

The Postgraduate's Life: living – and flourishing – on the edge

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TCD, 'Postgraduate Lives – Challenges and Opportunities', 9 May 2019

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The postgraduate's tale: A life of infinite demands

- Study
- Fieldwork
- Family
- Supervisor(s)
- Teaching
- (Uncertain) status
- Department
- Getting published
- Relationships
- Life (accommodation; money; interests)

A learning ecology; and more than that

- Overlapping spaces
 - Ecosystems - plural
- The student buffeted by them
- And moving in and across them
- Trying to bring coherence to complexity
- And even chaos

The pg student as lifewide learner

- A multitude of learning spaces
- Taking on (more and more) responsibility
- Having to learn
 - The studying itself (the literature)
 - Research techniques
 - Renting
 - University
 - Relationships
 - Stuff

Three main learning domains

- Becoming an x – a ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu); a ‘mode of existence’ (Latour)
- Lifeworld
- World of work (in or outside the university)

- A phase of transitions/ of forging oneself into something(s)
- Perhaps multiple identities
- Issues of the interconnectedness of these domains
- Spinning plates

A learning ecology

- What is an ecology?
- A set of entities that hang more or less together
- (An assemblage)
- That has powers of continuation ('autopoiesis')
- But also fragility and liable to be impaired
- The PG student has her/his own learning ecology
- Working it out, across multiple ecosystems (ecologies of knowledge, social institutions, economy, law, politics ...)

‘Who am I?’

- The question – ‘who am I?’ – lurks continuously
- No stable centre of being
- One’s identity is open
 - And a struggle
 - Not entirely in one’s hands (supervisor/ landlord/ funding agency)
- Being is ‘being possible’ (Heidegger) – but too many possibilities
- Despair (‘sickness’) – Kierkegaard – lurks therefore.

A necessary darkness

- There's a darkness here (Søren Bengtson)
- Hidden interior space
- As one makes sense of an incoherent set of spaces
- And one senses that the wider world won't be sympathetic
- Hearing voices – of supervisor, editors, students, friends
 - Even intellectual 'acquaintances' (in one's reading)
- And juggling one's hopes

Positive (as well as negative) darkness

- Yes, some of this darkness contains anxieties, forebodings
- But some offers a space in which creative thoughts might emerge
- As unbeknown to oneself the impulses within play themselves out
- One has no control at times
- Wonderful thoughts just occur.

Finding space

- Finding physical space
- But also intellectual space
- Having a note-book
- Be like a painter or novelist
- Keep reading
- And put stuff aside – just write!

The value of affirmation

- RB's story
- Finding sources of affirmation
- From wherever
- The going gets difficult
- Forging self-belief

The value of networking

- Affirmation
- Self-projection
- Being in the right place at the right time
- Takes 10 years to gain a secure academic position
- Joining 1 or 2 academic/ learned societies
- Becoming active
- Sources of support

Handling one's liminality

- Lack of understanding
- Even the supervisor (THE cartoon)
- Intellectual homelessness
- Knowing more and more about less and less
- Becoming aware of one's ignorance
- The fear of being found out.

A collaborative venture - and the value of international students

- The value of collaboration among students
 - Whether PGT or PGR
- A set of conversations – intellectual and social
- Presence of international students – global conversations on campus
- Immensely challenging (increasing literature)
- Important that the nationalities don't just remain in their national groupings
- Pedagogies should encourage (cross-cultural) communication.

Flying & flourishing

- Coming into oneself
- Not exactly finding oneself
- But finding a place for oneself
- A never-ending project
- Never at an end
- But solace in gaining some recognition
- One's first paper being published.

Having a project

- An intellectual or professional project
- Will be hazy, unclear
- Push at it
- The jigsaw puzzle
- And the child's kaleidoscope
- Always liable to be shaken up.

Stand up for yourself!

- See the postgraduate time as a set of opportunities
- Intellectual, academic, employability, social
- Forge yourself
- Get involved in your own projects
- Hamlet: ‘To thine own self be true’ – authenticity
- Don’t be afraid to press your own interests.
 - (eg your name on papers, and even appearing first.)

Conclusions

- The PG student's life
- Precarious
- Liminal – on the edge
- A phase of personal anxiety
- With a high degree of 'darkness'
- But space for flourishing – and that darkness can help
- It is the time of one's own becoming.
- Of course, there are profound implications for universities and for curricula and supervisors – for another day.



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