

Chapter 5

Supporting Dissertation Writing Using a Cognitive Apprenticeship Model

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ABSTRACT

The cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006; Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989) is one way to support doctoral student development, from student to scholar, in the dissertation writing process. The results of this apprenticeship are cognitive maturity (self-authorship, Baxter Magolda, 2004). Both cognitive apprenticeship and cognitive maturity are essential for writing the dissertation because it is a unique and high-stakes writing genre. Instructors and mentors must provide progressive levels of autonomous practice at the skills required to be a scholarly researcher and writer. This practice and support occurs in numerous forms during doctoral study. Thus, when students venture into the independent dissertation writing phase of the doctoral program, the level of skill transfer is much higher and the demand for support is lower but more specialized. This chapter specifically attends to scholarship and mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit how one group of faculty adopted the cognitive appren-

ticeship model (Collins, 2006; Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989) as a way to support doctoral student development, from student to scholar. The underlying result of

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this apprenticeship is cognitive maturity (self-authorship). Both cognitive apprenticeship and cognitive maturity are essential for dissertation writing because it is a unique and high-stakes writing genre. In other words, faculty members employ the cognitive apprenticeship model to develop students' writing and thinking skills with the intention of moving students along a recursive continuum towards increasing levels of cognitive maturity. One example of cognitive maturity and competence is evidenced by doctoral students' practicing "a contextual view of knowledge [that recognizes] that multiple perspectives exist, depending on how people structure knowledge claims...[and participating in] constructing, evaluating and interpreting judgments in light of available evidence and frames of reference" (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 9). Incorporating the history and assumptions of knowledge claims and being able to situate their own scholarly writing within these assumptions, not as right or wrong, but as contingent on context, signals cognitive maturity.

Dissertation writing only happens once in one's education path and is designed to be an individual or isolated test of one's ability to make connections, do research, and write. Liechty, Schull and Liao (2009) caution academics to remember that "scholars are made not born. Seasoned academics may forget the arduous developmental process by which they attained this level of scholarly confidence and competence" (p. 492). The isolation of dissertation writing many times results in doctoral students remaining ABD (All But Dissertation). It is reasonable to consider that dissertation writing is an illustration or application of Aristotle's thinking in 'the whole being greater than the sum of its parts,' suggesting that coursework alone is not enough support for dissertation completion. Because dissertation writing is markedly different from writing "an academic article, book chapter or paper for a taught course," (Carter, 2011, p. 731), doctoral students need an explicit support such as a cognitive apprenticeship to reinforce their journey through the dissertation writing process.

Lee Shulman (2010) lists four practices in doctoral education that should be included to prepare students for practice in the field. His first point is particularly relevant to this chapter on using a cognitive apprenticeship model to support dissertation writing:

Doctoral education, however, is indeed learning to practice: most centrally to practice research, the practical work of scholars, which is itself a highly complex set of technical understandings, skills, and ethical norms. In each discipline, different practices must be modeled, performed, repeated, mentored, refined, and applied. Yet very few of the pedagogical approaches used to teach practice in professional education find their way into doctoral programs. Those practices of the Ph.D. include:

- The practices of scholarship (in its many forms--problem framing, question asking, research design, collecting data, analysis, synthesis and integration, theory development, etc., as well as powerful, clear, and persuasive writing and speaking).
- The practices of design and interaction needed for teaching in large, small, and individual settings, in seminars or lecture halls, with the newest tools of technology and communications, and with refined methods of assessment and evaluation.
- The practices of supervision and mentoring, wherein professional academics learn to model and coach, to guide and support, to counsel and even on occasion to heal.
- The practices of public service, outreach, and civic participation in a variety of forms. (Shulman, 2010, p. B7)

The cognitive apprenticeship model attends in many ways to the call for the practices of scholarship, design and interaction needed for teaching,

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