



JOURNEY PLOT – Graph of the trajectory

Author: Anna Sala Bubaré

Background – justification.

The Journey Plot was initially created as a non-traditional visualisation method of collecting data and is particularly suited to considering experiences of a lengthy duration (Turner, 2015). It is based on the notion of ‘journey’ that emphasizes an individual’s movement from one place to another. Several events that have a significant impact on the experience take place along the journey (Miller & Brimicombe, 2003).

The graphic representation of the experiences promotes individuals’ recall about the experience, offers guide and structure to the narrative. Moreover, it allows access to the underlying conceptions in relation to the experience, such as what it means for them to do research or do a doctorate (Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012). The multimodality of the representation (visual and oral) enables interpretation and understanding of the complex changes since it allows researchers and interviewers to relate experiences and interpretations (Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012). Additionally, it allows them and the participants to contrast the description of the experience with the with its graphic representation (McAlpine, 2016), in order to compare, ask or provide more detail or clarify in situ misunderstandings and inconsistencies (Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017). On the other hand, Journey Plot is a useful tool to clarify, summarise and contrast certain aspects of the trajectory that may remain inaccessible through language, such as the emotional intensity of events, and especially the general overview of the process and trajectory and the changes occur during that time (Turner, 2015). In this sense, it is useful to organise events cronologically. Finally, in research or teamwork contexts, the graph facilitates quick and visual comparison of the trajectory of two or more individuals.

Description of the instrument.

The Journey Plot is a simple graph with two axes, one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical axis represents the intensity of the experience, from very positive to very negative, and the horizontal axis represents the duration of the experience or the period of time to be explored (this axis can include the timescale and temporal divisions or can be left blank). The participant has to draw a line representing the evolution of the intensity of the experience and label the significant events that took place during that period of time.

Used as a pedagogical tool, Journey Plot is presented in the context of an interview, counselling session or training to promote awareness, reflection and sometimes discussion about the positive and negative events, their causes and consequences and the coping and resolution strategies, the tempo, rhythm and intensity of the experience. The ultimate objective is to extract useful learning for the person, for instance, to introduce changes in the management of time and objectives of the thesis; in the participation in training and research activities; or in the coping strategies of negative situations. It is



usually used along with a more or less structured protocol of questions that guide the reflection. Below we present a protocol sample (pages 6-7).

Use of the tool for researcher education

This instrument can be used in different moments of the doctoral trajectory. For each moment, its use can address different specific objectives:

- *Beginning of the doctorate.* In the initial stages of the doctorate, the Journey Plot can be utilised to generate and negotiate conceptions, representations and expectations about the thesis, tasks, roles and responsibilities of each actor, share milestones and build the relationship between supervisors and PhD students. In this case, the Journey Plot can be drawn retrospectively, about students' previous trajectory, and prospectively about the expectations and forecast of the trajectory during the doctorate.
- *Intermediate phases.* In intermediate stages, the tool can be employed as a formative evaluation instrument to share meanings about the experiences lived up to that moment, give students feedback about their process and development, revise and adjust expectations, objectives and milestones, redefine roles and responsibilities and regulate the coping strategies.
- *Final phase of the doctorate.* In the final stage of the doctorate, the Journey Plot can be utilised to assess the process and draw conclusions, but also to plan doctoral students' professional trajectory, identify and discuss options and generate and negotiate expectations about their professional future.

The time axis of the Journey Plot (length and period) will need to be modified in relation to the moment the instruments are used and the specific objectives to be achieved. On the other hand, these objectives will also guide the plan of the activity or concrete situation in which the Journey Plot will be employed. In this sense, a series of decisions need to be taken in relation to the content of the Journey Plot, the persons involved in the reflection process and the focus and position the supervisor will take during the activity.

Content of the Journey Plot:

- *Doctoral students' development as a researcher.* Students' learning and development of the competencies as a researcher. The aim is to analyse the progress of the students, the most significant moments during the trajectory (discoveries, setbacks, etc.), resolution strategies, causes and consequences of the significant events and learning that promoted or hindered students' development.
- *Evolution of the thesis.* Evolution of the research (design, data collection and analysis) and the thesis (manuscript, articles). The aim is to analyse the progress of the research, the most significant moments of the trajectory (advancements, discoveries, setbacks, etc.), the resolution strategies, causes and consequences of the significant events in relation to the evolution of the thesis.



- *Evolution of supervisors' experience.* Evolution of supervisors' experience in relation to the supervision of a certain doctoral student. The aim is to analyse the most significant moments of the trajectory (advancements, discoveries, setbacks, etc.), the resolution strategies of the supervisor, causes and consequences of the significant events and learning achieved by supervisors in relation to their development as researchers and supervisors.

Persons involved in the process of reflection:

- *Individual.* The doctoral student and/or the supervisor complete a Journey Plot. Each analyses their graph and reflects on the process individually. Later on, student and supervisor can share the conclusions. The main aim of this modality is to raise awareness about the process.
- *Shared with people not directly involved in the experience.* Shared reflection among peers about the development, experience or thesis of each individual. It can be done in pairs, groups or in seminars and training courses for doctoral students or supervisors. The main aim of this modality is to share similar experiences and resolution strategies and offer and receive emotional support.
- *Shared with people involved in the experience.* Shared reflection between the doctoral student and the supervisor. The main aim of this modality is to contrast the interpretation of the events (causes, consequences, coping...) and share and negotiate meanings, roles and responsibilities.

Focus and position of the supervisor:

- *Mediator of the reflection of the doctoral student.* In this modality, supervisors do not draw a Journey Plot. They can mediate students' reflection, asking questions and offering their interpretation, or participate in the shared reflection about the Journey Plot drawn by students.
- *Perception of the experience of the doctoral student.* In this modality, supervisors draw a Journey Plot of their perception about students' trajectory, their subjective experience or development as researchers. The main objective is to contrast different interpretations about students' trajectory and build shared meanings of the events lived.
- *Perception of their own experience as supervisors.* In this modality, supervisors reflect on their experience as supervisors of a certain doctoral student, emphasising their interpretation, challenges and learning, and the significant events lived by the supervisors. The objective is to contrast students' trajectory with supervisors', and the subjective experience of each of the actors in relation to the development of the doctoral thesis. This modality can be more appropriate for intermediate phases of the process.





Example of activities.

Next we present four activities related to different moments of the process of the doctoral studies and that can be seen as prototypical examples of activities in which the Journey Plot is used.

Activity 1

- Moment: Beginning of the doctorate
- Content: Students' trajectory
- Persons involved: Supervisor and student
- Focus of the supervisor: mediator

Description:

The doctoral student draws a Journey Plot about their trajectory up to the moment (previous studies and first steps into the doctorate, if appropriate) and about their expectations along the doctorate. The supervisor guides the reflection on the process, stressing the student's conceptions and representations about the research and their objectives and expectations about the doctorate. Both define objectives and some key dates (presentation of the thesis proposal, data collection, participation in conferences, etc.).

Activity 2.

- Moment: Intermediate phase
- Content: Students' development as a researcher
- Persons involved: Group of doctoral students
- Focus of the supervisor: ---

Description:

The students individually draw a Journey Plot about their development as researchers. Later on, they take turns to explain the graph to their peers, who ask questions to promote shared reflection about the experience and learning achieved during this period. They can also negotiate and share objectives for the following phases.



Activity 3.

- Moment: Intermediate phase
- Content: Evolution of the thesis
- Persons involved: Supervisor and doctoral student
- Focus of the supervisor: experience as supervisor

Description:

The doctoral students individually draw a Journey Plot about their thesis process, and the supervisor does the same about their experience as a supervisor of this particular student. Once the Journey Plots are finished, they share and compare the two graphs, emphasising those experiences in which the interpretation and emotional intensity are very different and in those events that appear in only one of the two graphs.

Activity 4.

- Moment: Final phase
- Content: Students' development as researcher
- Persons involved: Supervisor and doctoral student
- Focus of the supervisor: experience of the doctoral student

Description:

Supervisor and student draw a Journey Plot about the development of the doctoral student up to that moment and their future trajectory. They both share and compare the two graphs, emphasising those experiences in which the interpretation and emotional intensity are very different and in those events that appear in only one of the two graphs, and they reflect together about the next milestones and possibilities for the student's professional development.



Protocol of questions to guide reflection.

In the following, we present a protocol of questions that promote in-depth analysis of the different aspects of the graph. To use it, it is suggested that individuals adapt it in relation to the objectives of each specific situation and person.

To reflect on a single Journey Plot

... for each positive significant event

What happened here?

How did you feel then? How did these emotions evolve?

Who was involved in this event?

What caused this rise?

What did you learn from this experience?

(in the case of subsequent decrease) Why did it decrease after that?

(in the case of maintained positive moment) Why was this positive moment maintained over time? How did you achieve that?

... for each negative significant event

What happened here?

How did you feel then? How did these emotions evolve?

Who was involved in this event?

What caused this slope?

Could it have been anticipated, predicted or avoided?

What did you learn from this experience?

(in the case of subsequent increase) Why did it rise after that? What did you do to overcome this negative moment?

(in the case of maintained negative moment) Why was this negative moment maintained over time? What were the causes? Could you have done something different to overcome this negative moment earlier?

... for the general shape of the graph

Does this graph represent the evolution of the experience?

Has it really been that *stable / unstable / negative / positive / changing / etc.?*

How do you see the future?

To compare and reflect on two or more Journey Plots

... for each positive significant event shared in all the graphs

What happened here?

How did you (all) feel then? How did these emotions evolve?

What are the causes of this rise?

What did you (all) learn from this experience?

(in the case of subsequent decrease) Why did it decrease after that?

(in the case of maintained positive moment) Why was this positive moment maintained over time? How did you (all) achieve that?



... for each negative significant event shared in all the graphs

What happened here?

How did you (all) feel then? How did these emotions evolve?

Who was involved in this event?

What caused this slope? Could it have been anticipated, predicted or avoided?

What did you (all) learn from this experience?

(in the case of subsequent increase) Why did it rise after that? What did you (all) do to overcome this negative moment?

(in the case of maintained negative moment) Why was this negative moment maintained over time? What were the causes? Could you (all) have done something different to overcome this negative moment earlier?

... to compare trajectories

What similarities do you (all) identify in the general shape of the graph? Is there any section that is similar?

What differences do you (all) identify in the general shape of the graph? Is there any section that is significantly different?

(if yes) Why are there differences?

Which key events are shared among the graphs?

Does the same event have the same intensity in each graph?

(if no) Why are they different? Why did each of you experience it in a different way?

How do you see the future going?

References.

- Mazzetti, A., & Blenkinsopp, J. (2012). Evaluating a visual timeline methodology for appraisal and coping research. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 85, 649-665.
- McAlpine, L. (2016). Becoming a PI: From 'doing' to 'managing' research. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21(1), 49-63. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1110789
- Miller, N., & Brimicombe, A. (2003). Mapping research journeys across complex terrain with heavy baggage. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26 (3), pp. 405-417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037042000265962>
- Sala-Bubaré, A., & Castelló, M. (2017). Exploring the relationship between doctoral students' experiences and research community positioning. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 39(1), 16-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2016.1216832>
- Shaw, K., Holbrook, A., Scevak, J., & Bourke, S. (2008). The response of pre-service teachers to a compulsory research project. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 35(3), 90-110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03246291>



Turner, G. (2015). Learning to Supervise: Four Journeys. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 52(1), 86–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1470329031000088978>



On the diagram below please draw the highs and lows of your experience XXXX from XXX to XXXX. Please label the high and low points i.e. what they represent and the ascending and descending lines.

