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Scholar Transformation Theory: Empowering Students to Get the Job Done Write

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Abstract

Research suggests that writing the dissertation is one of the major barriers to doctoral students completing their degrees (Di Pierro, 2007). Much of the research on dissertation writing focuses on teaching the technical aspects of dissertation writing and fails to address the underlying issues that give rise to students' struggles with conceptualizing and completing their dissertation research. This paper forwards a theoretical perspective, scholar transformation theory (STT), that explains the challenges students face with dissertation writing. Drawing on Kincheloe's theory of cognitive passivity, identity theory, and Adler and Van Doren's (1972) concept of elementary reading, STT provides insight for faculty who are charged to help doctoral students complete their dissertation. This paper begins with a discussion of the practical and theoretical underpinnings of STT. Then we provide a detailed discussion of the five phases of STT, which include: passive information gatherer, active information gatherer, active knowledge gatherer, active knowledge consumer, and active knowledge producer. The paper discusses this theory's benefits and how it can be used to understand doctoral students' progression from student to scholar.

Keywords: Doctoral education, dissertation writing, minority students

Scholar Transformation Theory: Empowering Students to Get the Job Done Write

Background and Introduction

Morgan State University, a Historically Black University, is a relative newcomer to doctoral education, the first doctoral program having commenced in the 1970s. Today, it offers doctoral degrees in a wide range of disciplines and has attained the Carnegie status of Research University, Moderate Research Activity, a designation that is based in part on the number of doctorates produced each year.

The theory developed in this paper emerged from the School of Education and Urban Studies in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy (ASLP), at Morgan State University, a department that houses five doctoral and four masters degree programs. Annually ASLP produces approximately 20 graduates including EdDs and PhDs, representing approximately 40% of its total doctoral output. Generally, the department places great emphasis on intellectual integrity and academic rigor, especially as it pertains to dissertations.

Arguably, the most challenging component of the doctoral degree program is the dissertation requirement. A 2007 study on doctoral student attrition suggested that the dissertation stage is the high-risk period for doctoral students (Di Pierro, 2007). Indeed, the successful completion of the dissertation eludes nearly 50% of doctoral program enrollees (Blanchard, 2018). The protracted length of time that it takes many students to complete the dissertation is a clear symptom of the same problem. Coursework typically takes approximately three years, but the national average time to doctoral program completion is seven to ten years. (Sowell., Zhang., Bell, & Redd, K., 2008). The average student takes 8.2

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years to get a Ph.D. For doctoral students in education, the length of time to completion is thirteen years. Fifty percent of students drop out along the way, with dissertations being the major stumbling block (Berger, 2007). This means that the dissertation takes an average of four to seven years to complete. Those statistics support our experiences as both students and dissertation advisors—namely that the dissertation process can be a prolonged, stressful, and ambiguity-ridden period in a doctoral student’s life, a successful outcome for which is far from guaranteed. We, as doctoral faculty at an HBCU, have rejected the average national graduation rate and completion time as the status quo. Instead, we have actively sought ways to help our students succeed in a timely fashion and we have made quality the central issue. Scholar Transformation Theory presented in this paper was born out of our imperative to make the quality of the dissertation, not rapid completion, the main concern for our students. STT grew out of our endless quest to find more effective ways to help our students develop the skills and dispositions needed to complete a quality dissertation. Resulting from our concerns, we created an annual Summer Dissertation Intensive Workshop where the theory was developed and tested.

Reflections on our experiences as dissertation students: the path to STT begins

STT emerged after months of casual impromptu conversations with one another about our more challenging students. After sharing our concerns, we would become more solemn and circumspect, reflecting on how we got through our own respective programs as dissertation students with dissertation chairs who were far less accessible than we are to our students. These reveries almost always began with empathy. We had to admit our own academic shortcomings

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and personal obstacles as we entered the dissertation phase of our own respective programs seemed to be every bit as serious as our students’.

For us, the dissertation was a terrifying, ‘trial-by-fire’ process. At least one of us considered ourselves a challenged writer going into the dissertation (having developed bad writing habits during the master’s program). And, at least one of us held jobs outside of our doctoral work and was starting a family simultaneously. But, somehow, despite similar skill deficiencies and personal challenges as those faced by our students, we posited that there was something fundamentally different when comparing our students to ourselves. Where we had acted as independently as possible, finding ways to finish our dissertations with minimal support from our committee chairs, our students would not make a move *without* our support. Indeed, some would continually seek our support and *still* somehow not be able to improve their work and move forward. Why? What was the difference between them and us?

As students, we were incredibly grateful for whatever feedback we got from our chairs. And when we did not get feedback (which was most of the time), we found alternative routes to getting the feedback that we needed. Our more challenging students, in contrast, seemed to shy away from feedback. Indeed, they somehow managed to disregard the copious feedback that we gave them, often leaving us feeling dejected and taken advantage of. Being educators with backgrounds in culture and education, we were not comfortable with the deficit explanation of our students’ apparent shortcomings. Instead, we sought a cultural explanation. Looking at our more challenging students from three perspectives, thinking, reading, writing, and mixing in

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theory with which we already had some familiarity, we were able to develop a more comprehensive theory that helped us to better understand where our dissertation students were and where we would like them to go. Kincheloe's (1993) postmodern critical constructivism provided us a viable place to start.

A Framework Emerges 1: The problem's dimensions

Thinking

Kincheloe (1993). Kincheloe's unsung theoretical masterwork, *Towards a Critical Politics of Teacher Thinking: Mapping the Postmodern* (1993), goes where few education texts dare go. He argues that virtually everything public education-related, from the teacher education curriculum to standardized lesson plans, standardized testing, and teacher certification, works together to install in our children a "one-truth epistemology" (p. 3). This one-truth epistemology is fundamentally antithetical to critical or creative thinking because those who are indoctrinated into it accept as fact the falsehood that every question ultimately has "one-truth" or "one right answer." The ontological consequence of this belief is what Kincheloe calls "cognitive passivity" (pp. 1-16). Public school students socialized into the one-truth epistemology become cognitively passive, conditioned to accept things at face value without interrogation, resisting nuance and gray areas at all costs. We asked ourselves if cognitive passivity could explain the behavior of our more challenging students, and we found that it certainly was possible.

The more we reflected on Kincheloe's (1993) ideas, the more we began to feel that the

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one-truth epistemology could help explain the attitude towards the dissertation process. They certainly seemed to resist nuance and gray areas. For instance, they tended to go into a ‘full stop’ after submitting their writing to us. Whether we took two weeks, a month, or two months to get feedback to them, many dropped their dissertations in mid-stream, effectively refusing to make a single revision or add a word to their documents until our feedback was in hand. Certainly, we were sympathetic to the desire to put the dissertation on hold, especially when facing family and other job responsibilities, as we all have. But as doctoral students we quickly learned that pauses can hamper progress, taking days or even weeks to recover from, or derailing the dissertation process altogether. Furthermore, at least one of our chairs took more than a full semester to provide any feedback. Had we stopped working for that long, we would have wasted time and money.

Our students seemed to follow a similar binary when it came to the feedback itself. We tended to provide all students with copious feedback on their writing, maximizing the use of the “track changes” and “comments” editing tools found in Microsoft Word. While each comment, suggestion, or required change was situated in the document, we expected the students to learn from the mistake that we had tagged, and fix similar mistakes going backward and forward through the document. What surprised us was that our more challenging students failed to make the changes throughout the document, even after we spelled out our expectations. Instead, they either (1) made no change at all, or (2) made changes locally where the comment appeared and nowhere else. They seemed to be unwilling or unable to apply our comments to writing beyond

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where the comment appeared. They could have been looking for the ‘one right answer’ (or the grade of ‘pass’) instead of having to work with comments that required them to think, reflect, and grow. In other words, we worried that our more challenging students have become ‘cognitively passive’ because of years of having been fed the one truth epistemology in their K-12 and post-secondary schooling. In those reflections, a key aspect of Scholar Transformation Theory was set.

Reading

Another difficulty that we had with our more challenging students had to do with their relationship to reading. Simply put, they seemed afraid of it. We recalled meetings with such students during which we would describe our favorite literature with great enthusiasm. We hoped that our enthusiasm would become infectious, that they would leave our offices inspired to read and motivated to keep working. Instead, they would watch us reticently, take down the information hastily, and never mention the sources we had tried to introduce to them. These students both mystified and frustrated us. They mystified us because we could not imagine why anyone would pursue a doctoral degree if they did not like to, or expect to, read. They frustrated us because they would show some gratitude for our suggestions, but somehow dismiss them simultaneously. Feeling miffed, we would return to our impromptu support group mulling over our interactions with them. Had we come on too strong? Had we said something wrong? Adler and Van Doren (1972) offered an explanation.

Adler and Van Doren (1972). To our delight, Adler and Van Doren’s (1972) concept

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of elementary reading supplemented Kincheloe's concept of cognitive passivity nicely. Although Adler and Van Doren acknowledged that elementary reading cannot be completely passive because it featured decoding the written word, they considered it passive, nonetheless, not because of how it approaches the word or the sentence, but because of how it approaches the book as a whole. While the active reader learns to move back and forth between chapters and sections in a deliberate manner, building independent understanding, the elementary reader does not. Instead, the elementary reader follows the linear presentation of the words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. and makes meaning of the book accordingly. Adler and Van Doren considered this cumulative, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, approach to reading non-fiction a clumsy, inexact, and, ultimately, an intellectually lazy way to make meaning of a book, hence their designation of elementary reading as a passive act.

With Adler and Van Doren (1972), we felt we had yet another piece of the puzzle when it came to understanding our more challenging students. If our more challenging students were, in fact, elementary readers, then it could explain why they might shy away from books or articles that were long or contained terminology with which they were unfamiliar. Indeed, an elementary reader might view such recommendations negatively, because they would view it as wasted time and effort, extending the dissertation process with questionable return. It seemed plausible to us that our more challenging students simply did not know (or were never taught) how to dip into a source and get out of it what they needed. Such dipping, Adler and Van Doren reminded us, was not part of elementary reading but active reading. We were beginning to realize that active reading was what had gotten us through our dissertations and that it was necessary in order for our students to get through

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theirs.

Adler and Van Doren (1972) divided active reading into two categories based on the purpose of each: analytical and syntopical. Analytical reading consisted of the set of skills aimed at developing an understanding of an entire book, where syntopical reading consisted of the same analytical skills, plus additional skills, aimed at developing an understanding of a body of literature on a single topic. While we were unfamiliar with the term syntopical, we recognized the skill set immediately: syntopical reading referred to the skills needed to complete a proper literature review in a dissertation. To state it from the student angle, a dissertation student is expected to develop an understanding of the body of literature that relates to their research topic. The resulting understanding is communicated in a chapter of the dissertation called the literature review. With syntopical reading, Adler and Van Doren captured the skills that were necessary to conduct an effective literature review, a chapter that our more challenging students also struggled with. Adler and Van Doren's continuum of reading skills (elementary—analytical—syntopical), together with Kincheloe's concept of cognitive passivity set the stage for Scholar Transformation Theory.

Writing

Difficulties with argument and organization were almost always present in our challenging students' work, but not always immediately obvious. Where headings and topic sentences could suggest a sound argument with a clear direction, closer readings revealed the opposite. For instance, a paragraph's lead sentence, which would often appear to be the paragraph's topic sentence, would be followed by several sentences that would also read as viable topic sentences of the same paragraph or of subsequent paragraphs. Indeed, some problem

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paragraphs were so completely encumbered by topic sentences that they contained no supporting sentences, amounting to little more than a string of generalizations, representing topics that should have been developed but were not. The argument of a chapter, or a section within a chapter, cannot sustain too many of such paragraphs and remain coherent. Several of such paragraphs across chapters renders a dissertation unreadable.

The more we mulled over the so-called writing problems evident in our students' dissertations, the more we realized that topic-sentence encumbered paragraphs represented something bigger than a mere writing or paragraph problem: they represented a thinking problem likely years in the making. Specifically, the problem seemed to represent confusion around the purpose of writing, audience, as well as the student-author's sense of themselves as an academic writer. In short, for our more challenging students, the writing was the assemblage of words on a page following a prescribed form. Human relationships were ignored or forgotten.

In the 1970s, James Britton broke ground in writing theory when he suggested that language connected students' "ideas about themselves" to "subject matter" (Durst and Newell, 1989, p. 375). Reacting to the British school system that emphasized the written product over the writing process, much as America's public schools do today, Britton turned the teaching of writing on its head by reminding his readers that writing is, first and foremost, an act of communication that originates with a human author and that is transmitted to a human audience. Although Britton's message to the writing education community was already nearly fifty years old, it seemed likely that our students had never have been taught writing in accordance with Britton's theory, particularly since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the U.S. law which

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weaponized the one-truth epistemology thereby diminishing the value of subjects such as writing that was not reducible to a single right answer, was already more than 10 years old.

Identity and Positionality

Kamler & Thomson (2014) reminded us that academic writing was no different from any other writing—that it, too, is an act of communication. Their theory, which carried Britton's (Durst and Newell, 1989) into the academic realm, emphasized that the knowledge production engine should be driven by two reciprocating pistons: “textwork” and “identitywork”—distinct, but interconnected processes that Kamler and Thomson combined into a single term: “textwork/identitywork” (p. 15). The implication of Kamler and Thomson's theory was clear to us: a student author's sense of self (or identity) evolves inevitably as he or she embarks on a writing project such as a dissertation, and the text being produced evolves as the student-author evolves. An implication of the theory was equally clear to us: a student whose identity does not evolve would necessarily hamper the development of a quality text. What Kamler & Thomson imply, but do not state explicitly, is that a student's positionality is important.

Kamler and Thomson (2014), together with Kincheloe (1996) and Adler and Van Doren (1972) and our experiences with our more difficult students, led us to a simple, yet profound, insight: dissertation students have to see themselves as being capable of becoming a scholar who can produce scholarship, before the textwork/identity work can even begin. Without a doubt, the community of practitioners (of which a doctoral student is an automatic part) can help support the process. But, at some point, the student must take the leap, and accept the fact that they have the capacity to do what the faculty and others author-researchers are doing—namely, produce

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new knowledge. We named this pre-condition of entry into the community of practitioners and the dissertation process positionality.

The theory certainly resonated with us as dissertation students and beyond. All of us felt as though we grew as individuals and as scholars through the dissertation and that we have not stopped growing as a result of any writing project since (including this one!). And, once again, we thought of our more challenging dissertation students. If they did not view writing as an act of communication between themselves and an audience, was it possible that they did not see the need to grow personally and academically in order to produce a quality document? Similarly, if they did not see themselves as having the capacity to produce knowledge, was it possible for them to produce anything of any value at all? Our understanding of cognitive passivity and elementary reading suggested the affirmative. We began our exploration of the solution to this problem with Kamler and Thomson, considering our students' identities and positionality and the leaps that many of them needed to take to move from passive to active, from a consumer of information to a producer of knowledge. Thus, STT was born. But first, we reviewed the literature on dissertation advising to see what others were doing in the area.

A Framework Emerges 2: Finding a solution

Dissertation Support Literature

A growing body of research on doctoral education has focused on approaches to helping students get through the dissertation. Cravens et al, (2014) suggested that doctoral students benefit from training in certain skills and dispositions necessary for successful completion, including the development of "resilient emotional attitudes towards setbacks" (p. 1). Kamler & Thomson (2014) challenge the notion that dissertation writing is an intensely

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individualistic experience by pointing out that the socialization into a complex community of scholars is at its root. Although the scholarly community is represented by the committee, it does not end there, including conference audiences, journal reviewers, and beyond (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Kamler and Thomson (2014) provide a theoretical framework that we found useful for guiding students in the development of scholarly habits of mind needed for approaching the dissertation and for subsequent careers as professors, researchers or scholars/practitioners.

Liechty et al. (2009) took more of a holistic approach to the dissertation process. They pointed out that success results from three levels of factors the confluence of which are relatively rare. The levels are 1) individual, 2) relational and 3) institutional. The factors at the individual level include the pre-existing knowledge, skills, and dispositions that were developed by the student before entering the program. The factors at the relational level refer primarily to personal relationships within departments, such as student-to-student and faculty-student relationships. Finally, institutional factors include the university-wide policies, practices, and supports that should (but do not always) facilitate student progress.

Based on our experiences as dissertation advisors, our students face two additional levels of factors that Liechty et al. did not consider: 4) domestic and 5) professional. The domestic level includes families and, in some instances, extended families, that our students are responsible for or accountable to. The professional level includes full-time employment that often consumes more than forty hours of our students' lives per week. Changes in either the professional or domestic realms, whether large or small, can add significant time to

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completion, and derail the process altogether. As far as we are concerned, a theory that would have heuristic value in mentoring doctoral students through this process must necessarily consider all five levels.

Liechty, Schull, & Liao (2009) found that one of the factors in doctoral degree completion is the institution's structure, particularly within the department. In most departments, there are structures in place that monitor the student's dissertation process, but often students are unclear about expectations, time management, and establishing a realistic timeframe to reach certain milestones (Liechty, Schull, & Liao, 2009, p. 490). Outside of the classroom, some departments have taken to the use of group sessions to teach the tools of: cognitive restructuring, stress management, and time management. Other departments have taken a hands-on approach by assisting their students with matching their strengths with the type of research they are interested in and offering them the opportunity to participate in research projects that promote self-efficacy and skill development.

Blanton (1983) interviewed graduate faculty members (from large universities) and found that the phases of the dissertation process (planning, beginning, data gathering, writing, and finishing) aid in the prevention of problems associated with the process. Particularly, as it pertains to the writing portion of the dissertation, there is a lack of technical writing skills among the students. There is also an inability to organize the material in a conceptual manner, which in turn makes it difficult to see meaningful patterns. Blanton (1983) also found that students have a lack of loyalty to the data.

Lim et al. (2019) provided strategies to assist doctoral students studying in distance

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learning programs that would support them in the completion of their dissertations. These suggestions included: shared responsibility and commitment, effective communication between researchers, and services and technologies for students and faculty. Shared responsibility and commitment are between faculty and students in the early stages of the dissertation. This is where the doctoral students' social network is discussed, teaching students time management, determining their dissertation readiness, and mapping out where the dissertation skills are developed within the program.(Lim et al., 2019, p. 195). Effective communication can prevent many issues that may arise when students work in isolation. Lim et al. (2019) shared that when faculty members provide shorter feedback, it allows for a quicker turnaround, as well as paces the student to attack the corrections quickly, so they do not become overwhelmed. Technologies, such as software, writing/research services, writing retreats, etc. are helpful tools that aid in the retention of these students, therefore raising the completion percentages (Lim et al., 2019, p. 202).

Cafferella & Barnett (2000) obtained doctoral students' perceptions of a teaching process designed to improve their scholarly writing skills. The Scholarly Writing Project was designed as a core course requirement for an educational leadership doctoral program in the US. Its purpose was to investigate a specific area of interest for the content of the class, engage in the process of critiquing their peers' work, and incorporate the feedback to prepare for a formal academic paper. In this study, the critiquing process proved to be the most influential in helping the students to understand the academic writing process. The apprehension of preparing and receiving feedback was there, but it increased students' efficacy and confidence in their writing, as well as lessened the emotionally-charged

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feedback they would give to other peers (Cafferella & Barnett, 2000, p. 50).

When taken together, the dissertation advising literature reaffirmed that dissertation students face a capricious ocean of relationships that must be navigated successfully to produce a quality dissertation. As we had surmised from our conversations, chief among these relationships is the student's relationship with himself or herself which becomes an anchor in that ocean.

When it comes to the dissertation process, the literature reinforced for us that the dissertation is not a linear, 'one-size-fits-all' process, as so many dissertation boot camps and 'how-to' books suggest (Booker, 1998; Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 1999; Ball, 2012; Graustein, 2014; Rudestam & Newton, 2014; Terrell, 2015; Turabian, 2016; Amandi, 2019). Instead, the dance between personal growth and skill development—a dance that takes place while floating on the capricious ocean of relationships—follows a delicate trajectory that is unique for each individual and can be interrupted at any point for any reason because of the individual's circumstances. Indeed, experience has taught us that the very books and materials that promote a 'one-size-fits-all' approach are often counter-productive in the hands of our students. More times than not, they feed our student's impatience which, paradoxically, slows the process down. Consequently, STT emphasizes process over product, to counteract those tendencies.

Once we had an idea of how our more difficult students saw themselves in relation to the dissertation process, we began to ponder how this external locus of control became so entrenched in them. Given its intransigence and consistency across students, we suspected

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that it began in secondary school or earlier. Eventually, critical pedagogy entered into our conversation: could this external orientation to learning be a by-product of years of schooling under the “banking concept” of education" (Freire, 1973, p. 72)? The answer seemed to be an emphatic "yes" Freire (1973) pointed out that a student's "critical consciousness" and "creative power" (p. 73) were casualties of the banking concept of education. Without these faculties, students tended to assume a "passive role" (p. 73) in their education, accepting the "deposits" of information made by the teacher without question. What is more, Freire suggested that the banking concept leads to a "domesticated" (p. 75) version of reality that emphasizes product over process. Freire's binary seemed clear: students socialized by the banking concept of education became passive spectators accepting the power structure's version of reality, where those who broke free of the educational oppression became active participants "in the struggle for their liberation" (p. 75)? Freire provided for us the outline of STT. We now had a starting point and an ending point.

Lambie and Vaccaro (2011) spoke of self-efficacy, which was defined as "a person's *belief* in his or her ability to perform a certain task" (p. 3) (italics added). Our more difficult students seemed to lack self-efficacy and an internal locus of control, at least in part because they did not see themselves as scholars capable of making decisions without us. Kluever & Green (1998) supported this inference, suggesting that non-completers tended towards an external locus of control where completers tended toward an internal locus of control.

Liechty et al. (2009) found Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasized that the best learning takes place in the context of supportive relationships. Thus mentors, peers, faculty and even staff are all important in moving the doctoral student from the place of students'

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current knowledge and skill level through the zone of proximal development to the optimal skill level that is available to a student when she or he is given adequate support. In addition, the Bourdeusian notion of capital, Freire's views about critical pedagogies, Mezirow's conceptualization of transformative learning, constructs related to creative intelligence (Lovitts, 2008) all informed the theory when it came to moving our doctoral students from passive to active learners.

Borrowing from higher education (Pascarella, E.T., Edison, M., Serra Hagedorn, L. et al., 1996) and multicultural education (Banks, 1996), we came to regard the passion and commitment with which we had approached and completed our dissertations as representing an 'internal locus of control'. Ultimately, this meant that we believed we, alone, had the power to get the job done, and that power came from within us as individuals. In contrast, our more challenging students did not appear to have such an orientation to the process. In fact, there were some who were so dependent-even 'co-dependent' (i.e. they manipulated us to get their emotional needs met) upon us as their advisors, that they sought approval for each and every page, paragraph, and even every sentence that they wrote. What is more, these same students appeared to be more interested in the extrinsic reward, namely the degree, than with growing and learning from the process of getting there. Hence, we tentatively assessed our more challenging dissertation students as possessing an 'external locus of control' - suggesting that they required constant affirmation from the outside to stay motivated. People and rewards external to themselves, advisors, and the degree moved them forward. We were left with the question that eventually powered both the theory and our praxis: how do we change the locus of control for these dissertation students from external to

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internal? It became evident that some sort of personal transformation was necessary.

Introducing Scholar Transformation Theory

Phase I: Passive Information Gatherer

The first phase of scholar development is what we call Passive Information Gatherer. Here we make the distinction between information and knowledge. We view information as disembodied 'facts', and knowledge as personal and reflecting the intentions, biases, and prior experiences of its producer. Students in the Passive Information Gathering phase do not possess a scholar identity. They do not see themselves as scholars nor do they appear to understand the norms, rules, or practices of the scholarly enterprise. They are naive about what is required of them as doctoral students and may even feel victimized by the "mysterious" requirements imposed by their advisors. It's as if, in the context of the academy, they are not in the game at all and see themselves as having little or no personal agency in the academic process. In fact, they may be unaware of the "academic game" at all.

With respect to positionality, students at this stage on the STT continuum have a locus of control that is external, and they see themselves as powerless in the knowledge creation process.

Passivity and powerlessness characterize their positionality, and they enact little or no individual agency as they interact with texts, passively reading information for the sole purpose of giving the professor what s/he wants. All information is viewed as equally valid and useful in order to meet the needs defined by the dissertation advisor whom he or she is trying to "please."

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The kind of thinking that is indicative of students as this phase is what we would call "anti- thinking." There is no intellectual interaction with information and little evaluation of its worth with respect to their own purpose. They are unaware of the purposes of the author. The intention of the student is to get information about a topic and to satisfy a need for external approval. Often a student who is at this phase will simply conduct a google search and cut and paste information that they find during their search. With little awareness of what counts as "good information," they will simply use information that shows up first in the google search and judge this information as "best" since it shows up first on such a search. The written product at this phase of thinking is a newly formatted document with the "gathered" information from a google search. The work does not represent a coherent flow of ideas and quotations are strung together in ways that sometimes misrepresent the intention of the original author.

Phase 2: Active Information Gatherer

This student still does not possess the identity of a scholar, but unlike the passive gatherer, is able to discern that there are norms and rules of scholarship but does not truly know what they are. Maintaining the analogy of the game, we describe this student as knowing that there is a game but not quite knowing how to play it.

With respect to positionality, students at this phase employ some personal agency as it relates to the information that they are collecting, however, their intention is to give the instructor what s/he wants. A student at this phase employs active reading strategies in order

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to determine what the information is saying but may not be able to discern the positionality and intention of the person generating the information. Students at this stage have an external locus of control, meaning that although they have some facility with understanding the relative worth of various sources of information, they are not gathering that information with a personal goal and intention in mind.

Thinking at this stage is "uncritical," displaying little ability to critique information or ideas. There is an understanding that all information is not the same; however, there is little awareness of the intentions or biases of the "knower" who has generated the information. Although this student may possess the refined skill of gathering information, they are unable to determine the worth of what they have gathered for their own personal intentions. The main intention of students at this phase is to satisfy an external objective such as getting good feedback or satisfying their advisor. The written evidence of this thinking is a "good" term paper that mimics the scholarship game. It is coherent but does not display originality nor the authentic voice of the student.

Phase 3: Active Knowledge Gatherer

We refer to this student as working with knowledge rather than with information such as in the two previous stages. This transition signals that we see in these students a recognition that all information is not created equal and that all information is generated by a "knower", who has intentions and biases. This student's identity is that of an aspirant. S/he aspires to be a knowledge producer but does not yet see himself as a 'real' or potential

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scholar. On occasion we have had students confess to feeling like an "impostor" because they recognize that there is more to scholarship than they have yet attained. The student's positionality is one of subservience to other knowledge producers and they often ascribe more authority to published work than is warranted. Although this student sees all information from a standpoint of knowledge production, he does not yet see himself as equal to those who generate knowledge, in fact, he sees himself as separate from other knowers. There is some degree of personal agency but it is limited by the need for external approval. In his thinking about what he reads, this student recognizes the knower in the information and therefore understands the difference between knowledge and information. He understands that when he reads any information, there is someone who wrote that information. Knowledge gatherers understand that knowledge is information that is mediated by a human being who has limitations and biases that are reflected in the knowledge that is produced. Active knowledge gatherers have purpose and understand that other knowledge producers have perspectives and biases, intentions, purposes, and voice and are speaking to specific audiences in their writing. They understand that scholarly writing has uniqueness and authenticity and that authors employ actions and methods when generating new knowledge. This student goes from reading about a topic to reading for a particular purpose that, although it may be informed by an external person, is fundamentally a purpose that they have for themselves.

Thinking at this stage manifests in writing that is limited by the need for external validation of the positions that such students adopt. Their critique of the work of other scholars is usually dichotomous, agreeing or disagreeing, believing or not believing. They

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evaluate the position taken by an author, as right or wrong, and can provide yes or no answers to questions about the authors' intention. Students at this phase often employ superior literature searching skills and can compare and contrast knowledge of the same topic based on perspectives and points of view of knowers. We judge good Master's level thesis writers to be at this stage,

Phase 4: Active Knowledge Consumer

The student at this stage has begun to develop her own scholar identity. She is conscious of her own perspectives, points of view, and preferred methods and understands that these are grounded in the scholar she is becoming. With respect to positionality, this student is an academic insider. She has a point of view and sees herself as a knower on the same level as other knowledge producers. She develops a passion for a field of knowledge, identifies with various scholars and knows what does and does not resonate with her. This student is able to critique the writings of others from her own internal locus of control and is not simply reading about a topic. She is able to recognize herself in the knowledge of others and can use knowledge for her own purposes. She actively reads information based on her own need to know and places her work at the center of the work that is being explored. She reads and provides active critiques of other knowledge producers based on more elaborate criteria that serve her own purposes.

Such students are able to choose those things from other knowers that serve their purpose and discard those that do not. The thinking at this stage is purposeful. Students who are active knowledge consumers no longer evaluate the worth of knowledge on the basis of

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dichotomies but are able to provide a far more nuanced critique of the work that they read. They are able to discern the conceptual frameworks that guide the work that they read and have a sensitivity to how various methodologies are grounded in epistemological stances. They understand how their research relates to various schools of inquiry. We posit that this is the minimum stage needed for students to effectively engage in doctoral-level coursework, and craft literature reviews that are relevant to their particular research purposes and that serve to locate their own work within a body of discourse.

Phase 5: Active Knowledge Producer

This student has developed a scholar identity. He sees himself as a scholar capable of producing his own unique scholarship. His positionality is more than simply an insider in the community of practice. He is a key player and game-changer. Students at this phase are able to create new understandings of existing knowledge, can engage in scholarly conversations as an 'equal' to other scholars, and sees himself as a unique scholar who can make a contribution to the academic field.

Not only do they see themselves as being on equal footing as other scholars, but they also have the scholarly positionality that is needed to create original research that is authentic to who they are as scholars. A student in this phase understands and can articulate who s/he is as a knower and can therefore contribute to knowledge. S/he is able to understand other knowers and situate themselves within the broader scholarly community through an understanding of how they are similar to and different from other scholars. There is a sense of originality and authority

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in their work that reflects their perceived position of academic power.

Students at this phase are no longer getting information about a topic; they are actively conversing with other scholars for the purpose of moving the conversations in the literature forward into new and uncharted territories. Hence, those in this phase understand that who they are is reflected in the knowledge that they produce and they are able to produce and defend their unique knowledge in ways that contribute to the larger community of scholars. They are what we call "generative thinkers," who have the identity and positionality necessary to create original scholarship. When students are at this phase on the scholar transformation continuum, they can conceptualize, implement, write, and defend a self-directed research study and produce research published in peer-reviewed publications.

It is at this stage that the arduous work of dissertation writing and guidance pays off. At this stage, the student/advisor relationship changes to one of "colleague-ship". The student is no longer trying to win the advisor's approval and "get it right". Meetings with the advisor are about the co-construction of knowledge and each learns from the other. In this phase, a student now sees himself as a scholar and can produce his own scholarship. He sees himself as more than simply an insider in the community of practice but as a key player and game-changer. Students at this phase are able to create new understandings of existing knowledge, can engage in scholarly conversations as an 'equal' to other scholars, and see themselves as a unique scholar who can make a contribution to their academic field.

Not only do they *see* themselves as on equal footing as other scholars, but they also have

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the scholarly positionality that is needed to create original research that is authentic to who they are as scholars. A student in this phase understands and can articulate who he or she is as a knower and can therefore contribute to knowledge. S/he is able to understand other knowers and situate him/herself within the broader scholarly community through an understanding of how they are similar to and different from other scholars. There is a sense of originality and authority in their work that reflects their perceived position of academic power.

The thinking at this stage is no longer merely about getting information about a topic. They are actively conversing with other scholars with the purpose of moving the conversations in the literature forward into new and uncharted territories. Hence, those in this phase understand that who they are is reflected in the knowledge that they produce, and they are able to produce and defend their unique knowledge in ways that contribute to the larger community of scholars. They are what we call "generative thinkers," who have the identity and positionality necessary to create original scholarship. When students are at this phase on the scholar transformation continuum, they can conceptualize, implement, write, and defend a self-directed research study and produce research that is publishable in peer-reviewed journals. The scholarly agency that the student now exhibits transforms the advisor/student relationship to one in which there is the co-construction of knowledge. The advisor is no longer "other" but another member of the community of practice in which the student is also a member.

Table 1: Scholar Transformation Theory Table

<p>Phase</p>	<p>Identity</p> <p>How do I see myself?</p> <p>Who am I?</p> <p>What do I do?</p> <p>Perception of Self</p>	<p>Positionality</p> <p>Where do I stand in relation to my own and others' "knowledge"?</p> <p>Who validates knowledge?</p> <p>How am I related to those with scholarly "power"</p> <p>Power + Personal Agency</p>	<p>Thinking</p> <p>How do I approach my scholarly work?</p> <p>How do I perceive the work that I do?</p> <p>What are the mental constructs that I employ in my work?</p>
<p>Phase I</p> <p>Passive Information Gatherer</p>	<p>Non-Player in the academic game</p> <p>Victim</p> <p>Naive</p> <p>Unaware of the game I am playing in the academy</p>	<p>No personal power at all</p> <p>No personal agency, not even with the information they read</p> <p>Doesn't related to information as knowledge at all and can't judge what information is most worth</p>	<p>Anti- thinking</p> <p>No thinking at all</p> <p>Actively "not thinking" actually is adverse to thinking</p> <p>Simple recall and is not even clear about this at times</p>

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<p>Phase 2</p> <p>Active Information Gatherer</p>	<p>An outsider to the game but knows there is a game</p> <p>Uses strategies to “make it look like” they are in the game but know they are not really</p>	<p>Students exhibit some personal power and agency. They are in the position of an outsider, not really in a position to make choices about the relevance and worth of information</p>	<p>Uncritical thinking</p> <p>Thinking is at simple and at the level of creating documents that reflect the proper organization of information, no real critiques of the authors behind the information</p>
<p>Phase 3</p> <p>Active Knowledge Gatherer</p>	<p>Aspirant Aspires to be a knowledge producer but does not see him/herself as a real or potential “scholar”</p> <p>Hopeful</p>	<p>Subservient to other knowledge producers</p>	<p>Codependent thinking</p> <p>Can critiques but in dichotomous thinking right wrong/good bad</p> <p>Needs external validation for thinking</p>
<p>Phase 4</p> <p>Active Knowledge Consumer</p>	<p>Insider, is in the game but not yet a key player as of yet.</p> <p>I am a knowledge producer but need to show this through my own work</p> <p>A key player in the game or community of scholars but not a game-changer</p>	<p>Power to consume and select knowledge in a purposeful way. Has a voice but it is weak because it is “unproven” since they themselves have not created an original work but they are in a position to do so</p>	<p>Purposeful thinking</p> <p>Critical thinking with a clear personal purpose in mind can critique beyond dichotomous boundaries and can create new and unique critiques and analysis of the works of other knowledge producers</p>
<p>Phase 5</p> <p>Active Knowledge Producer</p>	<p>Knowledge producer, scholar generator of knowledge in their own right</p>	<p>Power to create, empowered, game-changer, unique and voice that contributes</p>	<p>Generative Thinking</p> <p>Thinking that produces new and unique knowledge, theories methods of knowledge creation</p>

Heuristic Value of Scholar Transformation Theory

We think that this framework is useful in helping us to understand the challenges that students face in writing their dissertations. It helps us to come to grips with the seemingly mysterious process of moving students towards a place of autonomous writing that seems to elude both us and them. It helps to explain why the painstakingly detailed feedback that we give on students' writing seems to be so ineffective. Viewed through the lens of STT we recognize that the problem is not one of a lack of knowledge or research skills, but a need for a fundamental transformation of who the student is with respect to their scholarship. The question then becomes, "What experiences would foster a fundamental shift in students' identity and positionality to produce the authentic thinking that dissertation writing requires?"

Although our descriptions of the stages seem to be most applicable to the reading of the extant literature and the crafting of the literature review chapter, we point out that reading and crafting of the literature review chapter are fundamental to all aspects of conceptualizing the research problem, making methodological choices, and reporting the findings. The writing of the literature review chapter requires and is indicative of the thinking needed to conceptualize an original research problem, select and implement a research design, and report findings with authority and authenticity so that they make a contribution to literature. Writing and thinking are

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in a dialectic relationship. Writing both creates and is informed by thinking. In addition to the literature chapter, the absence of the identity and positionality of the scholar shows up again when the findings are being discussed. Often this chapter of the dissertation fails to reveal the student's authentic voice and the student is unable to show how her findings connect to a body of research in ways that move the conversation forward.

In our work with students in the Summer Dissertation Intensive that we mentioned earlier, we use this framework not only to help us determine where students are on the continuum but perhaps more importantly to help students to self-reflect on where they are. Early in the weeklong workshop, we present the theory. We describe the stages and discuss the characteristics of writing at each stage. We then ask the students to analyze a piece of their own writing and self-identify the stage at which they believe they are. The response of our students to this has been enlightening to both them and us. At this point, we only have anecdotal evidence but we have seen incremental changes in students' writing from this exercise alone. Our challenge and next steps will be to design experiences that help to bring about the transformations implied by the theory and to conduct empirical studies of the effect of the interventions that we are designing.

Summary and Conclusions

The above discussion provides a framework that explains why many doctoral students struggle with conceptualizing and writing their dissertation research, which for most students is their first experience with producing knowledge. As the above theory suggests,

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dissertation writing is more than an exercise in reading and synthesizing research, designing and implementing a study, and reporting findings using a five-chapter template, it is an act of knowledge production that requires students to adopt a scholar identity, positionality and thinking that results in a cogent, coherent and authentic dissertation. Hence, for a student to be able to craft a dissertation that rises to the level of scholarship that can inform and forward the scholarly community, it is imperative that we understand how he views himself as a scholar and how that view impacts his thinking and consequently his writing. Hence, STT provides a framework for understanding the causes of students' challenges with all phases of the dissertation writing process and can provide a way to address these challenges that can result in real and lasting changes.

Traditional approaches to supporting doctoral students in the writing of their dissertations have focused primarily on helping students to “improve their writing” or “understand the elements” of the dissertation structure. Those methods fail to consider that dissertation writing requires that students can think through each element of the dissertation writing process as a scholar: someone who can make a unique contribution to scholarship and can defend their choices to a committee of their peers. More importantly, when we notice students struggling in this process, we can do more than offer one size fits all writing tips and strategies, we can understand where students are on the STT continuum and provide strategies that are appropriate for their location on the continuum.

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