

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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'Towards Gothic-influenced approaches to doctoral journeys and supervision: challenging conformity, destruction and despair, releasing and shaping creative energies.'

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Abstract: We take a Gothic-influenced approach to reconsider current and ongoing issues of doctoral and supervisory 'darkness' (Bengtsen&Barnett , 2017; Wisker, Robinson&Bengtsen, 2017) and concern about the isolated, messy doctoral journey and accompanying issues of wellbeing, mental health, desolation, depression for both candidate and supervisor (Morris&Wisker, 2011) Gothic strategies first unsettle, defamiliarise, upset complacency, ironise the establishment, reveal instabilities and dark secrets of behaviours affecting acting, speaking, writing, constructing knowledge, imposing it on others. They also enable us to problematise, critique, change behaviours, moving on positively, creatively with criticality, essential in doctoral research and supervision. We engage with theorised darkness and ways forward using creative, imaginative responses through art&creative writing.

Bengtsen, S. and Barnett, R. (2017) Confronting the dark side of higher education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 51(1), 114–131.

Wisker, G., Robinson, G. and Bengtsen, S. (2017) Penumbra: Doctoral support as drama: From the 'lightside' to the 'darkside'. From front of house to trapdoors and recesses. *Innovations in Education Teaching International*, 54 (6), 527-538.

Paper: Towards Gothic-influenced approaches to doctoral journeys and supervision: challenging conformity, destruction and despair, releasing and shaping creative energies.

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This research based paper and session take a Gothic-influenced approach to reconsider current and ongoing issues of doctoral and supervisory 'darkness' (Bengtson and Barnett , 2017, 2019; Wisker, Robinson and Bengtson, 2016, 2017). We use the strategies of the Gothic first to expose both distress and complacency and then to encourage criticality and creativity through creative, imaginative responses (Wisker, 2014).

There is an ongoing and current focus on the dark, often isolated, confusing, messy doctoral journey which raises concerns about wellbeing and mental health, potential desolation, depression and lack of progress for both candidate and supervisor (Morris and Wisker 2011). This, we argue, is experienced in a neoliberal context of financial and time pressures on both candidates and supervisors, and increasing expectations of 'usefulness', which might lead to a merely un-creative, unchallenging functionality, or research and creative critical paralysis.

We address the underlying question of why we consider the Gothic in doctoral learning and supervision, and use a critical Gothic approach, sharing perceptions, expressions and strategies to first face, illuminate, challenge and then move on critically and creatively from the darkness of doctoral journeys and their supervision.

The Gothic here is being used as a theorised entrance in exploring the darker sides of the experiences of doctoral students and of role, practices and interactions of supervision, as a way of revealing those darker elements, through image, metaphor and narrative, and so starting the conversations about ways of challenging the destructive sides of darkness and bringing light. Contemporary Gothic can be used to identify and problematise characteristics which we see in the doctoral journey, in supervisory relationships and supervision processes, in different settings with different intentions. The aim of the Gothic is to unsettle, defamiliarise (Punter, 2012; Botting, 2002, 2014) then, we argue, to upset complacency on the one hand, ironise the establishment, unsettle fixed beliefs and processes, expose damage, reveal the instabilities beneath. It reveals dark secrets and hidden truths of behaviours and beliefs which contribute to our ways of acting, speaking, writing, constructing knowledge and imposing it on others. In doing so it enables us to more fully understand, problematise, critique, change behaviours and move on positively and creatively. In doctoral learning and interactions this insight enables agency, the taking of positive control of the learning journey, supervisory relations and construction (or co-construction) of knowledge.

Supervision and supervisor candidate interactions can be described as Gothic interactions in a Gothic space, as defined by liminality and potential for conceptual threshold crossings (Kiley and Wiske , 2009; Lather 1998) initial troublesomeness, reflections, actions informing breakthroughs in knowledge construction, criticality, creativity. Supervision itself is also Gothic because it is haunted by the ambiguity of power, restlessly shifting, shuttling between supervision as enabling or denying epistemological access, and the dual option of either including or excluding doctoral students into disciplinary cultures and research environments. For supervisors there is insecurity about student development of knowledge, and darker considerations about how to build our own reputations (often on the back of others' work). Through the lens of the Gothic we see the Doppelgänger nature of supervision. At the same time it can be an academic practice of support, faith, and moral

behaviour but also a practice of theft, undercutting, and silencing. Doctoral study is understood through the lens of the Gothic beyond these interactions, and beyond issues of wellbeing because of the destabilisation, troublesomeness of knowledge contestation, the stuck places, where issues of paralysis can emerge but where movement forward is also desired and sought. In the context of positive interactions and developments, liminality is experienced, moving into new critical and creative understanding and knowledge construction. Challenge as engagement opens up the constructive, theorised, conversations about positively powerful, enabling, practices for both doctoral candidates and supervisors, and hence more conceptual critical and creative doctoral work (Kiley and Wisker, 2009). Doctoral learning and supervision as regulated or unregulated practice in universities, are rife with issues of and potential for contradictions, power imbalance, problematic ownership, the power of one voice over another, surveillance and neglect, undermining of rights and worth, of dismay, disorientation and theft.

We will share some of our established research (eg Wisker Robinson and Bengtsen, 2017) into the liminal space of doctoral learning and its supervision, using theories and strategies of the Gothic and offer risky examples of using creative art and writing to engage with challenging complacencies and despair and releasing creative constructive energies enabled by forming responses.

After a discussion sharing topical concerns, literature, and our established research, and a brief introduction to Gothic-influenced theories and strategies, participants will be invited to engage reflectively and creatively with short Gothic creative art and literary work (Robinson and Wisker, 2019) and to consider and construct perspectives and actions to support more illuminating, enriching, constructive doctoral and supervisory experiences for a variety of positive outcomes.

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