THE DOCTORAL QUEST AS AN ALTERNATIVE METAPHORIC NARRATIVE FOR DOCTORAL RESEARCH EDUCATION

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Abstract

Earlier research on doctoral education had pointed to different conceptions of doctoral research education and scholarship. In particular, the 'journey' narrative, whereby doctoral studies are typically described as articulated research journeys and point to existential issues and dilemmas in the formation of research identities, proved to be useful. Research into processes that assist doctoral candidates to change from a position of dependency to independency also provides a useful way to explore research education. However, such researcher autonomy frameworks typically draw on the commonality of research learning journeys as well as notions of symbolic control and identity change. While the conceptions of research journeys and research autonomy represents a continuum of researcher development, such conceptions also have their limitations.

A possible richer narrative may be needed to describe the doctoral research education process and take account of the fundamental nature of the doctorate. This would include its complexity, the uncertainty involved, the extent to which research addresses the unknown, the roles of multiple actors and the emotions often accompanying the research experience. With less rich narratives candidates and supervisors often recognise that research is mostly a non-linear process and sometimes accompanied by uncertainty, isolation and motivational challenges.

The article addresses the metaphoric narrative of the 'quest' as it relates to doctoral research education to enrich the well-known 'journey' narrative in promoting research independence. The 'quest' narrative offers a nuanced account which includes at least six metaphoric elements: the desired object, the lengthy journey, the hero, several tests, the guardians and the helpers. Hereby 'quest' as metaphor offers a vehicle for a better understanding of the doctoral research education process - not only to doctoral candidates, but also to their supervisors. In addition, it implies a potentially useful thinking frame for facilitating development programmes for doctoral research candidates.

Keywords: Doctoral research education, doctoral supervision, doctoral research metaphors, quest as metaphor, researcher development.

1. INTRODUCTION

What does it take to complete a doctoral study for doctoral candidates who aspire towards scholarship and research independence? There are no easy answers to this question, but at the turn of the century, Brew (2001) and Pearson and Brew (2002) indicated different dimensions of conceptions of doctoral research as well as different dimensions of conceptions of scholarship. Brew's (2001) 'journey' conception of research, whereby doctoral studies are seen as articulated research journeys, points to existential issues and dilemmas linked to forming academic or research or scholarly identities (also see Higher Education Academy 2010). Doctoral research, in the sense of a 'journey' (not used in inverted commas further on – EMB), is interpreted as a personal and progressive route of discovery, not merely resulting in arriving at a 'destination', but leading to several changes along the way. In research education the question is ultimately whether and how doctoral journeys contribute to candidates becoming independent, autonomous and successful researchers.

Put differently, one could ask where doctoral candidates are heading and what the desired outcomes of a doctoral qualification are (also see Frick 2009). One premise is that a lack of researcher autonomy poses questions as to whether doctoral graduates experience successful change towards becoming 'doctorate' and develop as independent thinkers. It is in the notion of researcher autonomy where a link emerges among the doctoral journey, researcher identity formation and doctoral success.

Willison's (2006) and Willison and O'Regan's (2006, 2007) work on moving from heavily dependent research in undergraduate studies (a clear non-researcher identity) to research autonomy at the level of doctoral and post-doctoral work (a desired researcher identity) provides a useful way to explore researcher identity change. Their researcher skills development framework suggests six elements of movement towards researcher autonomy. These elements, in different ways, play a part in researcher identity formation within a move from doctoral candidature to a more advanced position of 'graduateness' or 'doctorateness'. These six elements can be briefly outlined as:

- *Curiosity:* To increasingly self-determine a need for knowledge and understanding; to be increasingly able to articulate research directions that expands the field or adds to knowledge in a particular field of problem-solving.
- *Determination:* To increasingly keep at the task of finding data or information from self-selected sources; to choose and develop appropriate methodology with self-structured guidelines and to increasingly generate new methods/methodologies towards answering research questions in novel applications.

- *Criticality:* To be able to increasingly evaluate data or information from self-generated criteria critically and rigorously; to generate substantial research outcomes for ideas, practices and interpretations that may become foundational in the field or discipline.
- *Organisation:* To organise data and information by increasingly using self-determined protocols; to start forming and developing research networks or communities.
- *Creativity:* To synthesise, analyse and apply information/data to increasingly fill self-identified gaps or extend knowledge; to develop new concepts or interpretations and address substantial concerns across scholarly or other communities.
- *Persuasion:* To increasingly master the language of the discipline or field; to choose appropriate genres to extend understanding and making knowledge publicly accessible and to increasingly contribute to the direction of conversations and discourse through publicly available communication of knowledge and understanding.

Researcher autonomy frameworks thus draw on the commonality of research education processes (Willison and O'Regan 2007) as well as Bernstein's (2000) notion of symbolic control and identity change. Such conceptions of an increase in researcher autonomy represent a clear continuum or journey of researcher development from a position of dependence to one of autonomy.

2. THE NEED FOR RICH NARRATIVE

However sound the journey metaphor and portrayal of research independency characteristics, a richer metaphoric narrative could potentially better describe the sometimes messy process that most candidates experience while they study towards their doctoral degree. The journey metaphor often suggests that the doctoral candidate starts from one point and then moves onto a next research or life stage. This has proved to be a too simplistic narrative for doctoral research education. The journey as metaphor also seems to be more descriptive rather than heuristic; which often implies to candidates and inexperienced supervisors a known start, a known destination and a mapped-out terrain. Thus the only real issue for those on the doctoral journey is how much effort to invest, the route to follow, mode of travelling and the duration of the journey. Journeys of research education also suggest a relatively predictable and structured beginning, middle and end – often questioned as an appropriate characterisation of doctoral education (Wellington et al. 2005; McCulloch and Stokes, 2008). For others the journey narrative may be a too predictable and routinised explanation for doctoral education (McCulloch 2013).

The complexity of the doctorate (Mouton 1996; 2001), the uncertainty that often accompanies research education, the extent to which the unknown is explored, the fact that multiple actors and role players are involved and the emotional ebbs and flows of the doctoral experience all need to be taken into account in doctoral research education (Bitzer & Vandenbergh 2014).

These are characteristics that the journey narrative only partially provides for. But before a potentially richer metaphor is suggested, some questions around the use of metaphoric language in relation to doctoral research education.

3. THE USE OF METAPHORIC NARRATIVE IN DOCTORAL EDUCATION

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things that actually have something important in common. The word metaphor itself is a metaphor, coming from a Greek word meaning to 'transfer' or 'carry across'. Metaphors thus 'carry' meaning from one word, image or idea to another. How metaphoric narratives can assist us in better understanding complex systems, issues and processes has been widely explored (Taylor 1984; Lakoff, 1993; Schweizer 1995; Turner 1997; Cortazzi & Jin 1999; Cameron 2003; Hughes & Tight 2013). At least five different approaches related to metaphoric narrative may be useful: In constructivist learning, by joining the cognitive and emotional learning domains, in promoting argumentative coherence, in discovery learning and in providing multi-layered meanings. A few lines on each of these approaches may suffice.
In education, metaphors are closely associated with constructivist approaches to learning. Constructivism supports the notion that knowledge arises with the context in which it is presented and within the pre-existing knowledge of the knower (Ortony, 1993; Canagarajah, 2001). Learning takes place as the learning context is better understood against the background and experience of the learner or researcher, which form the backbone of the metaphoric narrative. As understanding is not completely void of emotion, the use of metaphoric language can also bring the cognitive and emotional domains together by using language appropriate to the one as a lens for viewing the other (Haynes 1975; Brown, 2009).

In teaching logic, metaphors may also help to bring coherence to argumentation and therefore to understanding. For instance, metaphors facilitate interactive modes of thought between different knowledge domains as opposed to what would be achieved if simply thinking within a singular domain or along a linear mode (Sticht 1993; McCulloch 2013). By providing a functional context for acquiring new knowledge in terms of existing knowledge the metaphoric narrative produces saliency in the discourse which makes different domains of understanding cohere (Sticht 1993).

Metaphors may also act as “interactive” and “comparative” forces towards understanding (Haynes 1975, 274). The latter does not represent mere comparison, but a process of discovery which brings together the hitherto unconnected to provide new insights (Haynes, 1975). In doctoral supervision this notion makes sense as it suggests that in general, social researchers seem to understand the complexities of reality better by making use of stories whereby events can take on a contextual meaning (McCulloch 2013).

Also, metaphors can transfer meaning at many levels (Carter & Pitcher 2010) and some authors argue that metaphors can contribute to make factual data and information interesting and thus more understandable (Low 2008). Metaphors are thus important tools in describing, learning about and interrogating social phenomena.

If one takes into account that metaphoric language ascribes characteristics to something which belong to something else, it may be important that the defining and the applied characteristics fit well together. In this sense Bontekoe (1987) has pointed to good or inspiring metaphors but also to inappropriate or even misleading ones. Sometimes metaphoric language may be very useful in one sense and completely useless in another (Weed 2006; McCulloch 2013). For instance, Grant (2008) explored the 'master-slave' or 'apprenticeship' metaphor in doctoral education and found that while it may be highly problematic in a relational sense, it is quite applicable in getting the research done. Other metaphors with dual affinities include 'discipleship', 'midwifery' and 'parenting' narratives (Lee & Green 2009) or 'traffic rules' and 'packaging' language when doctoral writing conventions are referred to (Carter & Pitcher 2010).

When doctoral candidates and graduates are asked about their study experiences they often produce metaphoric narratives. In the early stages of a sponsored project by The Higher Education Academy (2010) in the UK doctoral graduates were asked to reflect on how they experienced their studies (Brown 2009). One graduate (Hoult 2009, 21) said that she experienced the typical 'community of scholars' narrative quite differently from other candidates in the sense the community that she was part of was rather "… a loose affiliation of other hermits and the odd prophet in the wilderness… communities exist in the desert, but they are moving, nomadic and loosely affiliated…the gatekeepers wouldn't let me pass" (through guarded city gates). Another graduate (Haynes 2009, 27 - 28) applied the metaphor of 'the body and medicine' to her doctoral experience with expressions such as "migraine... being scarred… constipation…gestation and birthing…stillborn" featuring in the narrative. In the same interview she also explored the metaphor of 'midwifery' to illuminate her experience of the relationship between candidate and supervisor.

Despite this variety in metaphoric narrative, the metaphor of the journey appears to be mostly used and reported on. Carter and Pitcher, for example, compare the thesis research process to a long and arduous journey where advisors may make the steeper passages more durable (Carter & Pitcher 2010, 580). Journey language can also be found in titles of articles (Bayley, Ellis, Abreu-Ellis & O'Reilly 2012), chapters (Wellington 2010) and in discussions of doctoral education. McCulloch (2013) points out that Lee and Green (2009, 622) call the jouney metaphor "pervasive" in doctoral studies while Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch & Sikes (2005, 31) emphasise that readers of texts are in general on their own and that "…we can neither

come alongside you to share the journey, nor provide you with a detailed map or account of what you will encounter along the way". Wilkinson (2005) introduces his book on doctoral education as an attempt to assist candidates to make a postgraduate journey which can be a most demanding, while Trafford and Leshem (2008) implies with their book a circular doctoral journey where reaching the successful destination is often to revisit the point of departure.

What also seems important is that metaphors are applicable to changing circumstances and to the diversity of needs. For instance, Lee and Green (2009) emphasise the importance to develop metaphors that challenge the idea that a research degree is simply a matter of techniques to be mastered and to report results. They identify two areas for concern regarding the conceptual limitations and constraints of available ways of thinking about research degree supervision. The first is a lack of emphasis on education at the expense of a focus on corporatisation and the second the continued implicit assumption that supervision entails a one-to-one relationship between one supervisor and one candidate (Lee & Green 2009). The remainder of this paper therefore proposes a potentially rich metaphoric narrative that addresses concerns such as these.

4. THE 'QUEST' AS AN INCLUSIVE AND RICH METAPHOR

An argument can be made for a more inclusive metaphor for doctoral research education and in doing so, the work of Propp (1927) on the morphology of folktales and Auden (1969) who wrote extensively on the literary work of JRR Tolkien become prominent. In addition, and drawing on several other authors, McCulloch (2013) argues that to do justice to the doctorate and doctoral research education as complex and potentially transformative experiences the 'quest' (not used in inverted commas further on – EMB) narrative offers a nuanced and appropriate metaphor.

Metaphors are important and when they work well they operate at more than a simple descriptive level which is the level at which the journey operates. The quest, on the other hand, is heuristic and encourages insight and helps bring meaning, coherence and understanding to what can be a confusing experience for many research students.

In mythology and literature the quest represents a journey towards a goal, as a plot device and often as a symbol. It appears in the folklore of many nations (Propp 1927), but also figures prominently in non-national cultures (Auden 1969). The objects of quests require great exertion on the part of the hero and the overcoming of many obstacles, typically including many routes and sub-routes. These routes lead the hero to many different locations and discoveries, but in the end he or she obtains the precious object which changes the person and fulfills a previous lack in her or his life (Propp 1972; Auden 1969; Isaacs & Zimbardo 1969).

Quest narrative enriches the journey metaphor (Higher Education Academy 2010) in assisting to interrogate the doctoral research education experience. The reason being that the quest, with its component elements of the precious object, the long journey, the hero, tests, guardians and helpers offers an appropriate vehicle for better understanding, not only to research students, but also to their supervisors and those interested in doctoral education as scholars of higher education (McCulloch 2013). The quest's ubiquity across cultures means that it is well suited to doctoral programmes with international students drawn from different cultures. In addition, the quest metaphor poses important questions about the contemporary doctorate such as the tension between the private and the public benefits arising from doctoral research education. In turn, this links to questions such as who pays for the doctorate and whether multiple motivations and purposes for the doctorate prevail. Auden addresses this possibility in his discussion of the precious object saying that, in "many versions of the quest, both ancient and modern, the winning or recovery of the precious object is for the common good of the society to which the hero belongs" (Auden 1969, 46). It is important that a metaphor can raise this and other contentious issues as the motivation to pursue a doctoral degree may reside in the public benefits it accrues (for example, a contribution to public health or increased historical knowledge) rather than merely the private (for example, promoting a career).

Identifying and explaining the quest as a rich metaphor for doctoral research education has positive implications in at least three directions. Firstly for doctoral researcher development, secondly for their supervisors and advisors and thirdly for those who facilitate development programmes for research students and their supervisors. These implications will be further alluded to later in this paper. McCulloch (2013), for instance, points to metaphors being valuable in that they provide useful starting points to structure workshop presentations prior to discussion and also to act as prompts for discussion on specific aspects of the doctoral experience. The generative nature of the quest metaphor makes it particularly appropriate for these purposes.

Auden (1969) identifies the essential elements which characterise the quest as narrative and in the remainder of the paper I shall discuss the metaphor's appropriateness to the experience of doctoral education. The six elements[1] of the quest are:

- A precious object and/or person to be found and possessed or married;
- A long, arduous journey to find the object, for its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers;
- A hero. The precious object cannot be found by anybody, but only by the one person who possesses the right qualities or character;

[1]Propp (1927) has identified eight broad character types in his analysis of folklore stories: The hero, the helper, the villain, the false hero, the donor, the dispatcher, the princess and the princess's father.

- A test or series of tests by which the unworthy are screened out and the hero are revealed;
- The guardians of the object who must be overcome before it can be won. They may be simply a further test of the hero's character and abilities, or they may be malignant in themselves;
- The helpers, who with their knowledge and powers assist the hero and without whom he would never have succeeded. They may appear in many forms.

In terms of the key stages of the quest narrative, Booker (2004) identifies five such stages: The call, the journey, arrival and frustration, final ordeals and reaching the goal. Such stages may be quite familiar to doctoral graduates and for the sake of brevity will not be explored further here.

Drawing mainly the perspectives of Auden (1969), Booker (2004), Hughes and Tight (2013) and McCulloch (2013), I shall briefly point to the six metaphoric elements in terms of their relation to doctoral education.

5. METAPHORIC ELEMENTS OF THE QUEST

The precious object

The precious object being sought through the doctoral quest may take various forms. It may be the award of the doctoral qualification or the title of 'Doctor' with its all-important approval of the conferring institution; the precious object may also be the knowledge which is gained through study, the original contribution the new knowledge makes to the field of study, a more autonomous research position or even the self-knowledge gained through the reflection in and of the doctoral education process. Alternatively, it may be the solution, the partial solution, or the better definition of a particular issue or problem - whether social, technical, theoretical or cultural. It may also be the development of a new concept, artefact or performance.

The outcomes of most doctoral research education are unknown until discovered or uncovered. This may imply that the understanding of what the precious object is can shift. Had this not been the case, the activity would not be research. While different candidates and supervisors may desire different (precious) objects in different combinations and to varying degrees, there is a world of difference between a doctorate which is undertaken for credentials only and one undertaken to provide transformational education or research autonomy (Smith 2009). The precious object is thus more than what is merely desired as it provides the intrinsic motivation needed for pursuing and completing the doctorate (also see Phillips & Pugh 2005).

The long journey

Whilst partially questioning the metaphor of the journey as an appropriate characterisation of the complete doctoral education process, one cannot dispense with the notion of time, travel and distance. As with any form of education, to be successful the experience must change the person in some way (Hughes & Tight 2013; McCulloch 2013). One may rather ask what kind of journey is implied as the doctoral quest is lengthy, with relatively few candidates completing in less than three years full-time or four to five years part-time.

As in any quest, doctoral candidates are often distracted by side-adventures or by going down blind alleys. Some supervisors encourage this sort of activity so that candidates can learn to recognise a false or unproductive path, while in other cases it is the candidate themselves who pursues non-research project-related activities; for instance part-time undergraduate teaching, paid or voluntary work, assisting with the research programmes of supervisors and so on. In some cases these activities are deliberately built into doctoral programmes and in some cases the planned distraction can provide time out to think about a project or can introduce candidates to new ideas which supply an answer to the thesis- or project-related problems they are facing. For example, teaching a theoretical or research methodology course to Honours or Master's students may be a good way of developing a better understanding of the subject or topic (McCulloch 2013).

The journey element can also include a degree of personal travel; for instance, visiting universities or research sites in other countries to enrich the doctoral study programme. Such experiences can, and some supervisors would argue should, be transformative - certainly in the way the candidates thinking may be challenged and possibly also in personal terms Brew (2001) and Pearson & Brew (2002) emphasise that doctoral education, as with all good education, should result in personal change and that change can be characterized as the distance travelled. Doctoral education thus involves one or more journeys and each can involve a significant distance, but that is only part of the narrative.

The hero

The undoubted hero in the doctoral quest is the research graduate (Bitzer & Vandenbergh 2014). It is the doctoral candidate who is unmistakably involved as in search of the precious object. It is he or she that has been motivated to study for the degree, who engages the intellectual landscape and making sense of it, who is in search of the original contribution to knowledge and who bears the ultimate responsibility for failure should that be the outcome. It is the doctoral candidate who is plunging into the unknown and who will reap the prize for success or pay the cost for failure (Hughes & Tight 2013; McCulloch 2013).

Doctoral quests require intellectual capacities and skills to complete and very importantly ask for individual qualities such as tenacity and the courage to see to see the project through. In his discussion of quest narrative, Auden identified two types of heroes. One resembles the epic hero whose superior intellectual and moral qualities are manifest to all. It seems clear that this person unmistakably has what it takes to complete the doctorate. The other type, which is common in many tales, is the hero whose qualities are concealed. Here it is often the youngest, weakest, apparently least clever, the one who everybody would judge as least likely to succeed, turns out to be the hero when all his or her rivals or companions have failed. Tolkien's heroes, for instance, are interesting characters in that they are the little, ordinary and everyday people who has the courage do the right thing. Also, the heroes can't do it alone; as some doctoral candidates need much assistance and support to successfully complete their studies (Auden 1969, 46).

Many supervisors, academics and administrators would be able to recognise these two ideal types of doctoral candidates. However, most may actually fall somewhere between these ideal types and it is encouraging for candidates to realise that they do not to fit one particular character-type to be successful in a research degree (McCulloch 2013). The quest metaphor can thus be used productively to encourage students to reflect on the challenges involved. The doctoral hero is the person who, when faced with apparently insurmountable problems, finds both the courage and means to solve, detour around or design them out. From the experience of many graduates and supervisors in doctoral education it is quite clear that one cannot succeed on one's own and nor does one need special powers to complete the quest, only a pure heart (clarity about one's goals), a clear mind (the intellectual capacity) and perseverance.

A test or series of tests

Whereas the journey narrative suggests the traveller to be en route from beginning to end with the occasional time-out, change-over or interruption, the quest narrative sees the hero as battling and facing tests to allow her or him to pass through to the next stage and progress towards the ultimate prize. As the doctorate is increasingly becoming controlled for quality, these tests may become more formalised and can lead to intense frustration. Such was the case for Hoult (2009, 9) who refers to repeated demands by her Research Degrees Sub-committee to account for envisaging the end results of her studies. As emphasised by McCulloch (2013), the hero in doctoral quests does not suddenly appear, but is revealed over time - largely by overcoming the many challenges posed by doctoral research. In conversations and at conferences some researchers into doctoral education have referred to 'becoming' doctorate rather than 'getting' a doctoral qualification as candidates gradually develop and reveal within themselves the qualities of 'doctorateness' (Trafford & Leshem 2008).

While at times tests may thus seem to be designed to prevent the timely completion of a doctorate, viewing them as part of the quest casts such tests or challenges in a completely new light (McCulloch 2013).

The guardians

In the doctoral quest, the guardians of the object who must be overcome before it can be won or awarded are the examiners of the thesis (or, in some South African universities, also the oral examination or viva). The examiners are the actors in the process who decide whether the candidate has performed at a sufficiently high level to be allowed to possess the precious object and join the stage of heroes. In the case of theses by publication these actors can also be peer reviewers who determine the academic quality of publishable or published material. The guardians for both the discipline and the institution are thus the examiners or peer reviewers and questions as to whether or not malignancy has been involved must be left to discussions about specific cases. However, surfacing the issue of doctoral examination prevents the development of a mythology around the examination process, encourages candidates to develop confidence in the processes which are in place to prevent or remedy unfairness and helps to maintain confidence in the value and worth of the qualification to be awarded (McCulloch 2013).

The helpers

In quest narrative the question is whether the hero is successful or not. Is the successful pursuit of the precious object for doctoral candidates a one-person effort or something involving just the candidate and sometimes, but not always, her or his loyal companion(s)? Auden says that in the quest, success is not only subscribed to the hero's own powers, but also to those who help him or her win. She or he is able to enlist their advice because, unlike their betters, (s)he is humble enough to take advice and is kind enough to give assistance to strangers who, like her-/himself, appear to be nobody important in particular (Auden 1969, 46).

Unlike the mythical quest, in the doctoral quest the helpers take human form most of the time and include supervisors, research advisers, colleagues, librarians and laboratory staff, administrative staff, friends, family and those who provide information, data or commentary and critique on papers or thesis chapters (Bitzer & Vandenbergh 2014; McCulloch 2013).

Conclusions and prospects for further research

What has been established is that there are different dimensions of doctoral research education as well as different ways in which doctoral candidates can achieve research autonomy – something ultimately important in doctoral education and researcher development.

I also established that metaphors can be useful tools in assisting doctoral candidates to bring coherence between the known and the unknown or that what is to be found out. Metaphoric narrative can potentially promote better understandings of doctoral research processes and in most cases they serve as mediating tools to better explain the complex processes involved in doctoral education. Metaphors are thus important and when they work well, they operate at the post-descriptive level.

The journey as metaphor seems appropriate for the doctoral research process, but at the same time it may be a too descriptive account to address the multiple elements and complexities that doctoral education involves. The quest narrative is heuristic, encourages broader insight and helps to bring meaning, coherence and understanding to what can often be a confusing experience for many doctoral candidates. With its constituent elements of the precious object, the long journey, the hero, tests, guardians and helpers the quest narrative offers an appropriate vehicle for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges posed by doctoral research education; to research students as well as supervisors and those interested in doctoral education as scholars of higher education. It also ties in well with the qualities of research autonomy referred to earlier and, in addition, the quest's ubiquity across cultures which also means that it is applicable to doctoral programmes with international candidates from diverse backgrounds. This includes students, for instance, from Africa who know about traditional initiation practices, how to overcome numerous barriers to study as first-generation candidates and extensive family financial and other support.

Doctoral candidates, if interviewed, can surface important questions about contemporary doctoral issues and how different candidates experience the quest they are on. The tension between the private and the public benefits arising from doctoral research education often raises questions of who pays and whether there are multiple motivations and purposes for the doctorate.

The identification and explication of the quest as an appropriate metaphor for doctoral research education has positive implications for researcher development and those involved in facilitating development programmes for doctoral candidates and their supervisors. Metaphors provide useful prompts to structure workshop presentations prior to discussion and to act as triggers for the discussion on specific aspects of the doctoral research and supervision experience. The generative nature of quest narratives makes them particularly appropriate for these purposes. In all aspects of life we define reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of these metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments and execute plans - all on the basis of how we in part structure our experiences, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor. For doctoral candidates, who become (hero) graduates, the quest stands as an appropriate research education narrative.

The quest represents the search that continues for that illusive something and every step brings the researcher closer to what she or he needs to know or find out - always aware that the precious object may not be found soon, and only after facing and overcoming many challenges.

A further positive implication for researcher education and development is that the quest narrative is known to almost everybody, even if they may not be aware of it. This paper has been written, for instance, drawing on the original ideas of JRR Tolkien (1892 – 1973) who authored 'The Hobbit' (1937) and 'The Lord of the Rings' (1954-55) trilogy, which are forms of quest. Popular films and many video games are based on the quest model, while many of the tales people grow up with are based on the idea of the quest – also in the African context. Its universal and appropriate nature makes quest narrative an ideal addition to that of the journey as a thinking frame which could enhance the understanding of, and promote reflection on, doctoral research education processes.

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