The Skills Necessary for Completion of a Ph.D. Program: A Look Into Personality, Self-Creation, and Self-Care

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Doctoral educational programs are difficult, and require a great deal of perseverance, work, and being able to perform at a highly rigorous level. This paper looks at what a Ph.D. is and its requirements to provide some context for the discussion. It explores my personality tendencies and how they interact with my scholarly work. Necessary for a doctoral program and the addition of an original contribution to our field it examines self-creation and the related and required self-care in relationship to McNamara's and Kegan's elegance and model of adult identity development. Finally, it examines complex thought and transdisciplinarity.

Keywords: Ph.D. Studies, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Self-Creation, Self-Care, Developmental Models, Resilience

I am not one to start something that I will not finish. In the decision-making process to apply for the California Institute of Integral Studies Doctoral Program in Transformative Studies, this was no different. I have been considering and thinking about going back to school for my Ph.D. for many years. Before I started the program, I knew that if I was to start that I needed to be able to have a way to finish. This paper is a look into some of the things that will be necessary for the completion of my Ph.D. program.

Grounding and Understanding of What Is a Doctoral Studies Program

With the doctoral degree being the highest academic degree awarded, it might seem like a finish line, but in fact it is just the starting line. It is a starting place for the scholar's future career. Many who are pursue a Ph.D. are already practitioners in their field of study, but as one goes into the doctoral process and then on to the actual writing and creation of their dissertation, it is an opportunity to dive deeply into the field they are studying. It is a way of staking out some ground that we can demonstrate that we have gained expertise in this field of study as demonstrated by both the evidence of our work (e.g. our dissertation) and the approval from other experts in that field (e.g. our committee).

The discussion of this evidence leads us to describe what the dissertation is. While a dissertation is described as a written manuscript or a book. It is about more than providing a written manuscript, but a process that students go through to develop an original contribution to their field of study. The (CIIS, 2017) describes the dissertation as including a committee. The dissertation committee includes a committee chair (a core faculty member), an internal committee member (a faculty who is from CIIS), and an external committee member (who would be from another institution). The scholar/researcher goes through their process to answer their research question wherein the end they submit a completed draft, participate in a dissertation defense, obtain participation and approval from the committee, complete a final review and approval, and end up with a final publication.

The creation of an original contribution to our field of study is only possible by understanding the knowledge base of our field and where its limits are. As we explore the landscape, depths, and limits of our field, we are better equipped to make a meaningful contribution. Montuori (2010) describes the problem solving that we engage in as a part of our creative inquiry as "engaging the unknown, the messy, the complicated, the complex, and attempting to understand and make sense out of it" (p. 121). Our original contribution gives us the privilege of trying to share how that unknown makes sense back with our fields of practice. My background is in social work, where one of the identified competencies that we are supposed to take up is the twofold task of having research-informed practice and practice-informed research (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). This idea of saying how can we move our professions and others in our field forward is a privilege. At CIIS, the dissertation process is looked at as a creative inquiry.

The Dissertation Process as Creative Inquiry and Transdisciplinary

The concept of creative inquiry deals with academic rigor and creativity in understanding topics both from a perspective of the heart and the head. For many academic institutions, they are either more focused on what Montuori refers to as reproductive education or narcissistic education (Montuori, 2006, 2012; Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). It also requires the ability of the scholar to look at the systems and disciplines that are in place.

To understand the area of inquiry, being able to gain insight and a broad understanding of the academic landscape. Montuori (2010) describes how transdisciplinarity is separate from multidisciplinarity or interdisciplinarity. that it is a different "way of thinking, organizing knowledge and informing action that can assist them in coming to grips with the complexity of the world" (p. 123).

It seems to be able to accomplish these types of insights, there is a need to be able to see the world from a more ecological perspective. To be able to understand the parts, but also to understand the whole. To both be able to both complement and integrate disciplinary knowledge and to integrate the inquirer into the inquiry and generate new knowledge (Montuori, 2010).

Montuori (2008) in talking about the creative process, describes that there is a need to be immersed in our fields of study. He states

> although it may be true that in the illumination phase the creative process appears deeply mysterious and sometimes mystical, to get to that level of inspiration, we need deep immersion into our subject matter, the development of real craft, the ability to explore, think, investigate, and then, after the illumination, to engage the process of verification (p. 21)

Personality tendencies can either help or hinder our ability to be immersed in our field of study. They can either support or distract from our ability to complete complex processes and to integrate the information required to be managed as a part of a doctoral program.

From an ENFJ to an ISTJ: My Personality and Its Connection to Scholarship

How we work, and how we best interface with the world, changes based on our personality tendencies. There are a considerable number of ways that different people and organizations have conceptualized personality. I have been around several different models during my life. One example is through enneagrams, where for years my mom as been sure that I am a seven (Howell, 2014). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of the most common

and highly regarded personality inventories. In 2016 I took a version of the MBTI from NERIS Analytics Limited (see https://www.16personalities.com). My result from that testing rated my tendencies to be as an ENFJ. This year, as a part of the course work for Introduction to Transformative Studies, I took the test from the Individual Differences Research Labs (see https://www.idrlabs.com/). This second time going through the set of questions scored my tendencies to be almost opposite, describing those tendencies as ISTJ.

As a scholar and a student, it important for us to consider our personality tendencies. I will situate my scores discussing the differences between the two times that I took the MBTI and address some considerations that are important for me to make as I move forward in my academic studies. The first major difference is in tendencies towards introversion versus extraversion. While the first time that I completed the personality test, I scored as more of an extrovert and the second time as more of an introvert. I feel energized when I get opportunities to socialize, connect with people, go out and do activities, and generally to be busy. These settings are best for me in small groups versus a large group. I tend to struggle connecting and feeling comfortable in a large group setting, unless I am facilitating the group, which is an activity, I feel very comfortable doing. As my life circumstances have changed some from my first participation in the questionnaire and the second, that might account for the change in my identified tendencies. Along with these more extrovert tendencies, I find that I am edified by introverted activities. One of my more introverted activities is a desire to find solitude. Newport (2016) describes a need to have solitude to be able to do what he calls deep work. I find myself needing time to process and mull over topics before I know how I want to respond. My self-care is mostly focused on these individualized activities well. When I don't get opportunities to go for a walk or a bike ride, I feel like I'm not able to focus as well. In my academic life, I need to make sure that I provide time to be alone with my thoughts, but not get lost in times spent with family and friends. While it is also important for me to be able to socialize, I have to keep a balance.

My focus on intuition versus sensing is another area that was vastly different the two times that I took the Myers Briggs. The first time I scored more highly with inclinations of intuition and the second time my scores connected more to sensing. While this is true for most people, I feel that I'm both and could go any way. The way I see myself, is that I have a need to see the big picture. I struggle at making any of the precise connections or understanding and implementing the details of a project if I do not understand the big picture. The prospect of being in the military or a similar setting where the expectation is to just follow orders would be extremely challenging for me. I find that I want to know the why, and not just the what. In thinking about being able to

take a transdisciplinary approach, it is invaluable to be able to step back and try to understand the big picture. While I might get a great amount of satisfaction from diving into the procedures of things or the details of what I'm looking at, I need to be able to step back and see the forest from the trees to really feel connected with my work and make significant progress.

A third set of personality dispositions the MBTI looks at is feeling versus thinking. This is another result that was different for me between the first time and second time I took the test. My propensities feel like a strong combination of the two. For me, I tend to follow my heart in the direction that I want to go to. I find it challenging to stick with things that I am not invested in or have a deep sense of care for. In my field of practice, I am drawn to supporting people because of the passion I have. But In the more day to day evaluations and understanding the context of what my next steps are, I gravitate towards thoughtful reflection. I have to take the time to process things. I like to consider all my options, the potential effects. Before making major decisions in my life, I frequently find myself making pros and cons lists to help understand the options laid out before me. In my scholarship, it will be important for me to stay grounded in topics that I am passionate about. If I move away from following my heart, I will become disinterested and not be likely to make a meaningful final product.

Consistency is important to me and while I can get fixated on the minutia of a task, this can both be a strength and a weakness in academic work. In many aspects of my life, I find myself going back and back over things to have some sameness or uniformity in how they are done, or to make sure they have gone through the same process. Sometimes, the reasons why I automate some processes in my life is less regarding making sure that I am more efficient in the completion of the task and more to verify that I have this uniformity in the process. As a minor example for me, when am creating a document, I often make specific styles so that I can apply them throughout the document. I think for me putting things into some sort of order helps relieve some hidden anxiety that might come from the lack of uniformity. The only consistent result that I had from both times I took the personality test was in scoring with a proclivity towards judging versus perceiving. I am task-oriented and find myself living by lists and consider myself highly organized. This elevated level of organization allows me to do much more than I should (for example trying to balance two mostly full-time jobs, my family, and my academic studies). In my future scholarship, it will allow me to stay organized and connected to my areas of inquiry and focus. In another example of this for me, as I was working on completing the preparation work for my courses this semester. I wrote about how I organize data I need for my classes and put them into different silos, describing it my mise en place for university class preparation

(Campbell, 2019).

My Drive for Self-Creation

How we label and think about our world along with the ways that we think about ourselves seems to be impactful and important for us to evaluate and think about. In a social constructivist fashion, Gergen (2015) would argue that "understand the world in terms of mental categories, or construals. This is to say, we construct the world in our own terms" (p. 28). This carries over into both how we see ourselves poset degree and our personality types. I have a drive inside of me to create and be generative.

Newport (2016) descriptions of how to move away from distractions and give ourselves time and opportunities to do what he calls deep work is another great way to help manage the stresses and difficulties of being a student. His thoughts about how we must disconnect from the world to reconnect are an important aspect of being able to self-create. This ability to disconnect to be able to connect is something that connects strongly with my introversion tendencies. While I cannot claim to be the best practitioner of doing deep work, I do feel I work much better during those uninterrupted times and being purposeful about creating them. For me, even his discussion on email stood out to me. He described that he will tell people that when they do not have to reply and detailed instructions to limit the number of distractions he receives or to spend doing the shallow work of much of correspondence. Handcox (2016) in his review of Newport's book, describes having set aside times to be distracted and having a routine to the times that we are practicing deep work as being relevant for him and they are also good advice.

In my drive for self-creation, it can make me incredibly productive, but it can also drive me to work on things that do not matter much. I find that I have a strong drive to explore things and to create things. I am fascinated with automation and digital systems. I can spend hours trying to make an automation to save myself a couple of minutes (although sometimes the very practice of this helps develop skills). I can get lost in reading about a subject and wanting to find out increasingly about it. I can also spend too much time trying to make a presentation or document look pretty. While this can be negative, it also means that I am thorough and a bit of a completionist. The thing I know is that if I go through a spell of not creating something or writing something, I have a drive that feels like I just have to make something. For me, to be able to be generative and make meaningful contributions requires that we can mange not just our personality tendencies, but to find ways to take care of ourselves by practicing positive self-care practices.

Management of My Self-Care

The work that it takes to complete the Ph.D. degree is significant. Jackson (2017) describes the various stressors that

students go through in their studies, in their financial and work lives, and through their social environments and relationships. She describes a theoretical and practical model for what she calls self-creation self-care. This model looks at how the act of self-creation can intersect with self-care. She even describes the basic outline of what a curriculum could look like in addressing some of these problems' students face. This model could be effective at addressing self-care needs students have.

In the social work classes that I teach, I end up talking about self-care, vicarious trauma, and burnout that you discuss by Jackson (2017) in her dissertation. In my work on self-care and its conceptualization as I am teaching it, I tend to use the professional resilience paradigm that Fink-Samnick (2009) describes. She appeared on the inSocial Work Podcast and provided a good discussion of the paradigm (inSocialWork® Podcast Series. [Audio Podcast], 2015).

As far as my ideas around self-care, for me, I find that I have to be able to go for walks. In Washington, we get a bunch of snow during the winter. I put on my snow pants, cleated addons to my boots and still go. I like being able to get out of my head and find it helpful for me to think that way. As well, I love nature and being able to connect to the world around me. In Jackson's (2017) description of self-creation, she describes the importance of being able to create. I find that I have a burning need to be able to create stuff sometimes and find it has a cathartic experience as well.

Self-Creation and Self-Care Through the Lens of Distortions as Described by McNamara

Self-Creation and Self-Care can be seen through a developmental model and process that adults go through such as is described by Kegan's model of identity development (as cited in McNamara, 2006). Within this model, adults go through various transitions in their life moving through stages related to the imperial mind, socialized mind, self-authoring mind, and the self-transforming mind. As adults' identities and thought processes progress through these stages, they gain elegance and complexity.

Some distortions can hinder us as we move through these stages and make it difficult to complete the transitions. The identity development model and the concept of elegance as described by McNamara (2006) is about personal and intellectual growth. The major tasks of adulthood revolve around identity, intimacy, and generatively. Elegance offers refined levels of adult development along with the responsible implementation of those newfound adult capacities. In describing this, he goes on to state:

> As it turns out, adulthood is not just one stage, as many wrongly assume. Instead, adulthood involves a series of transformations increasing

our complexity, capacity, and worldview. Each transformation brings novel sets of expectations, possibilities to live into, and expanded ways of functioning (p. 21)

When adults are focused on an internal drive to become more outwardly, they are falling into the trap of the distortion of more. In a world in which there are so many things and there can be a strong desire to possess those things, we lose our focus on the internal changes that we should be making in our lives. On an inward level, we can try to substitute social power and concentrate on gaining more power versus making important internal changes and increasing our psychological power (McNamara, 2006).

The learning and experience distortions also move us from the inner work that is necessary to move through the stages of adult identity development. It can be easy to have gained some learning or experience and no longer be willing and agile at changing our thinking. In the movie Avatar, Moat in talking to Jake Sully about why people do not seem to understand their people "it is hard to fill a cup that is already full" (Landau & Cameron, 2009).

Self-Creation and Self-Care Through Kegan's Model

In McNamara (2006) discussion of elegance and comparing elegance to Kegan's model of identity development he states that

> To summarize, you are always actively shaping, constructing and forming a reality that fits within your developmental capability at any given moment. And how you are presently co-constructing these very sentences right now is largely invisible to you until you developmentally outgrow your current subject and move it into an object (p. 50)

The socialized mind is the stage where we are working within a set of our peers. We focus our self-interests to serve larger cultural and relational contexts. It seems that this stage is about being inside the group and not being able to step out into our creation. It is about creating and being what others want.

Moving into the self-authoring mind is step into more individual internally creating. This self-authoring mind is a prerequisite for the completion of a Ph.D. program. As described before that it takes the creation of an original contribution to our field of study. McNamare (2006) describes self-authoring as being "well-resourced for managing boundaries and setting limits in relationships. Instead of loyalties governing the self, the now larger self governs and manages the kinds of loyalties present and how they are leveraged" (p. 60).

It takes being able to hold multiple divergent perspectives at the same time, what he calls multiperspectivism. This connects the idea of having a systems approach to our research and the concept of transdisciplinarity. This becomes an important component of our self-creation. But to be able to implement effective self-creation, there must also be effective self-care.

Examination of Challenges of Self-Care and Time Management This Semester

This semester has been a challenge for both self-care and time management. I try to stay away from telling people how busy I am because firstly most people do not care and secondly everybody is busy. This semester has been a struggle. The first several weeks went well and felt much more comfortable for me. I struggled this semester due to some choices that I have had to make. Last year, when I decided that I would pursue my Ph.D. I was worried about the coursework and my ability to complete it. I have been working a more than a full-time job with the Pasco School District for several years and coupled it with teaching two or three classes for Heritage University. This has been manageable (although sometimes stressful). A part of the reason that I am pursuing my doctoral degree is a desire to be able to do more in higher education, so I did not want to put my status as an adjunct on complete hiatus. While I know that the university and my program chair value my work at the university, I teach core classes that somebody would have to teach in my absence. Because of my status as an adjunct, I know that any classes I give up, will have no guarantee that they will be returned. I was also approached to teach a new class (well two sections of a new class), research methods. Working on my Ph.D. and teaching a research methods class seemed to be a great fit for this year. Because I was unsure what my employment plans were, I committed to teaching three classes this semester.

I approached my school district and asked if I could reduce my time (with a plan to just teach one class and work a reduced schedule). Due to new HR policies, I was told that was not possible, but that I could take a year-long educational leave of absence. So, I took that, and worried about my finances agreed to teach three classes this semester (four is considered full time for regular faculty in my University). I set out after the summer started ending looking for part-time employment to supplement my income (while I teach a lot of credits, as an Adjunct I do not earn very much). I was able to apply and get hired for a counseling agency, working with a remarkably similar population to what I was doing in the school district (with some of the same students). The previous social worker in the program worked part-time, and while this position offers up to 36 hours per week, I could work less if I needed it.

While this position has seemed good in idea, and I am enjoying the actual work/clients/staff in practice, if I had it all to do again I think I might have stayed at the school district and just taught one class. With the new position, there is still a learning curve to pick up a new role. This is especially true as the program needs some support and development of systems. It is an exciting proposition to almost get to be a consultant to help develop the program. I also get the opportunity to work with staff in multiple districts (where previously I was just in my district) so my network base is increasing. But my desire to always do the best job that I can, and my detailed nature are fighting against me. Next semester I am reducing my teaching load to two classes (I would reduce it to one, but I am teaching two year-long classes this semester). My current plan is to return to my job at the school district next year and only teach one class next school year.

All of that to say that it has been a hectic semester so far. Being able to manage work (along with a small coaching contract for a College of Learning and Teaching Certificate and supervising students doing their practicums), spending time with my wonderful and very forgiving family (I have five kids) has been hard. It means that very frequently I am time constrained. I block out time to do specific tasks and activities for classes. Sometimes, I might not feel like writing or be in a place that I do not know what I want to write. In these times, I just tell myself I must do something and force myself to put words on the computer screen.

Along with my just get it done mentality, I have also had to find ways to keep up my self-care. While sleep is often one of the things that I lose, I am very consistent about going and walking and listening to some of my podcasts. I am also sure to always at least make an appearance with my family and extended family parties. As well, almost every other week my wife and I go out dancing (club, Latin, ballroom, swing). Being able to do the things I have too and keep it all together is important.

Key Principles of a More Systemic Approach to Research

The thing that I like and find interesting about a transdisciplinary approach is that it seems to be more about understanding the whole and the parts. Because when you take, this approach you are focused on a topic of inquiry versus only the viewpoint of your discipline or a specific viewpoint. In describing the difference between having a view of creativity is through what is original and valuable, Montuori and Donnelly (2016) state:

> A transdisciplinary approach does not reject Weisberg and Runco's choice of a parsimonious definition [original and valuable]. It takes a diametrically opposite view that includes what they have explicitly left out. Indeed, the specialized focus Weisberg and Runco propose provides a

good reason for the complementary, transdisciplinary approach that looks at creativity in a relational, systemic, and contextual approach (p. 755)

Much of my scholarship and perspective is still grounded in social work. I find the transdisciplinary viewpoint and its method for for understanding complexities as highly important. This seems particularly accentuated in the focus on integrating rather than eliminating the inquirer from the inquiry (Montuori, 2013). By bringing in the inquirer into the inquiry it adds a new layer of depth and originality.

Montuori (2013) and Montuori and Donnelly (2016) describe that transdisciplinary discourse is about having some wide angled point of view of the whole. That is is really about the area of inquiry. In my case, if my area of inquiry is regarding resilience and trauma, many different disciplines look at those topics. A lot of scientific research and understanding has come out of research related to Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. Felitti et al. (1998) original inquiry into the effect of these adverse childhood experiences as a form of trauma was completed by medical practitioners. It is focused primarily on the physical effects that trauma has been documented to have. Since then within the field, there have been numerous studies that have looked at the concept of these ACEs and their effects in many ways. These include topics such s from the impact on learning and behavior in a K-12 educational setting (Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011), organizational design in the implementation of trauma-informed care models (Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008), the relationship to resiliency factors and depression (Poole, Dobson, & Pusch, 2017), and many many more topics.

Each of these different disciplines has its own particular set of foci that they are looking into and seeing the topic of these ACEs through. The discussion about the process disciplines go through in understanding in taking a topic on and encircling around it seems to be predictive in the topic of resilience, as Montuori (2013) described the establishment of a "Journal of the Newly Minted Sub-Discipline" (p. 48) there is a new journal that is being released by springer starting in 2020, Adversity and Resilience Science: Journal of Research and Practice (https://www.springer.com/psychology/child+&+school+psychology/journal/42844). Many educational degrees are being offered specifically tailored to the study of resilience as well.

It seems to me that the originality in a transdisciplinary approach is in the focus on the understanding of the parts and the whole together. To see the complexity of that whole. To be able to include the inquirer into the inquiry, and the new insight that is provided through the process.

Complex Thought and Pertinent Knowledge

Knowledge requires being able to elucidate context, global, mutlidemensional, and complex understandings to be able to be pertinent. Morin (2001) states

> In fact, there is complexity whenever the various elements ? that compose a whole are inseparable, and there is inter-retroactive, interactive, interdependent tissue between the subject of knowledge and its context, the parts and the whole, the whole and the parts, the parts amongst themselves. Complexity is, therefore, the bond between unity and multiplicity. (p. 15)

In his description, this complexity weaves a complex mash of both understanding the parts but also understanding the system as a whole. In my undergraduate sociology class, I remember enjoying discussion about the United States and describing it as a melting pot versus a salad. Many authors have used this dichotomy to discuss many different subjects (one example being Mahfouz, 2013). In my sociology class, I remember expanding my thinking about the idea of the United States having each of these different distinct flavors to it that each part is unique yet the whole also has its flavor. Complex thought seems to require that we can appreciate the complexity of it contrary to only the general mush of one flavor of a melting pot.

In thinking about this complexity and the need to understand these parts, I am drawn to my social work perspective. In schools of social work, some schools have different focuses. They are all accredited by the council for social work education, which gives competencies and practice behaviors that must be included (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). But various universities tend to have different sets of focuses on that material. In Washington State, three universities offer master's in social work degrees. The University of Washington offers a more research focus, where Walla Walla University provides a more clinical focus, and my alma matter described their curriculum as an advanced generalist. This concept of specializing, yet still focusing on broad strokes of how to address problems and challenges is highly alluring to me.

In looking at planning, one might look at a specific modality of planning, such as a crisis intervention model. This will give a specific direction for planning when somebody is in crisis. This is invaluable information to have. But an advanced generalist perspective will provide a basic framework that works for all types of planning. Then there is the need to have some of that specifically focused understanding of what to do in a crisis. But in an advanced generalist perspective, there is a need to both understand the underlying principles (such as the generalist intervention model) and how we engage with various needs that people might present.

Conclusion

The rigor and stress of completing a Ph.D. program is extremely high. Understanding my personality tendency can

help me in being able to stay on track in my scholarship and be effective. The process of completion of a doctoral program requires an original contribution to our field of study and there are many things that I can do to both make sure that I am keeping up a practice of self-care and implementing self-creation. This scholarship, and especially taking a focus on my area of study of resilience, is best situated in taking an ecological approach and moving beyond just my own discipline and taking a more transdisciplinary approach.

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