Paper 3. ‘Rites of passage and playing the doctoral game’
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This paper brings together the notion of ‘rites of passage’ (Meyer & Land, 2005), Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (see Moll, 1992), and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) Legitimate Peripheral Participation and applies these concepts to the idea that for many research candidates the doctoral experience is one of first approximating the behaviours of researchers, and then more specifically researchers within a particular discipline. Working through this rite of passage entails a number of developments and changes leading to a transformation, in most although not all, candidates as they become the medical research scientist or the research historian. This argument will be embedded in the work of Meyer, Land et al (2006) on threshold concepts and the work of Wisker et al on threshold concepts at the research education level.

Theories of the acquisition of threshold concepts focus or moments of challenge to students’ identity where they are invited and encouraged to develop both new levels of thinking and researching and new ways of being as a postgraduate student. These new levels and way of being involve undertaking rites of passage, learning the language not merely of the subject area but of postgraduate study and learning to behave as a postgraduate researcher with a the rigour, focus design, and articulacy in writing and shaping arguments which this expects, Three case studies are focused on here of students for whom this rite of passage, this transition through the liminal state, is a struggle.

References