



Why Is There a Need For a ‘Doctoral Compass’? A Metacognitive Scaffolding for Navigating Doctoral Progression.

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Why is there a need for a 'doctoral compass'? A metacognitive scaffolding for navigating doctoral progression

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**Research Domain:** Postgraduate Scholarship and Practice (PGSP)

**Abstract:** This presentation will consider the complex doctoral landscape, with a view to offering a holistic conceptualisation of the 'twin' elements in each doctoral journey. Such a journey equally entails both: a) doctoral level research; and b) doctoral scholars' development. Within this distinct doctoral landscape, I will discuss the different key milestones and argue for the connection among threshold concepts, stages of competence development, Imposter Syndrome, the Dunning-Kruger Effect, and the formal and hidden curricula. By connecting and synthesising these well-known doctoral concepts, I will endeavour not only to offer a new conceptual framework, likened to 'a compass' when navigating this potentially complex journey, but I will also elucidate how this framework can be harnessed better particularly post-pandemic. Arguably, having a compass offers doctoral scholars both the flexibility and a strong sense of direction as they reconnect and rebuild their doctoral learning practices during these challenging and transformative times.

**Paper:** Why is there a need for a 'doctoral compass'? A metacognitive scaffolding for navigating doctoral progression

Doctoral journeys are a typical analogy given to the long and complex PhD process. Recently, some other metaphors including 'quest' or adventure have also been used to describe the doctoral experience (Elliot et al. 2016; McCulloch 2013; Skakni 2018). By employing the journey metaphor, it has been argued that having a map is not possible due to the doctoral genre itself. The variation in relation to the distinctive PhD challenges that characterise each doctoral scholar experience, whether: a) intellectual; b) personal, c) learning adjustment; or d) contextual challenge – makes each PhD journey unique (Elliot 2021; Lovitts 2005).

In this conceptual paper, I would like to offer a metacognitive lens to understand more deeply the doctoral landscape, primarily through the use of a number of psychological theories and concepts.

All doctoral scholars are by and large assessed through the use of shared PhD standards, where scholars are expected to have developed the skilful use of argument, the capacity for theorising a framework, creating new knowledge, in-depth ability for analysis and interpretation of research data

and a wide comprehension of the research paradigms. Taken together, they exemplify the threshold concepts in doctoral education that doctoral scholars need to master to achieve a successful as well as a transformative PhD experience (Kiley 2009, 2019; Kiley & Wisker 2009).

I will explore how such threshold concepts can be mapped onto the conceptualised stages of competence development in the field of counselling. This appreciation of developing competences takes into account the four identified stages of competence development comprising: a) unconscious incompetence; b) conscious incompetence; c) conscious competence; and d) unconscious competence (Castle & Buckler 2018; Donati & Watts 2005).

A stronger understanding between threshold concepts and stages of competence development among doctoral scholars naturally paves the way for further exploration of two psychological phenomena, i.e. the Imposter Syndrome and the Dunning-Kruger Effect (Deconinck 2015; Kirschner & Hendrick 2020; Kruger & Dunning 1999). Whereas these two concepts are seemingly opposed to each other, it could be argued that they may both serve as psychological barriers to doctoral scholars' progress. This is because a faulty assessment of their actual competence can lead to them being dissuaded from seeking the support that they require to develop further (Elliot 2021).

I would like to link this to the notion of the formal and the hidden curricula as complementary channels of doctoral learning (Elliot et al. 2020). By recognising, valuing and capitalising on both curricula, doctoral scholars are able to maximise their learning and access learning resources as well as the support they can receive through various scholarly and non-scholarly communities.

In discussing seemingly disparate concepts, each concept is like a jigsaw piece that helps elucidate the nature of the doctoral journey and what such a journey entails. These concepts are therefore consolidated and unified, with their connections highlighted (Elliot 2021,10). This leads to the concept of the 'twin' doctoral journey. On the one hand, the first refers to the often recognised and more conventional journey, i.e. the 'research landscape' where the focus is on doctoral scholars' acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, thesis writing and research skills. On the other hand, its twin journey refers to the 'doctoral development' landscape, where the focus is on the doctoral scholars' overall development per se, e.g. identity formation, personal growth, professional development, psychological wellness and personalised socialisation experience.

[Figure 2 here]

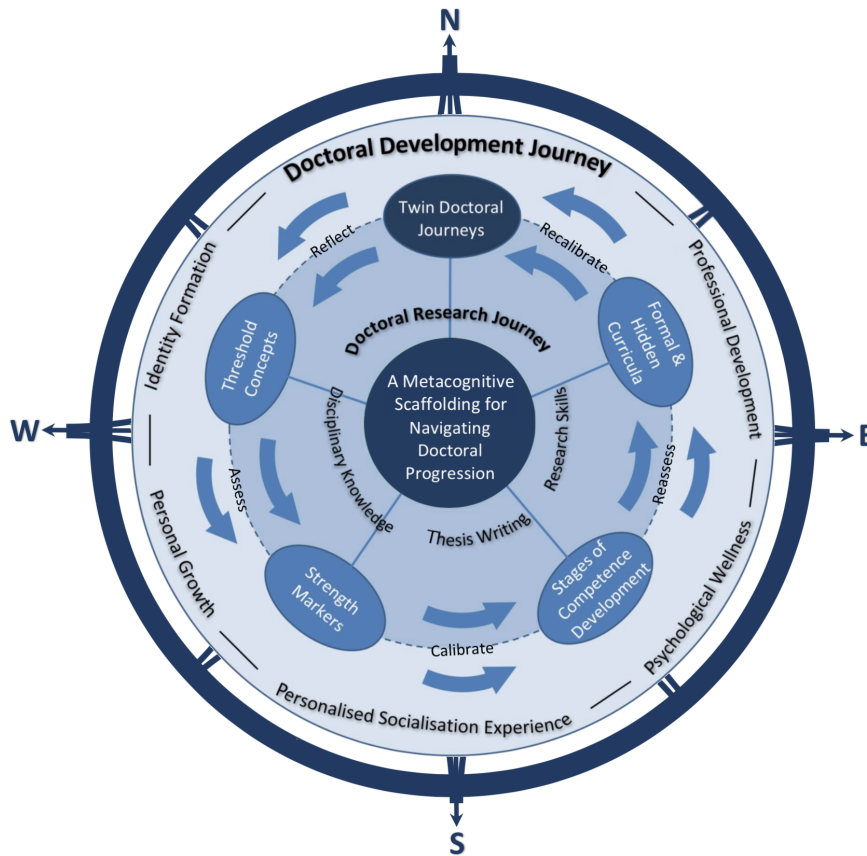
Mapping out these various interlinked concepts paved the way for Figure 1. In this conceptual framework, three central points are key:

- A metacognitive and holistic understanding of the doctoral requirements
- Awareness of the interdependence between formal and hidden curricula and how to tap into the vastness of available learning resources
- Application of the 'essential praxes' when addressing doctoral challenges and sustaining doctoral scholars' mental health and well-being.

Overall, the doctoral learning process requires in-depth and authentic reflection on a number of factors, including doctoral thresholds, personal strength markers and one's level of competence. Doing so will enable doctoral scholars to assess and reassess, and subsequently calibrate and recalibrate their learning according to their developed strengths and competences, knowledge and skills. This personal learning cycle will be unique to each individual and may continue throughout the doctoral period until completion and may even continue post-PhD. With all the new challenges brought about by the pandemic, flexibility within the framework also means that each doctoral scholar can recalibrate its use depending on their focus and requirements post-pandemic. (749)

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Figure 2. A metacognitive scaffolding for navigating doctoral progression.



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