Flying Start: partnering with students and other stakeholders in doctoral rites of passage

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Murdoch University

Centre for University Teaching and Learning
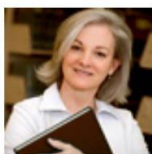
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The Centre for University Teaching and Learning provides integrated and coordinated leadership and support in learning and teaching students and academic staff at Murdoch University and strategic advice to the schools on learning and teaching matters.

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GREAT - Graduate Research Education and Training program

- Beginning Research

- Thesis and Journal Article Writing

- Information Literacy and Management Professional and Career Development

- Personal Qualities

- Professional Conduct

- Research Management

- Seminars for all graduate students: e.g., presentation skills, Endnote, computer skills

Challenges of Doctoral Research

Life getting in the way

Readitis:

The belief that reading one more article will solve all your research problems and then you will be ready to write.

Experimentitis
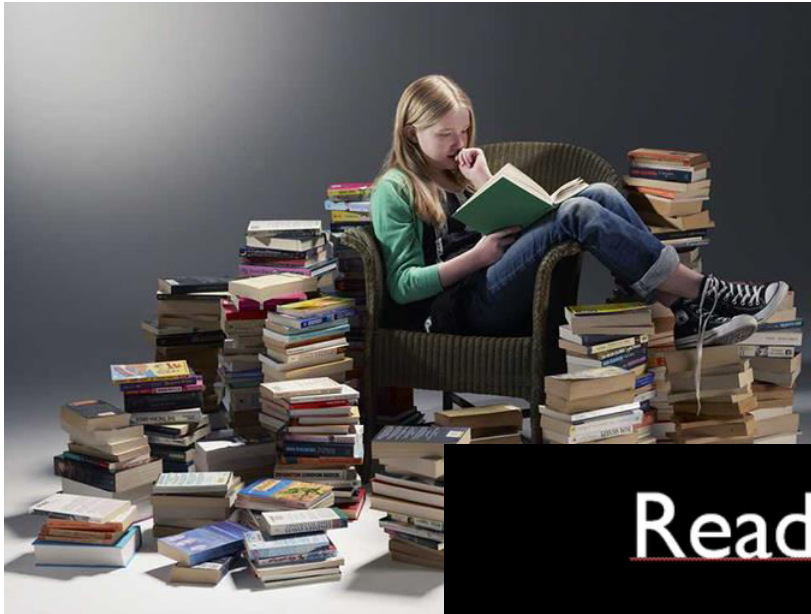
Procrastination perfectionism, over-commitment and the imposter syndrome

Not taking responsibility

Problems with writing

Losing confidence

Hugh Kearns, Thinkwell
https://twitter.com/ithinkwellhugh/status/638701124522868736

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Conceptions of Transition

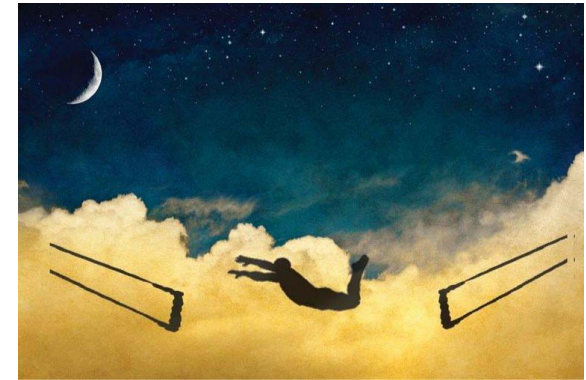|		
transition as 'induction'	'linear progression through a number of "phases"' (p.739)	PhD milestones, including confirmation of candidature (CoC)
transition as 'development'	stages in individual development or transformation	skills that candidates need to develop through stages of increasing competence (e.g., RDF)
transition as 'becoming'	'the complexities of life and the interdependence of "public issues" and "private troubles"' (p.744)	fluid process of doctoral becoming; doctoral research as a series of 'rites of passage' (e.g., Kiley 2009)

Based on Gale & Parker, 2014)

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'Stuckness' and Liminality

○ Research students can get 'stuck' for a variety of reasons: cognitive, social, or emotional (Ahearn & Manathunga, 2004)
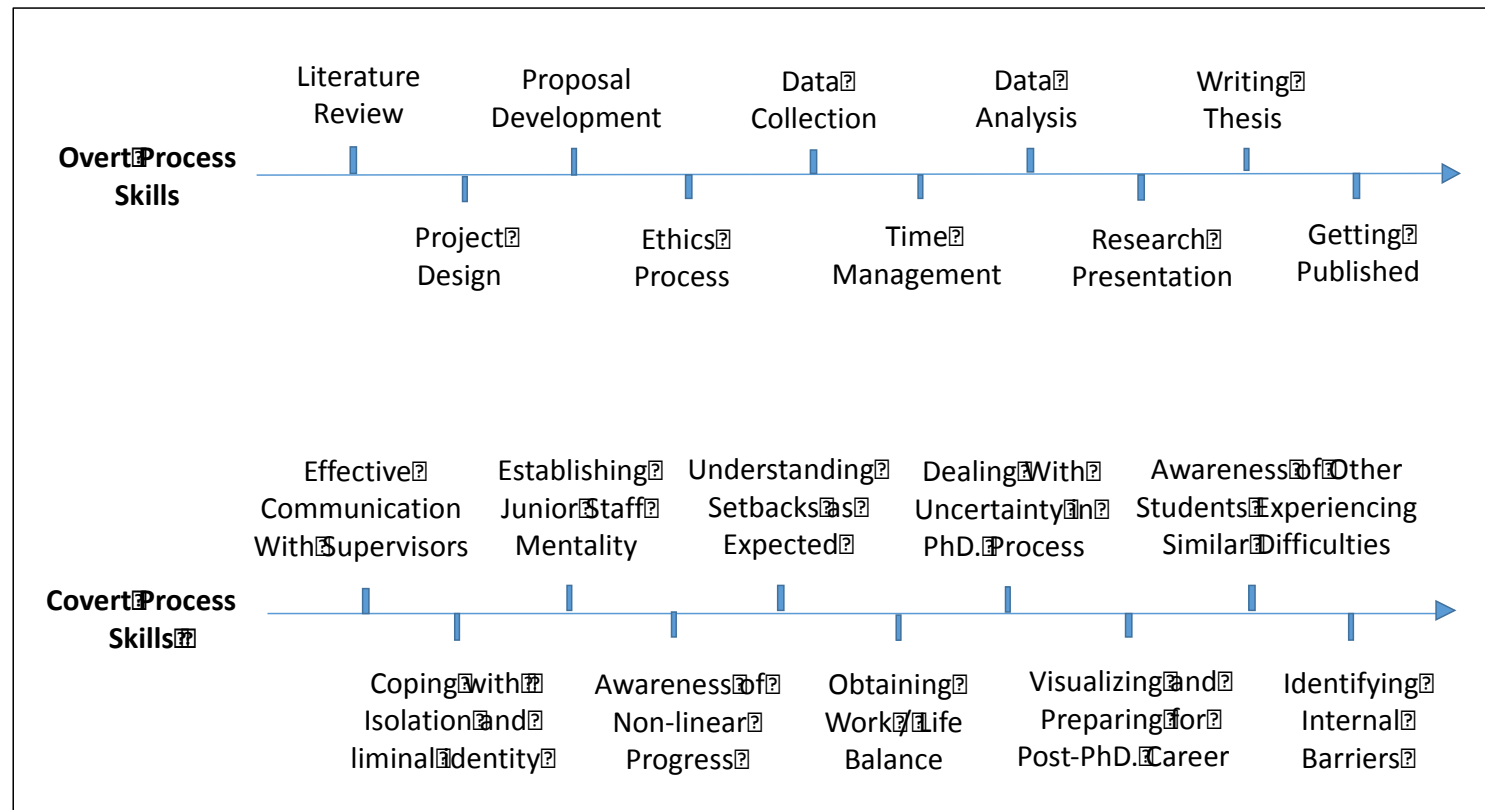

https://www.slideshare.net/jeffkeefer/thresholds2014-keefer-threshold-concepts-and-postgraduate-struggles-071014v12

https://www.trendhunter.com/trends/stuck-chewing-gum

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Parallel processes of PhD study

Flying Start

- Meeting confirmation of candidature (CoC) milestones

- Identifying and starting to develop essential skills as a researcher

- Sharing experiences about doctoral 'rites of passage' (e.g., Kiley 2009)

https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/study/flying_start.php

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Flying Start Program

- offered 3 times a year
- each offering consists of two sets of two-day intensive modules, which students ideally take towards the beginning and towards the end of their first six months (e.g., during their confirmation of candidature period).
- each module consists of a series of free face-to face seminars (or workshops) delivered by CUTL academics, professional staff, and senior PhD students.

| Flying Start Dates	Module A	Module B
Flying Start 1: March to June	Two-day intensive in March	Two-day intensive in June
Flying Start 2: April to July	Two-day intensive in April	Two-day intensive in July
Flying Start 3: August to November	Two-day intensive in August	Two-day intensive in November

Meeting CoC milestones: the research proposal ...

○ Introducing the context, aims, research question(s) and/or hypotheses

○ Stating the gap in knowledge and the significance of your research

○ Explaining your methods and approach

○ Presenting a clear argument for the proposed project ?

○ Other?

http://fenopatrn.com/blank-bar-graph-patterns/

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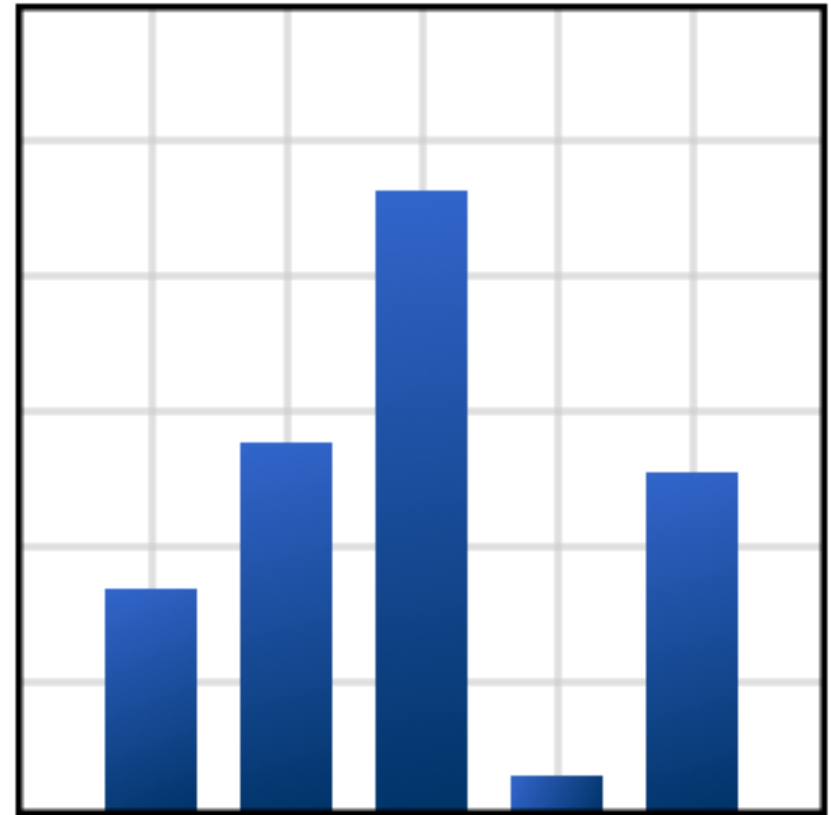
Meeting CoC milestones: the literature review …

- Argument and voice
- Organization
- Coverage
- Relevance and Integration
- Analysis, interpretation and evaluation
- Other?

http://fenopatrn.com/blank-bar-graph-patterns/

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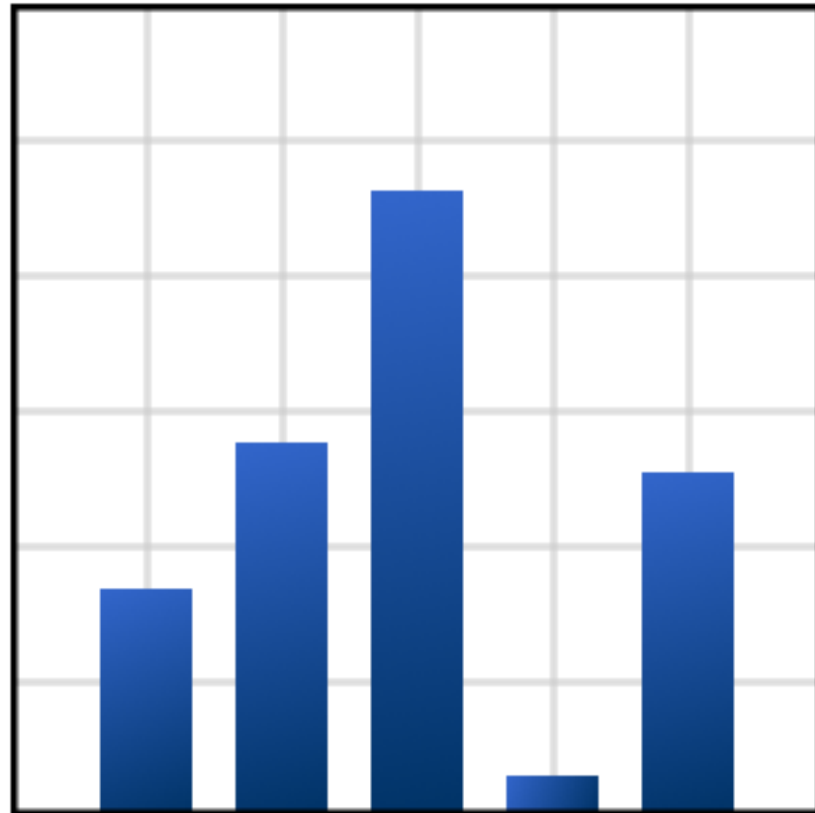
Focus on Threshold Concepts

- Understanding that a thesis is a claim or defense – not just a collection of work you will do (e.g., **argument**)

- Being able to articulate a position on 'the literature' and locating the work you are doing within it (e.g., **analysis, interpretation and evaluation**)

https://thesiswhisperer.com/2011/01/18/why-you-might-be-stuck/

https://www.slideshare.net/jeffkeefer/thresholds2014-keefer-threshold-concepts-and-postgraduate-struggles-071014v12

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Meeting CoC milestones: the oral thesis proposal presentation …

Identifying and developing essential skills

Identifying and developing essential skills

Knowledge base (A1)

Cognitive abilities (A2)

Creativity (A3)

Knowledge and intellectual abilities
The knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques to do research.

Domain A
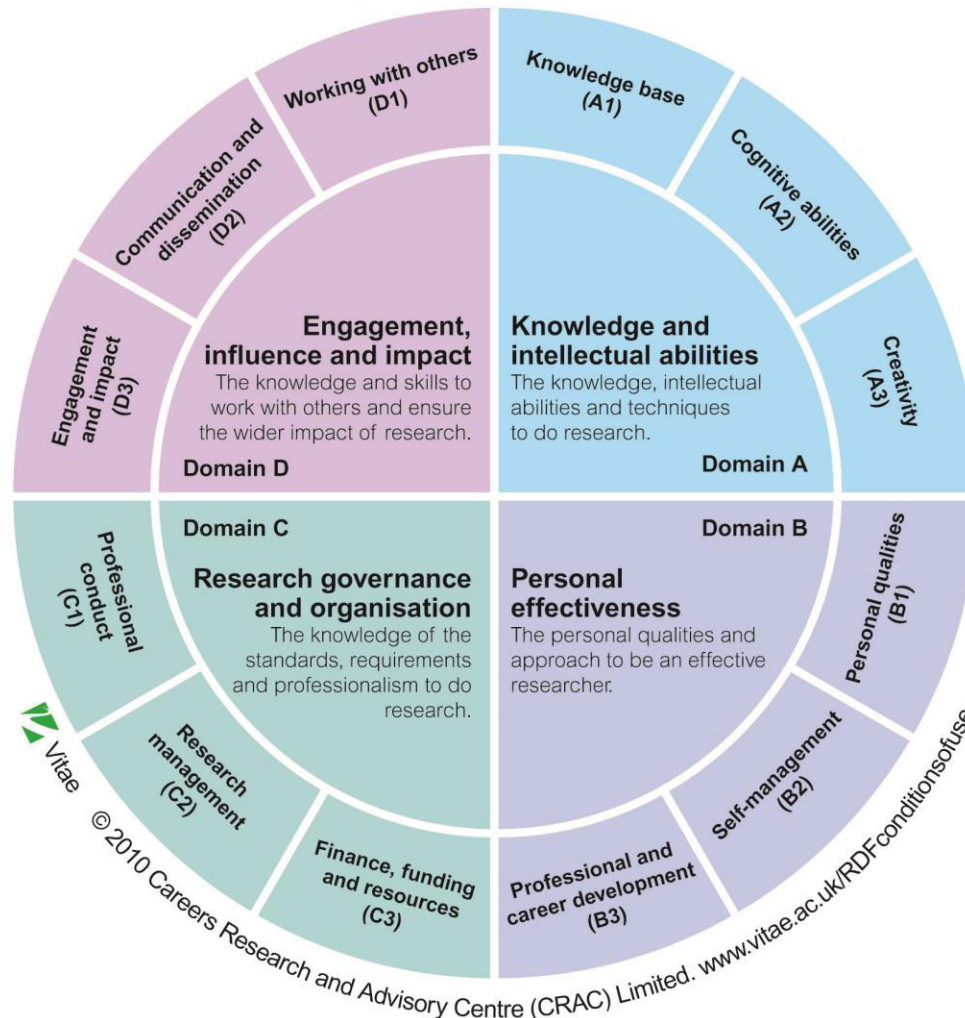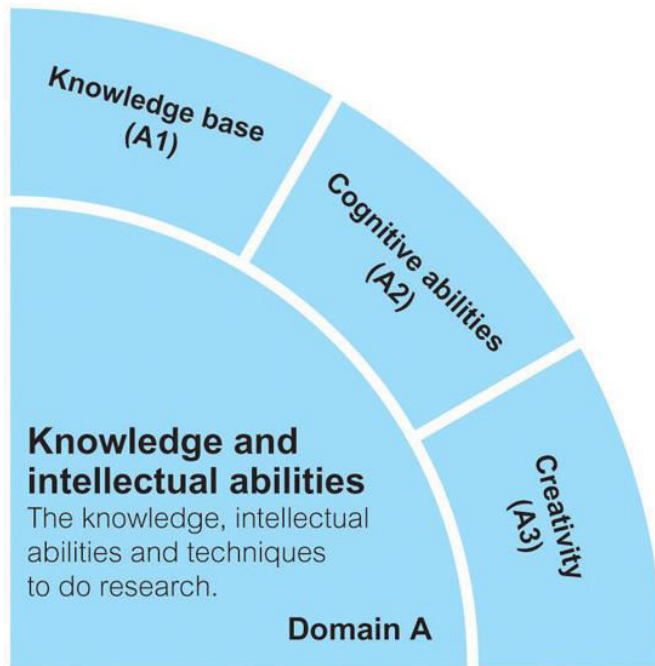
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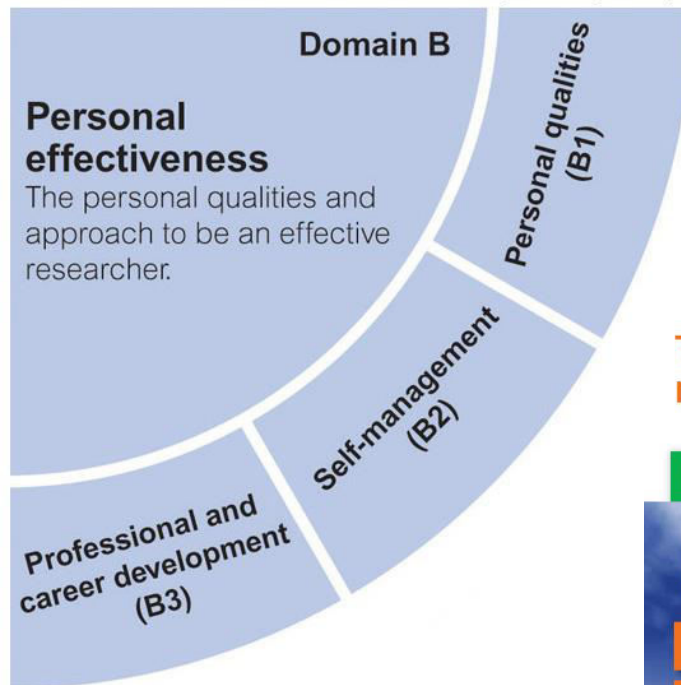
Identifying and developing essential skills
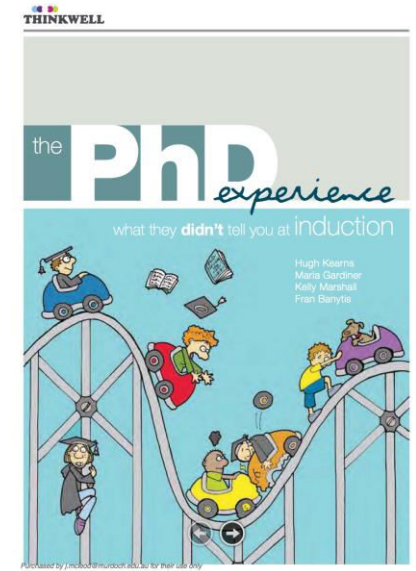
Sharing experiences about doctoral 'rites of passage'

Panel of students from the previous cohort:

- practical problems faced
- a lonely journey?
- learning what a PhD is
- getting support
- juggling the PhD vs life
- the emotional rollercoaster

(Kearns et al 2006, p.35)

Sharing experiences about doctoral 'rites of passage'

Current, mid-program PhD. candidate assisting in workshops.

Role has included:

- fielding student enquiries throughout the course

- providing specific strategies toward attaining CoC,

- offering feedback on early presentations

- hosting the panel session of senior PhD students

- Co-authoring paper submitted to JALL.

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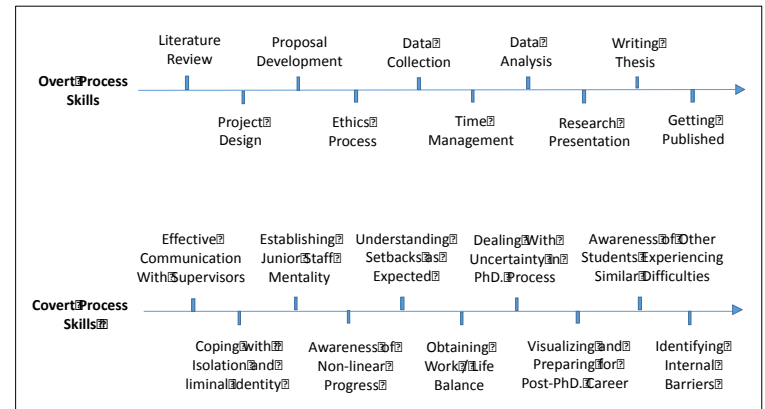
What next?

Integrating the following into the Flying Start program:

○ A peer-mentoring program

○ School-based writing groups

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