

PhD Journey: Some Shared Experiences

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Academic interest in the PhD journey predominately concerns the technical aspects of the doctorate. It tends to concentrate on a number of pragmatic areas, such as, deciding on and narrowing down the topic area; choosing a supervisor; the pitfalls associated with supervision; alternative methodological approaches to research; and writing up the thesis (Dunleavy, 2003, Graves and Varma, 1997, Pearson and Ford, 1997, Phillips and Pugh, 2000; and Trigwell, Shannon and Maurizi, 1997). Often within the literature is a chapter or two, or a short commentary, on what Bencich, Graber, Staben and Sohn (2002) call the emotional and intellectual experiences. These aspects of the journey tend to be examined through 'the narrative' that portrays the individual experience of one, two or a handful of students.

There has, however, been little systematic exploration of individual experiences of the doctorate to identify if the individual experiences are in fact shared. The stimulus for the paper comes from my own experiences where I often found myself engaged in informal conversation with fellow PhD students that inevitably included debate and discussion about our own intellectual journey, such as, the evolving change to approach based on research to date, the modus operandi of finalising the draft, idiosyncrasies of writing the final document and a comment a year before I finished, that will stay with me forever, "you will never believe what the examiners want" (fellow student, 2000).

These informal conversations informed my work and unlocked part of the mystery that lay ahead. Yet the telling of the stories was informal and by chance. They continually affirmed the view that formal scholarly communities where students relay their experiences to each other, during the doctorate or in hindsight, post doctorate, could be of benefit to each other and to those who follow behind. On further investigation, it was discovered that this perspective is supported in the current, though limited literature, that investigates this aspect of the doctorate (Bench, Graber, Staben and Sohn, 2002; Cawthon, McClellan, Dunn and Grandpre, 2001; Dinham and Scott, 1999; Gonzalez, Figueroa, Marin and Moreno, 2001; Heinrich, 2000 and Morton and Thornley, 2001).

Heinrich (2000) in particular, advocates "a community of scholarly caring" where "group support [is] integral to participants developing a scholarly identity that manifest[s] itself in passionate dissertation scholarship" (p.63). She notes the work of Beeler (1993) and the recommendation that "a practical beginning for a renaissance in doctoral education might be a re-examination of the experiences, knowledge and opinions of what leads to successful completions..." (Beeler, 1993, p.6). She also promotes the view, in her own work on shared scholarly communities that "the sharing of lived experience [is]...both educative and empowering" (p.67). In her paper, one student portrays some substantive reasons for this outcome during a workshop with other women engaged in the doctorate;

This workshop has been an incredible turning point in helping me decrease my fears and anxieties. The opportunity to dialogue and connect with other women in different stages of their doctoral journey and the uniqueness of each woman was so profound.

I don't feel alone anymore because I carry with me the words and feelings and the whole experience with me and can draw on this experience each time I need it (Heinrich, 2000, p.70-71). [While another student comments] refreshed and renewed after each reunion...able to confront dragons and negotiate tasks...affirmed by the support gained...there are allies for each [stage] of the journey (Heinrich, 2000, p.75).

Heinrich (2000) also affirms Freire's, (1997) view that such pedagogy respects "the intellectual capacity of the other [and] implies the ability to stimulate the creativity of the other" (p.303, cited in Heinrich, 2000, p.80). Furthermore, in her own conclusions, she supports the view that the "emotional, psychological, spiritual and relational, as well as, the intellectual dimensions" of the doctorate, need to be investigated in a comprehensive and systematic way, for the purpose of enriching the journey for those who pursue it (Heinrich, 2000, p.81).

In addition, the intention of the Dinham et al (1999) study of doctoral experiences is to "[hear...] the voices of those actually involved in the doctoral process" (p.95). Their study demonstrates that "fellow students, were very important, particularly when support from family was absent" (p.99). They categorise the experiences of students surveyed into positive, negative and ambivalent as well as mixed. What emerges from their study is "the need for recognition of the 'whole person'...equal in importance to course structure, processes and procedures" (p.110).

Bench et al (2002) in a more recent study, entitled 'navigating in unknown waters', note that "at the beginning of the dissertation research process doctoral students cannot see the end, nor can they image how they will get there" (p.289). This view is confirmed in their informative paper on the experiences of three students who have recently completed their doctorates. Whilst acknowledging that each student must take ownership of their own journey, they advocate, "tackling the challenges together is needed" (p.293). It is the "share[ed] insights and experiences that might smooth the way for other graduate students who may be struggling to chart their own courses to the PhD shore" (p.289). In support of this view, one of the doctoral students in their study reflects;

As a researcher, I have become a firm believer in the power of support groups, whether they are made up of one person or many people. While writing my proposal, the weekly meetings with my five classmates at a local coffee shop...were a key factor in helping me successfully negotiate that stage of the process (p.295).

This student perspective is confirmed in a conference in Denver, where the doctoral experiences of the three recent graduates were shared. As noted by Bench et al (2002) "forty-some people showed up, most of them graduate [PhD] students, most of them anxious, and most seeking response and support over and above what they were getting from their faculty committees" (p.289).

Morton et al (2001) in their study of the experience of doctoral students in mathematics in New Zealand, engage in similar discourse and are drawn to similar conclusions. They note that their "findings suggest that the graduate research experience could be improved for many students by simple measures [that include]...fostering graduate student networks both within and across disciplines" (p, 113). They also note, "there has been little formal research on the experiences of

graduate students in mathematics in New Zealand" (p.113). A view that is supported by my own recent search of the literature that disclosed very few articles on the PhD journey in general, both across and within disciplines.

In furthering such research, Morton et al (2001) advocate, "...networking, meeting people in similar areas. Encouragement from others, particularly at times when the 'going seems tough' [is satisfying]" (p.122). They also conclude, "...graduate experience could be improved for many students by simply paying attention to the everyday experiences of their lives...this includes; fostering ways of counter-acting isolation from other graduate students or from scholars in the field" (p. 132).

This paper, in unison with the findings, in limited but enlightening literature, is supportive of the view that universities could foster a scholarly community where research students benefit from interaction with other students. Furthermore, it advocates that those who have completed the journey should be encouraged to share their experiences with others. For the writer, the intellectual experiences are of most interest, for it is these that are considered to be most useful in unlocking the mystery of the journey and empowering students to complete.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study is based on grounded theory, as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach has been taken because the methodology promotes qualitative research that is exploratory, systematic, inductive and realistic. In particular, it requires the researcher to declare their predisposition and lay down all their biases prior to the investigation and then to collect, code and classify the data until repetitive data emerges. It is the repetitive data or shared lived experiences that informs the study, in contrast to, the researcher looking for evidence within the data to validate a priori position.

At first it was intended to recruit from amongst students engaged in their doctorate, but on reflection, it was decided that the process of gaining access to these informants would be difficult, given the probably requirement of ethics clearance from each of the institutions they attend. Alternatively, a study of the shared lived experiences of students from the same institution was dismissed because the findings from the study may be misconstrued as reflecting on the particular processes and procedures of the institution.

Instead, participants were recruited at 'arms length', through a letter and information sheet that was emailed to academics that held a doctorate and worked in the same institution. This method of recruitment enabled the researcher to gain a cross section of participants who held doctorates from different institutions and for differing lengths of time. Potential recruits were initially sought from within the social sciences. They were also procured from amongst those who had completed their doctorate, because it was considered that these participants would be able to deliberate on their experiences, with hindsight, rather than in the 'mist' of their studies. This means of obtaining informants was efficient and expedient because it required ethics clearance from only one institution.

The investigation was progressively emailed to new recruits until enough repetitive data emerged to develop core categories and properties that were substantive. From a potential pool of 24 academics engaged in various disciplines within the social sciences, eight were interviewed. Willing participants were mainly female, from disciplinary areas within the social sciences, and included a cross-section of recent and long- standing graduates.

Each potential informant was asked to participate in a semi-structured interview and reflect on the following questions.

- Why did you decide to do a PhD?
- How would you describe the intellectual experiences of your doctorate?
- What particular aspects of the intellectual experiences of your doctorate stand out?
- What advice on the intellectual experiences of a doctorate, in terms of your own experience, would you give to other PhD students, that follow in your footsteps?

After each interview, the data collected was coded and classified and the interviews continued until enough substantive data emerged to enable the development of core categories and their properties. The paper reviews the findings from the participants. It also considers the shared lived experiences contained within the literature. The literature sources are discussed next, followed by the findings in the field.

Key findings in the literature

The literature was interrogated until enough repetitive data emerged to develop core categories and their properties. The categories include; technical, emotional and intellectual and the properties within each one divided into three sub-categories; positive, mixed and negative.

The technical aspects of the journey show evidence of facilities for mentoring, encouragement, support and a sense of belonging. Mixed feelings are reported on supervision, the requirements of the doctorate, the norms or expectations surrounding the thesis, the seminars and conferences, having to justify progress or the thesis to date, being seen and being tested. While, negative feelings are evident in the areas of poor and sometimes ill-informed introduction to a research degree, the unspoken rules, the conflict that arises from time to time especially with the supervisor, the vagueness of the process, feeling invisible, being dissatisfied, feeling deserted and sometimes feeling excluded (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Shared technical experiences		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Mentored	Supervision	Ill-informed
Encouraged	Requirements	Poor introduction
Supported	Seminars	Unspoken rules
Belonged	Conferences	Conflict
	Having to justify	Feeling invisible
	Being seen	Vagueness of it all
	Being tested	Feeling dissatisfied
		Feeling excluded

To illustrate these findings in an informative way, samples of repetitive commentary and narratives in the literature are cited below. They include, Appel and Dahlgen's (2003) study of the working conditions of 159 doctoral students at Umea University, Sweden in which they note, amongst other things;

The informants were more or less dissatisfied with their introduction to their department. The picture they had of what postgraduate studies involved was vague. Several of them related that it had been up to them to get information, and that their departments had not taken responsibility for introducing them to the area of postgraduate studies. ...even many years after embarking on the studies, several informants were strongly critical when looking back at their own introduction (p.100).

In terms of seminars, one student comments that they are, "pretty boring...discussions were held at a level that had led to non-participation on the part of those doctoral students who attended" (p.104). Another describes her Department's seminar in positive terms. "Marianne was seen; people showed interest in what she said, and relevant questions were posed" (p.104). While a very negative outcome is relayed in the following narrative;

At seminars things happen that are difficult to comprehend until you have left the seminar. We had a horrible event, when this guy was completely humiliated...it got worse and worse. Nobody said anything. Nobody did anything. When we left the room it felt we'd participated in slaughtering him, and in a way we had, because nobody said anything (p.105).

Other comments include those on supervision, such as, "students...may feel tempted to want the [supervisor] to tell [them] the way to do it [but it is] their work they have ownership" (Bench et al, 2002, pp.292).

Initially students expect a high degree of involvement from their supervisors, but then move through a more detached phase when they take increasing responsibility for their own work, before returning to greater involvement with their supervisors during the preparation and checking of successive drafts of the thesis (Morton and Thornley, 2001, pp.119-120).

The emotional aspects of the journey, detailed in the literature, tend to start with a sense of commitment, a passion for the journey that is marked with a substantial number of interconnected and intertwined negative, positive and mixed emotions. These emotions appear to have decisive phases starting with those that are positive such as commitment and excitement about the doctorate, followed by potential subsequent feelings of doubt, being overwhelmed and being lonely. Given the up and downs, and the years involved in the doctorate, some become ambivalent and cynical as they juggle their way through what for most is a 'mystery tour', fueled by academic silence on the idiosyncrasies of the doctoral process. Then towards the end of the dissertation, there is a propensity for the writing to become burdensome and all consuming, with emotions wavering between belief, anxiety and for some fear. Finally, with confirmation of the doctorate, most talk about feelings of being affirmed and, for some, transformed (figure 2)

Figure 2

Shared emotional experiences		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Committed	Ambivalent	Doubtful
Passionate	Sense of Juggling	Overwhelmed
Challenged	Sense of mystery tour	Lonely
Excited	Cynical	Unsettled
Belief in oneself		Anxious
Defined		Uncertain
Affirmed		Fearful
Transformed		Burdened
		All consumed
		Disillusioned

Commentary in support of this summation includes; (Appel and Dahlgren, 2003).

Seventy-nine per cent of [informants]...responded that personal interest was the most important motive (p94). In many of the narratives,...the idea of postgraduate studies [doing a doctorate] was considered 'a really tremendous undertaking, almost unattainable, and something for the exceptionally gifted' (p.100). A number of the doctoral students said they felt that their research was always hanging over them and giving them a guilty conscience. ...the survey frequently reflects ...that there is no clear dividing line between work and leisure time, and a number of students reported that 'never being totally free' was difficult. Several of the students who responded...reported that they were lazy, and that...laziness was one of their worst characteristics as a doctoral student (p.107)

Informants in Noble's (1995) study, sum up the mixed and intertwined emotions in a way that suggests that both positive and negative emotions contribute empathetically to completion

...a period of profound change, challenge and tribulation...characterized by ordeal, chaos, emptiness, and often despair. The purpose of initiation [into the doctorate] is to release these capacities and hidden strengths by presenting a series of formidable obstacles (pp.63-64, cited in Henrich, 2000, p.71). ...the most pernicious dragons will be seen in retrospect as a most influential and essential ally (p.127, cited in Henrich, 2000, p.73). ...transformation takes place...when we confront the dragons in our path and slowly, inexorably, subdue them (p.106, cited in Henrich, 2000, p.73)

In addition, an informant in Heinrich's (2000) own study, notes on completion of her doctorate;

After my doctoral program, it took me several years to recover from completing a dissertation with a conflicted committee and to grow my tenuous scholarly voice into a doctoral identity (p.64)

And, Dinham and Scott (1999) note,

A quarter of those surveyed [noted a number of positive personal aspects of completing a doctorate] including, making new friends, being exposed to new perspectives, academic rewards, enjoyment of the academic lifestyle and learning

more about oneself...feeling good, feeling relieved, feeling elated and proud of feeling fulfilled (p.101-102)

The emotional experiences are well articulated in the literature and an abundance of them could be cited here to substantiate the findings.

In contrast to the relatively extensive coverage of technical and emotional experiences of the PHD journey, there is limited commentary on the intellectual aspects of the doctorate, even though these experiences appear to substantiate and legitimise the journey, for most. When mentioned in the narratives, they are almost exclusively talked about from a positive perspective and are often the initial impetus for commitment, and the driving force behind completion. They include the opportunity to actively, substantially and comprehensively engage in research in an areas of special and specific interest, to develop authenticity and a sense of voice, to contribute to academic knowledge, to be empowered and to gain ownership of your thoughts and ideas. While mixed experiences include, doing original research and being interrupted. Furthermore, and of interest, is the lack of articulated negative experiences in this part of the doctorate (see figure 3)

Figure 3

Shared intellectual experiences		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Engaged	Originality of the work
Feeling of authentic research	Being interrupted	
Sense of voice		
Feeling of having ownership		
Making a contribution		
Being empowered		

Views in the literature that illustrate experiences in this area of the journey include;

...Even though the students had a lot to do, they generally felt that the work itself was very interesting and intellectually stimulating. The research gave them a good chance for in-depth studies within a specific field of interest, and a feeling that their work was important to others (Appel and Dahlgren, 2003, p.94). ...sometimes I would wake up thinking about the study: how I might go about framing it or what criteria I might use to choose my participants. Even if a full work day awaited me, when these burst of inspiration hit, I seized them immediately whenever I could, knowing full well how easily grand ideas can dissolve into vapor (Bench et al, 2002, 292). If I could just harness even three days in a row to keep some continuity going in my thoughts I think I could get somewhere, but as soon as I make a little progress I have to stop, shift gears for several days, and when I come back to it I have spend a considerable chuck of time trying to catch up with where I was when I left off (Bench et al, 2002, p.293)

Key findings in the case study

The findings in the study will be looked at progressively, starting with the first question.

Why did you decide to do a PhD?

The answers to this initial question enabled the development of three core categories and their properties. The categories included; suggested to me, choose to do it, to secure employment (see figure 4).

Figure 4

Why did you decide to do a PhD?		
<i>Suggested to me</i>	<i>Choose to do it</i>	<i>To secure employment</i>
Converted Master (Hons) to PhD	Right time	Needed for university occupation
	To test commitment, involvement, skills	Means of moving from six months contracts to tenure
	A challenge	Means of moving from research assistant to researcher
	An opportunity	Means of promotion

Commentary that enabled the above categories to emerge, included; (fieldwork, July 2003)

...always had the intention of doing it, timing good, young child, no job, the right time. ...working as an academic, involved in research, wanted to test interest, involvement, test skills...a challenge. ...wanted to be the researcher not the research assistant...enjoyed during research needed the PhD to be the researcher. ...lots of reasons...personal, academic challenge...to test out academic confidence...professional [reasons]...a building block to get promotion. ...in the academic context it is exactly what you do to get a job.

How would you describe the intellectual experiences of your doctorate?

The second question asked the informants to reflect generally on the intellectual aspects of the journey. The categories that emerge from this part of the study include; lonely-scary, unsupported and supervision-not very engaged and confidence building (see figure 5).

Figure 5

How would you describe the intellectual experiences of your doctorate?			
<i>Lonely-scary</i>	<i>Unsupported Intellectually</i>	<i>Supervision-not very engaged</i>	<i>Confidence building</i>
Naive	Academic environment silent	Supervisor own problems at work or in personal life	Developed/honed critical analytical skills
Went down a number of paths/ dead ends	Ideas unchallenged for a long time	Supervisor lack of knowledge about methodology wished to use	Developed/honed writing skills
			Helped refine way of ordering epistemology

The properties within the categories from this part of the study emerged from reflections such as those below (fieldwork, July 2003).

...naïve about how one sets about doing [a PhD], went down a lot of tracks, a very broadening experience, trying to find the model, material and engagement with the knowledge that existed...entered knowledge without a broad understanding of how it stretched out...not a path that I would advise my own students to go down, but enlightening [and also] limited, and therefore not really rewarding...not a clear perspective on the things you are engaging with. ...lonely, something that happened apart from my employment... had no opportunity of meeting with other people who were doing topics in the same area. ...a sense in which you weren't alone but not intellectually supported for program of investigation. ...surviving that hardened me, gave me the confidence, the will for all to do things by myself. ...I enacted with gaps in my knowledge. ...the skills that I have now are due to the PhD...the way you say things...the writing skills...how you present what is important. ...towards the end of the PhD [my supervisor, who engaged with me throughout and was highly recognised in the field] offered me theories but I wasn't satisfied with any of them. Was accepted got it four years later...knew the area, had the primary data...already had the material for a PhD but didn't know it...once I got around the literature had a thesis. ...significant counter-thesis wanted to be subversive and was. ...only since finished starting to feel confident enough to publish

What particular aspects of the intellectual experiences of your doctorate stand out?

In this part of the interview, the positive experiences stood out and were evident in the emergence of the following categories; development of critical analytical skills, support from others-mentors and confidence building (see figure 6).

Figure 6

What particular aspects of the intellectual experiences of your doctorate stand out?		
<i>Development of critical analytical skills</i>	<i>Supports from others-mentors</i>	<i>Confidence building</i>
Learned through experience	IT/academic support with statistical data/computer program	Being the scholar
Learned through process information	Support from other researchers	
Learned through things coming together	Support from participants/informants/partner	
Learned through immersion -being immersed in the thesis		

Reflections on this question supported and broadened the categories and properties that were emerging from the informants' narratives (fieldwork, July 2003)

...highlight, when things would just come together. ...finding a framework that worked. ...learning just how I processed information, wasn't a matter of reading and writing...sometimes confusing and then suddenly started to gel...now have confidence even when confused...things do get processed in my brain. ...already skilled as an academic, consolidation of my capabilities in the intellectual exercise of a doctorate ...sense of actually being able to relate theory to practice. ...personally, find puzzling with epistemological theoretical questions, engages me, even if I can't get a clear

picture, enjoy doing it...like the business of reading about theoretical questions...real insights when see things manifest on the ground. ...how satisfying to write, that immersion again...regardless of what was going on around you. ...monday meetings...couple of research assistants, 2 or 3 post-doctorate students, [others and myself]...met weekly...someone would talk about some aspect of their work...really good...half a dozen to eight of us meeting regularly. ...the real intellectual journey, you need markers for the depth of your understanding...grasp of being a scholar...at the end you are the scholar at the start you weren't...that is the hard journey...not the project itself.

What advice on the intellectual experiences of a doctorate, in terms of your own experience, would you give to other PhD students, that follow in your footsteps?

Responses to the final question reveal a number of discrete categories and their properties that support and reaffirm the positive aspects of the doctorate. The categories include; commitment, good supervision, thinking critically and analytically and support from others-mentors. They are evident in both the literature and the case study and appear to be the driven force behind completion (see figure 7)

Figure 7

What advice on the intellectual experience of a doctorate would you give to other PhD students?			
<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Good supervision</i>	<i>Thinking critically and analytically</i>	<i>Support from others-mentors</i>
Be consistent	Regular contact	Able to change thinking	Test your ideas with others
Do it for yourself	Deadlines	Able to justify	Exposed to what others think
	Talking things through	Able to establishing an argument	Genuinely discuss your ideas with others
	Good working relationship	Constantly revisiting and reviewing research question	
		Open minded	
		Structured approach	

Reflections on the final question reveal commentary such as; (fieldwork, July 2003)

...not to stop...consistency rather than the brilliance that gets you there. ...do it for yourself to challenge and develop yourself, that is why you are doing it. Don't start a doctorate unless you can actually see yourself typing the last page. ...what you end up with is sitting in the chair rather than the thesis on the shelf. ...make sure it is always central to your life...can't do a PhD on the side. ...think seriously about whether you need it, a life changing thing. ...keep a good working relationship with your supervisor, regular contact...rewarding relationship, I did...but not always possible. ...interview potential supervisors and find the right supervisor...your supervisor may just add you in so they can get promoted. ...not to set up a relationship where the supervisors are the experts on your doctorate. ...read widely, outside of obvious areas...sparks other ideas and opens windows...but do not get distracted either. ...if don't have solid research question then it will dissolve in front

of you. ...having the intellectual space to look at different viewpoints. ...structure important...helps realise the goal and the best way to get there. ...set the boundaries really clearly...know what they are doing and not doing...and as a result of that it is achievable. ...need to be with other people that you can test out ideas on. ...need to be exposed to what other people think. ...need to test out your thinking with others...[but] some people don't want that detracting or dilution of their own thinking. ...important to have mentors, peers and genuinely discuss what you are doing...difficult for part-time [students] because not always with others...often a very lonely experience. ...have to have faith in yourself but also [open to] mentoring, open to ideas of others, otherwise very lonely. ...go to outside people that ground you...alternative sources, that have the expertise. ...there is so much that can go wrong with the supervisor...need anchors outside...someone to read write through your thesis.

Discussion and conclusions

The paper identifies a number of factors that suggest the development of 'scholarly communities of researchers' may be of benefit to PhD students. It also discloses that the PhD journey, though unique in its essence, contains substantive common experiences that could be shared with others as they move down the doctoral path.

In an effort to unlock the mysteries of the journey, the paper differentiates between technical, emotional and intellectual experiences. This is not to deny that these experiences occur in conjunction and are difficult to separate. The narratives suggest that they influence and impact on each other throughout the journey, though this is not discussed directly in the literature. For the informants in the case study, the intellectual experiences contain technical and emotional experiences particularly in the discourse on supervision, and being lonely and scared, in an intellectual sense.

For the researcher, the paper discloses some aspects of the PhD journey that are yet to be comprehensively discussed in an open forum or detailed in the literature. A lot that is outlined here is evident in my own journey, but at the time, there was a sense the experiences were unique with little, if anything, in common with others. It was only the informal networking that suggested that this might not be the case.

For me, what stands out in this study, is that the intellectual experiences are predominately talked about positively and appear to be the driving force behind the doctorate. Yet the only forum in which there is any significant discourse on these experiences is in the seminar or colloquium where students come together to 'display their wares'. There are very few opportunities for the Monday meetings with fellow students. For most, it is the informal conversations in the corridor or over coffee with friends and colleagues that provide the only other avenue for the development of 'scholarly communities', from those who are willing to listen to the endless stories of doctoral research.

Maybe if nothing else has come out of this paper, there is a sense of understanding of the idiosyncrasies of the journey that extend well beyond the technical aspects, to the emotional and intellectual experiences. Furthermore, the paper suggests and advocates the development of

scholarly communities of researchers within tertiary institutions that promote the formal and informal exchange of ideas and intellectual experiences. Where students are given the opportunity, if they wish, to come together both formal and informal and engage in discourse, not only about their dissertation, but the high and lows, the pitfalls and inconsistencies, and the vitality of their own individual experience. It could be that through this process the mysterious and misconceptions about the journey may be unlocked.

At the very least, further research into this aspect of the PhD journey may be of interest to those who follow behind.

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