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Book Review: The Doctoral Journey

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The Doctoral Journey. Thomas G. Ryan. (2013). Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing LLC as part of The Learner Book Series. 174 pp. (ISBN 978-1-61229-226-7).

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The Doctoral Journey, edited by Dr. Thomas G. Ryan, gives insightful views of the success, struggles, and overall experiences of thirteen vastly different doctoral journeys. This book allows those considering the doctoral journey to reflect on others' experiences and to learn from their struggles and successes. The book was designed "to capture the stories of Canadian doctoral graduates who undertook, successfully, the doctoral journey which unfolded with purpose and candor." While formally defining doctoral education as "the educative process leading to a doctoral degree," Ryan opens space for flexibility and new readings in the doctoral discourse through the lenses of several contributors. Each contributor experienced their own doctoral journey, "through alternative passageways and, in many instances, blaze[d] innovative trails." These passageways gradually revealed a living, breathing, pulsing, and enthralling landscape before the eyes of the reader, through which one can live the excitement, twists and turns of the doctoral adventure. Although each doctoral experience was unique there were common woven throughout the narratives. The major themes that emanated from these thirteen authors included the importance of choosing a program that is appropriate for oneself, student-supervisor relationships, unconditional support from family and mentors, feelings of accomplishment and the aftermath of the doctoral journey.

A major decisions that all *The Doctoral Journey* contributors addressed prior to starting their doctorates was a critical analysis of the different doctoral program offerings. Their insightful processes were beneficial for those considering their own doctoral journey. Elizabeth Ashworth discussed the importance of finding a program that met her "professional and financial needs" and ultimately led to her decision to attend the doctoral program at the University of Glasgow due to its online course work combined with onsite weekend. Vera McDonald chose the United States International University just north of San Diego due to its proximity to her work place and its small university community setting. Each doctoral participant in *the Doctoral Journey* offered a different list of reasons and factors concerning individual rationale for program choice.

The development of a student-supervisor relationship that occurs throughout the doctoral process became evident in every doctoral journey mentioned in this insightful book. The doctoral supervisor began a guide, and the relationship evolved into a lasting friendship when the supervisor became an emotional supporter, and perhaps most importantly, continued to be a mentor many years after the doctoral journey was complete. For instance, Dr. D. Sabers gave Ron Philips some firm but genuine advice during the process to help him succeed. Dr. Saber's words of wisdom should be something that readers take away from this book, "to stop trying to stress over the perfect dissertation, instead of what a good dissertation is, a done one" (2013, p.107). Zhihua (Olivia) Zhang's supervisor was crucial to her successful completion as unlike the other authors in the book she moved to Canada from China and experienced not just academic demands, but also cultural shock and family demands that impacted her journey. As well, Dr. Wallan's words to Sherry Peden were timely as they entered their student-supervisor

relationship: "We are entering a journey as advisor and student, and unlike a marriage, neither one of us can bail out when the going gets tough" (2013, p. 75).

It was not just the support from their supervisors that enabled each author to achieve his or her goal, but also the support from their family, friends and classmates. Heather McLeod's peer group was vital to her success. Her peer group consisted of five doctoral students that met monthly to support each other and to give advice on academic and personal issues. McLeod openly admits that at first she did not see the benefits of the informal monthly 'get together' but that these meetings did turn out to be intellectually stimulating, which contributed to her ability to continue working on her dissertation (2013, p. 33). David C. Young commented on the incredible importance of having support from your family throughout the doctoral journey (2013, p.110).

The perception of each individual's feelings and emotions after they completed and successfully defended their dissertation is priceless. Kristen Ferguson's eventful defense day demonstrated her compassion, desire and strength to manage having a family and completing her doctorate at the same time. Due to the illness of her son and resulting exhaustion from a sleepless night, and a previous year of dedication to complete her dissertation, she was still able to celebrate and soak in all that she had accomplished during her doctoral journey when she walked across the stage to accept her diploma (2013, p. 99).

The Doctoral Journey is a mandatory read for anyone considering the pursuit of this difficult, challenging, and long, yet rewarding academic journey. I also think it is an important read for others who wish to understand and appreciate the challenges experienced by those pursuing this route in academia. Dr. Thomas Ryan's ability to bring thirteen vastly different doctoral experiences into one book is skillful. The advice from the different authors is practical, timely, and is aimed to help an individual arrive at a decision that is right for his or her particular situation and context. The prospect of enrolling in a doctoral program with a comprehensive understanding of the roadblocks that one might encounter throughout the journey is not something trivial or inconsequential. During the process of reviewing this book, I often wondered whether I would have pursued this journey had I known what I now know about the process. Of course, a single book cannot address all the complexities inherent in pursuing this path. In addition to all the themes mentioned above, there is one more theme that could have been included in this collection of personal narratives. In my opinion, a successful dissertation is just one more step in the long journey of scholarship, teaching, research and publication. It takes many more decades of toil and trial and tribulations in the academy; so one must truly embrace a journey in which learning is the main reward.