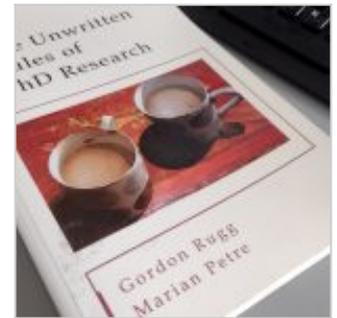


# Unwritten Stories of PhD



03/02/2022

I write this post to document my own journey a little, and for the benefit of others who think they aren't good enough, aren't suitable or are 'the wrong kind of person' for doing this kind of thing. That was probably my own self-view. But I am now a Dr, and you could be too.

*(Longread)*

I was first pointed toward doing PhD by an early tutor, the inestimably wonderful Jenny Le Peuple, who was a senior lecturer at the former Guildhall University, at that time still fairly recently merged with North London University in a widely unpopular alliance of two large and capable institutions (that frankly didn't need to merge) into the new London Metropolitan University. But that's another story. Jenny was really great, proper 'old school brilliant', a usability and interaction design expert, who was pioneering a new masters programme, MSc Usability, at London Met. She was an ex Ravensbourne Art School graduate who had gravitated into computing, a not uncommon situation with many of the earlier 'computer people' of that era. I myself am ex music artist/songwriter and I have other friends who are ex journalists or from other kinds of creative pursuit backgrounds. So, here we all were in the mid 2000's (2005 ish), making the world of computing a better, more well designed and well written place.

I was studying a module called 'Research and Development', consisting of six areas of work. This was a modified and streamlined version of an earlier ten segment module designed by another very erudite and well published old school lecturer, Bruce Christie. Christie resigned soon after I began at London Met, out of sheer exasperation at the poor quality of students and teaching at this new university. (Again, another story, but Bruce, in my humble view, was totally wrong to do this, as well as about his attitude to how computing was 'done'.) Anyway.... This module was a cross programme module taken as a required (compulsory) unit by several masters degrees: Usability, Internet Applications Development, Multimedia Systems, and ICT Consultancy. I was studying Multimedia Systems. This module was very difficult, and arguably worth a lot more than the 20 credits it got for doing it. It was notorious for people failing, or getting low marks. I was continually warned about it by one or two lecturers who seemed to think I wasn't very good and that this module would be my downfall. Subsequently, I was worried about it, it scared me. But, while one or two lecturers seemed to think I would fail at the degree, there were others who had the opposite view, to keep me going, motivated and confident enough to carry on. This is important, because confidence is everything in this situation. Not over confidence, but determination to see it through. It is fair to say I was not perhaps the usual material for doing academic things - or so it appeared. I was an ageing rock chick who had entered into university late in life, bedraggled and at a very low ebb.

But, I digress. This module was fantastic, exactly why I had finally taken the plunge and come to university to find out how much I knew, how 'good' you needed to be, to be considered skilled and knowledgeable about computing and digital media. Initially I was wary, and there were significant problems in the module regarding group work, changed groups, my insistence to make things different - I was prepared to stick up for myself - but I worked through each segment of assignments with deep diligence and total engagement. Perhaps the negative attitude by those lecturers helped to motivate me. But I also discovered that many things I knew from my previous job work experience were very relevant. I met several fabulous co-students from the other degree programmes while doing this module, and though I had made one good friend who was on my degree, I really enjoyed meeting some people

from both the Usability and IAD courses. This made a lot of difference. Peer learning is extremely important in the general scheme of things. I discovered that they respected me, and they were all very, very good, already highly skilled people.

At some point in the module, Jenny Le People showed us a book - 'The Unwritten Rules of PhD', recommending it to anyone who might be interested in taking things further. The thought had not entered my head up until that moment. After class, I went to get a copy of it from the library. Due to personal circumstances, at that time I was living in a very small room in east London, without many possessions and with little to keep me occupied. I began to read the book. I read it all the way through. I had no real idea about much of what was in that book but I read it, some passages several times.

Jenny was very supportive, and kept encouraging me, along with others, to take things seriously. She was a superb mentor. In due course the module ended and all the work was submitted. We were all very nervous about how we would do. I was convinced that some in the class would get very high marks while I just hoped I would pass. I was absolutely stunned when the grades were released. I got 84. I say this clearly for the benefit of the reader who may have a low opinion of themselves, have low expectations, or not know how to estimate their strengths. I got 84, possibly the highest mark that module ever gave. My close friend came second, with 78 (she probably still hates me about this). The boy who I had expected to do really well - he was already employed in his field, he had a kind of confident swagger - got 57. This is a very important lesson to learn. How you think the world works is not always accurate, not even close.

This module was the beginning of my journey into deeper levels of academic research and thinking. If I had not studied it, and had not done so well in it, I probably would not be here. So thanks Jenny Le Peuple. I'll probably write further instalments on this journey towards even beginning a PhD. These stories are about confidence, ideas, ability to pay fees, age, work life balance, personal motivations and detractions, other people's expectations... these are the stories that help other people decide whether they'd like to even begin this journey, and they start long before you submit a proposal.

Dear Ms Lister

### **Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

We are pleased to inform you that at its meeting of the 20 January 2022, Senate approved the recommendation of the Board of Examiners appointed to examine your thesis: "Experiencing the Smart Learning Journey, a Pedagogical Inquiry", and agreed that you be awarded the Ph.D. Degree. Warmest congratulations on your achievement! You are now allowed to use the post-nominal letters Ph.D.

## **The Book**

Rugg, G., & Petre, M. (2004). *The Unwritten Rules of PhD*. Open University Press.

<https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-unwritten-rules-of-phd-research-3e/marian-petre/gordon-rugg/9780335262120>

PDF copy of the book (this may be illegal, it's hard to tell)

<http://postgrado.bio.uc.cl/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Unwritten-Rules-of-PhD-Research.pdf>