a structure or pattern from diverse elements. Puts parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure.	Categorises, combines, compiles, explains, generates, reconstructs.
<b>Evaluation</b> Makes judgments about the value of ideas or materials.	Appraises, concludes, critiques, evaluates, explains, interprets, justifies.

It is worth looking at the lower levels **offer** this so that students can position where 'describe' and 'summarise' sit given that these activities may characterise academic activities that they are comfortable with. The following Sessions may offer further useful strategies and examples here:

- **Organising and writing an essay**
- **Critical thinking and argumentation**
- **Critical thinking and synthesis**

### **Strategy 3**

Talk constantly about 'what is meant underneath' the text. Chinese use the phrase *yan xia zhi yi* (what is meant under the words). Drawing or discussion of the physical layout of teaching spaces, and what this indicates about teaching and learning, could be a starting point to elicit 'underneath' meanings.

### **Strategy 4**

Ask them to identify and reflect on the strategies that they use for learning (e.g. memorisation). Get them to critique the effectiveness of such strategies in their new environment. Introduce them to new learning strategies (e.g. effective note taking. See the Session on **Notetaking strategies for lectures and seminars**).

It is important for students to realise that their strategy toolkit is linked to their learning culture and that they need a different 'toolkit' in Australia.

### **Qualitative Research**

- Chinese students need to do formal units in this area as most are unfamiliar with qualitative approaches.
- They then need to do pilot studies etc. to ensure that they have the capacity to collect and analyse qualitative data. This is particularly important if they are intending to gather data in China.
- You need to work with them closely in terms of learning to code data. Saldaña (2009) Chapter 1 'An introduction to codes and coding' is a practical introduction. Then work on pilot data with them. Saldaña's 3 column model and his 'questions to consider as you code' are useful (pp.17-18).

<b>Raw data</b>	<b>Preliminary codes</b>	<b>Final codes</b>
The closer I get to finishing my doctoral research, the faster I want it to happen. I would give anything to finish now. But there's a lot of literature to review and still many more interviews to conduct - but I keep working very long hours and not sleeping much in the hope of getting through this research and becoming a fully-fledged media academic.	<i>Finishing research</i>  <i>Doctoral obligations</i>  <i>Overwork</i>  <i>Dreaming of an academic career</i>	  COMPLETION  ANXIETY

(Adapted from Saldaña, 2009, p.17)

### Questions to consider as you code

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How exactly do they do this? What specific means and / or strategies do they use?
- How do participants talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?

(Adapted from Saldaña, 2009, p.17)

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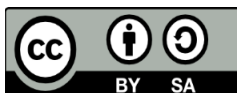
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Additional materials and resources are available from  
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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