



## OASES Graduate School

### Guiding Ethical principles/reminders: practices and processes for the OASES learning community

<b>Approved by:</b>	Academic Council
<b>Last reviewed:</b>	08 December 2014

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#### Preamble

OASES is committed to encouraging mutually beneficial relating within a caring, participatory, co creative and responsive/ responsible/ community where all members respect the dignity and intrinsic value of all beings. It is the policy of OASES to ensure that all participants and members of the OASES learning community have equal respect and equal opportunities for integrative and transformative learning. An ethic which is embedded in the significance of our relational being and our relational knowing. An integrative, relational and transformative approach to ethics does not provide a code of ethics but rather sees our ethics intertwined in all we do and directs our attention and practices to the thriving of relationships and of individuals. One of our primary responsibilities then is to provide a safe and nurturing context in which the inevitable dilemmas and challenges of transformative learning can be faced. Our ethic of mutual beneficial relating also requires us to extend our ethic into the wider community which provides the context for our learning and practice. So this is not so much a code as guidelines as we realise that our ethics needs to be an embodied practice of *mutually beneficial relating*. This is our link to discussions of ethics. In living 'relational ethics', we acknowledge that ethics and relating are integrated, are one! So, we perceive 'ethics as mutually beneficial relating' not as a 'code' (abstract code or guidelines) but as a 'process' (embodied in social context and interactions) as well as a set of positive principles. Such ethics, rather than disabling, are enabling and, rather than being 'once-off', disengaged and abstracted, ethics conversations are ongoing.

We can identify the constituencies and relationships in our academic world ~ participants, learning community, lecturers, supervisors, ethics committees, examiners, institutions, society, etc. Here, we express very, very briefly mutually beneficial relating (ethics) from the perspective of several of these constituencies. Whilst very definitely partial and incomplete, it hopefully gives a flavour of our 'way of being' 'in relation' to one another. Though this speaks of participant relations within the school, the principles are equally as relevant across all relations in OASES (i.e. between/amongst Board of Directors / Academic Board / the Genesis group and with our founding partners.)

## **1. A beginning statement of our commitment to mutually beneficial relating**

We all understand that ethics (in our meaning of 'mutually beneficial relating') can only happen when we devote proper space and time to it. We make both space and time and we will continue to develop our ability to hold the place and the time; being in the place where we can learn together, a place where ethics can happen ~ in the lived, communal, embodied sense. We agree that it is a reciprocal relationship and that it is each person's ethical responsibility to make time to be present. The school is responsible to create spaces where it is beneficial to be ethical.

### **Participants / Researchers**

We take the whole person (in all their contexts) on board. We believe that the nature of knowledge is social and that the principle of knowledge emerges from relating with texts, people, symbols, self, etc. Learning emerges from lived experience in principle and practice. Whilst this is uncomfortable and there are inherent tensions, our participants' value people's lived experience (and their own). We acknowledge learning 'has an affect', and that knowledge disrupts the life of the participant/researcher and those around him / her.

### **Supervisors / lecturers / facilitators / learning mentors**

One's supervisor, lecturers and other learning mentors becomes *co-visors* with the participant (and the Ethics Committee), creating a positive relationship ... a nurturing, not a punitive environment with confidence in the participant ... providing a 'secure space' in which the participant-researcher may work. Like guides or sherpas ~ someone who knows the terrain ~ they will be journeying together ... in a conversation and dialectical process where both can learn ... there should be an engaged dialectic between the parties (giving feedback but also taking feedback) ... participant takes responsibility for research practice ... co-visors takes responsibility as participant's sponsors in the wider structure ... recognising that the participant-researcher is embedded in web of relationships.

The co-visor needs to accept that, in a four year program, during the first 2 years they will likely know more and in the second two years the participant may well know more in the area of the participant's research, and that part of their role is indeed encouraging the participant to grow and learn beyond them.

### **Ethics Committee**

We perceive the 'ethics committee' to be like 'the wise men and women of the tribe'. The environment created and sustained by the committee (on behalf of the participant-researcher) is inviting, trustful, open, thoughtful and thought-provoking ~ constructively

critical. The attitude is encouraging and affirming, with time taken for conversational interaction. There is transparency, leading to trust and direct dialogic communication. ... Contact with the committee is iterative not once only ... The researcher doesn't have to be defensive. ... All the while, the established standards of existing ethics regulations and policies will be fully considered as to their relevance for the ongoing work of participants.

### **Examiners**

The examination process is relational. Examiners are not simply judges but also facilitators of learning. They understand that they step into an ongoing conversation and that the examination itself has to do with the growth of the learner. They are guardians and standard bearers – not gatekeepers in the abstract. They are linked to real world issues and values. They are also learners, ready to acknowledge and respect the work done; ready to thank the researcher for teaching them something.

### **Learning Community (and beyond that to the whole of society)**

Dialogical ... As well – preserve classical scholars and scholarship ... Research interdependence. What are the values / terms upon which this rests? Not individual but social, relational. ... Challenging core narratives ... Inherently co-operative rather than competitive ... Involvement of critical reference groups. ... Rethinking structurally how these processes are done.

## **2. Ethical Practices that underpin our pedagogy, relationships and organisation**

### **Deep Listening**

We ask participants and all in the learning community to listen carefully, openly, to others' stories, listening phenomenologically, with an 'intense and concentrated attention', remaining aware in the process of the pervasiveness of certain beliefs which might intrude into our attempts to listen 'to the things themselves'. We become responsible for understanding what obscures our ability to listen deeply to others, including the structural and cultural exclusion of certain voices and discourses

### **Appreciative responding**

We ask that the focus in our relating is strength based, we inquire into what is working, what is "alive" for us, on capabilities rather than on failure, where "mistakes", and dilemmas and "grievances" which are inevitable are held and responded to as potentially new learnings. So punitive responding becomes increasingly excluded from our relational repertoire. An appreciation of difference is also embedded in our ethical stance

### **Responsiveness and attending**

A participatory ethic compels us to become increasingly attentive and responsive to others, to the context of our learning, to the wider world in which our learning occurs and to share responsibility for engaging with and in our learning and the impact of our learning

### **Dialogue**

We work and communicate dialogically, where truth is dialogic rather than objectively given, where conversational openness allows for multiple interpretations, encouraging a diverse

range of points of view, where inclusion is valued rather than exclusion, where uncertainty and not knowing can be tolerated and even encouraged

**Mindfulness**

We ask all members of the learning community to become increasingly mindful in their practice, of the consequences of their actions and to reflect on these, to critically reflect on the assumptions they bring with them and the impact of these on self and others and the social and ecological world of which we are apart

**Critical Thinking**

We encourage and nurture a critical approach to ways of knowing and knowledge production, where the processes and context of knowledge creation can be explored in depth and where time is required to fully appreciate the intellectual and other production of others

**A new model of relating**

We want to affirm different forms of relating based on connectedness and communality, a non hierarchical form that enhances the potential of the other (human and non human) and that recognises the connection between the “personal” and political/social/ecological domains.

**Learning as relational**

We see our responsibilities as relational and collaborative learners to be fully present to the learning space between us.

We of course recognise that these are our statements of intentions which we try to realise through our organisational contouring as well as our pedagogical and philosophical approach to learning, educational practices and our mode of facilitation. Other documents describe the policies we have in place when these don't work. However even the tone of these policies are filtered through the above ethical responsiveness.

<b>Policy Owner</b>	Chair of Academic Council
<b>Next review</b>	October 2016

<b>Version No.</b>	<b>Approval date</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Amendment</b>
3.0	08 December 2014	Academic Council	Change of program name from 'Integrative and Transformative Studies' to 'Sustainability and Social Change'
2.0	October 2012	Academic Board (now Council)	Extension and clarification of guidelines.
1.0	November 2007	VRQA	