

ict4d

UNESCO Chair in  
ICT for Development

## **Navigating the Academy Sessions: How to deal with input in a strategic manner**

**Time:** 2-4pm  
**Location:** Q136

Navigating Academia can be both exciting and frightening at the same time. When doing a master's or a Ph.D., you will have to present your ideas at workshops, conferences and events, and this can sometimes be nerve-racking. Sometimes you find a very helpful audience willing to give insightful feedback and in some cases, you may find members of the public asking challenging questions, questions we may not know how to answer. Sometimes it may not be the question, but how the question or comment was formulated that can sound intimidating. Dealing with these things can take time and experience and the only way to move forward is by *'feeling the fear and doing it anyways'*. However, in an attempt to share insights and learn some techniques to deal with this, we will be doing a role-play session.

We have asked some members of the audience to be provocative in their questioning. We have asked members of staff to give us some examples of what a provocative input can look like. While not exhausting (and not scientifically proven) we consider a provocative input in the form of questions and behaviours:

### **Questions:**

- The 'it's not a question but I am promoting my research comment.'
- The 'I don't think your methodology can be called science.'
- The personal attack (hopefully never happens)
- The 'let me force you to overgeneralise.'
- The 'everything you said makes no sense.'

### **And behaviours:**

- Sit in the back and look mean
- Nasty body language
- Ignoring behind a laptop

- Falling asleep in first row

We also asked some members of staff to give us tips on how to deal with these issues. Again, while not exhaustive (and not scientifically proven) we consider positive strategies to deal with provocative input:

- Be kind and yet strategic
- Try not to be provoked. Remember to breathe and take your time to answer.
- Speak to an imaginary friend in the audience if you start feeling anxious.
- Do not let the questioner set the frame.
- Trust in the wisdom of the rest of the audience. In most cases the audience will be able to tell when someone is being provocative for the sake of it. Remember that in the end it is best to remain calm and look for the friendly faces (in some cases people will be nodding back at you).
- Use a question to say more about your research. We cannot fit our research in 15-20 minutes. If asked a question about the literature review or the methodology, you can take that opportunity to develop it a bit further.
- Ignore a question/answering with something different
- Avoid a sense of own self-importance, which can lead to overlong answers or overstepping one's actual expertise
- Be charming, use humour, be polite/ courteous (to other speakers, to other experts in the room)
- Be strategic (planting questions, cross-referencing with allies)
- Be supportive (taking the same amount of care/time/effort with the enquiries/discussions with people with different levels of experience/confidence; solidarity with more marginalised voices/researchers etc.)
- Recognizing limitations is actually very refreshing in presentations. Sometimes a comment or criticism may be a criticism to the theory or methodology you are using. Try not to take it personal: this is not a criticism to your own study but to the theory/method you are using. In this respect you can try to respond like this:

*(Say your study is a qualitative case study or Action Research)*

*Member from the audience: You can't generalize from your findings. How are you possibly going to make a contribution to your field when your findings can only be attributed to the people in your case study!*

*You: Thank you for your comment. I appreciate and recognize the criticisms presented when conducting a single case study, as stated by X & Y in their 2009 paper. However I share Yin's argument that a case study*

*approach might not allow for statistical generalisation, but by applying the transformation of empirical data to theory, it does provide analytical generalisation. And this is what my research is interested in.*

Remember, at the end of the day, getting feedback is a great thing. It means we are getting one step closer to understanding and improving our research. These tips should be considered in general, and you should use whatever works for you. It's best to be authentic than to try and force certain points, which you are not comfortable with. We do not expect these tips to be universal, just hopefully something that can be useful.

Please also remember that in this session, we will try to apply these tips when dealing with extreme provocative input. This is not to say that you will face nasty input every time you present, but we will try to be and present the 'worst case scenario', in a friendly and safe space so you can go out to the world and deal with input in a strategic manner.

Can we apply these tips? Are there any other tips you can give? Share your thoughts with us during the session. We will have a debriefing after each presentation to share thoughts, feelings and other tips members of the audience recommends.

Thank you!