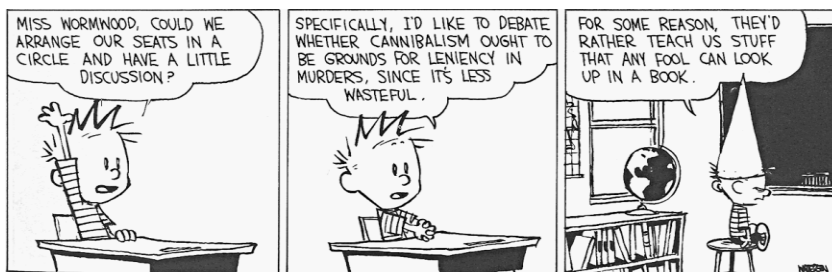


## Preparing and Taking Qualifying Exams



**University of New Hampshire  
Department of Education**

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# **Introduction**

The qualifying exam is the final step that delineates between being a doctoral student and a doctoral candidate. For most doctoral students, the process of preparing for and taking their qualifying exam is a stressful experience, filled with many questions and not nearly enough guidance. This guide is an attempt to rectify that by answering to often asked questions, as well as providing advice and guidance from students who have survived the experience.

The booklet is a reference tool for doctoral students who have completed their doctoral course work and are preparing to take the comprehensive examination in the UNH Department of Education. The aim of this guide is to provide three valuable resources: (1) general description of the nature of the qualifying exam; (2) advice gleaned from students who have taken their qualifying exam and advanced to candidacy; and (3) Model exams, as well as sample qualifying exam questions from recent exams in various areas.

All doctoral students are strongly urged to take full advantage of the information offered in this booklet prior to planning and preparing for their qualifying examination.

## **Before the Comprehensive Exam**

A minimum of 48-56 credits of coursework are required for completion of the doctoral program. While the qualifying exam is usually undertaken following the completion of doctoral coursework, it can be taken once a minimum 48 credits are completed.

Prior to taking the qualifying exam, the student will meet on several occasions with her guidance committee to determine whether or not the student is ready to write the exam. At these meetings the committee may request copies of course lists, bibliographies (annotated or not), and/or topic areas the student hopes to address in her exam. At these meetings, the committee and student work together to decide what steps are necessary for the student to be prepared to take her qualifying examination. These steps may

include recommending more coursework, reading additional bibliographic references, and/or starting to generate questions.

Using the questions generated by the student as a reference, the committee will work to create the final exam questions. This may involve the committee accepting, rejecting, or significantly modifying the student's questions prior to finalization. Throughout each step, the chair will send drafts to the committee for review and make changes as necessary, as request additional information from the student if pertinent. This process should be very collaborative, and the student should feel involved in the process, and ask questions if they are unclear on the next steps. Often committee members can make suggestions of current students who have recently completed the qualifying exam process to serve as resources in this process.

The chair and the candidate will work out the specific time of day and method of transmittal for the examination. In most instances, the exam will be emailed to the student on the predetermined date. In some cases where email is not an option, the exam can be mailed or faxed with the agreement from the candidate that it will not be opened until the designated day/time. The committee can allow for seven writing days and one day to copy the material.

## **Nature of the Examination**

There is a wide range in the format of the qualifying exam that can vary from specialization area to specialization area, as well committee preferences. Generally, the exam consists of answering a series of four essay questions, though some exams can require more than four responses.

The questions posed will generally cover some or all of these topics: (1) Research/Methodology, (2) Ethics, (3) Area of Specialization Strand (e.g. C&I, Teacher Development, Leadership/Policy Studies) (4) the student's chosen special topic (this will tie in closely with the proposed dissertation work), and (5) any combination of the above. Looking at copies of previous qualifying exams administered by the student's committee chair can offer a lot of insight into the type of

The essay answers are to be approximately 10-15 typed and doubled-spaced pages long. The answers will show the candidate can bring to bear the appropriate literature and some critical appraisal of that literature. The assessment will ascertain the depth and breadth of knowledge the candidate has, as well as the ability to synthesize from the appropriate literature and to critically evaluate it. Candidates are expected to attach a list of works cited as part of the comprehensive exam.

While the examination is open book and the student may use any bibliographic resources at his or her disposal, the student may not seek help from outside persons in the completion of the exam. Upon receiving the examination, if the candidate has any questions they will immediately contact the person named on the examination.

The candidate will provide copies of the examination answers to each committee member by the set time, and date after completion of the exam. Depending on the committee, some will request paper copies, while others prefer electronic. In some instances, only the chair requires a hard copy. It is up to the student to work with her committee to determine the requirements.

### ***Guidelines***

Below is a set of verbatim instructions for the completion of the qualifying exam that are sent with the questions on the day the Qualifying Exam begins. These are provided as a reference for the expectations laid out from the outset of the examination.

*The time line for completion of this examination is the period between 8:00 AM Thursday, October 3, 20\_, and 4:00 PM Thursday, October 10, 20\_. Please make three (3) copies of your completed examination and submit one copy each to Professors X, Y, and Z by 4:00 PM Thursday October 10, 2002.*

*This is an open book examination. You may make use of any notes or resources you have prepared in studying for the examination. It is assumed you will not ask the Committee members or anyone else to help you with your responses during this time. The bibliography that*

*you provided at our most recent guidance committee meeting with you, along with any reference works added, should serve as the primary source of reference cited in your written response. Please cite references used at the end of each question.*

*Each response should be approximately fifteen (15) pages in length, typed and double-spaced. You have the option of presenting your responses in any order that makes sense or contributes to an effective and logical flow of ideas. Your responses should reflect both depth and breadth of knowledge (citing appropriate research to support positions), the capability to express oneself clearly and precisely, the ability to analyze, synthesize, and critically appraise the literature under discussion.*

*Upon receipt of the examination, the members of the committee will evaluate your responses. The committee chair will notify you of the committee's decision: (1)pass, (2)fail, (3)provide additional evidence of qualification to be advanced to candidacy. Upon request, the committee will schedule a meeting with you to discuss its decision.*

### ***Assessment of the Examination***

The committee (normally) has three weeks to read and assess the comprehensive exam

For details of the assessment of Qualifying Exams, see the PhD Handbook, Section VII.

### **What If...?**

Often students worry unnecessarily about what to do in the event some sort of emergency situation comes up during their Qualifying Exams. The guidance committee and Department of Education are here to support the doctoral student and want each student to be able to successfully complete their Qualifying Exam. Therefore, if an unforeseen situation arises during the qualifying exam, whether family emergency or sickness or some other event, the student should contact her committee chair as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements.

## Advice from Past Students

### *I. 'A Candidate Who Happily Survived'*

As a general caution to all students who are approaching their exams, one piece of advice I have is to *stay in control of the process*. This is about you and your eventual contribution to a body of knowledge -- but it has to be your work and something to which you can remain committed. Granted, you will stand on the shoulders of others. But if you don't stay in charge of the process, it might either become someone else's agenda (so you might not desire to remain committed), or the process will fall apart because you have not maintained ownership. Please remember that nobody else will care the way you do.

Pieces of the qualifying exam you will have to address:

- selecting your exam committee, including your advisor/chair;
- developing your exam questions; and, finally,
- preparing for the exam, both academically and personally.

### *Selecting your exam committee*

*Make sure that your committee members can work together.*

If your members don't have collaborative and positive working relationships, then you may suffer through no fault of your own.

Therefore, before you go and ask so-and-so to be on your committee, you might discreetly ask your advisor (or your most important committee members) if they can work effectively with the member you would like to invite onto your committee.

*Make sure your committee members represent your areas of interest/study.*

First, they will be far more interested in your work and committed to supporting you if they have their own interest in it. Second, they will be resources for you as you develop your expertise in particular areas. Finally, they will be the authorities who judge your answers on your exam. So be sure that you have authorities working with

you who share the knowledge base. They will make or break you on the exam, so it is crucial that you and they share understandings about your interests/knowledge base. What kind of boat would you be in if you wanted to discuss and promote theories of evolution in your exam, but your committee member in that area was a creationist?

*You need to make sure that your committee members support you.* It is not just a matter of knowledge base and academics, but do you *feel* supported? Are you comfortable and at ease with them? It is not an absolute requirement, but it can make your process a whole lot easier and less painful. You need to have people around you who make you feel good, confident, valuable, and worthy of the whole doctoral process. This exam is an important part of that process, so make sure you feel good about those you have supporting your work.

### ***Selecting your advisor/chair***

*The most important person on your exam committee is your advisor, or “exam director.”*

One question I posed in the process of selecting my advisor was: Do I select an advisor based on my subject matter and content area or on my research methods? I think a student can easily go in either direction, but my advice is to know what your priorities are.

Furthermore, since your advisor is the most important member of your committee, I advise you to *be completely comfortable* with him or her. For one thing, you never know what kind of stuff is going to come up (personal or otherwise) in the process of preparing for your exam and in the exam itself, so it would be wise to have someone you can confide in and/or share with ease. But, more importantly, my bias is that you can’t be a good thinker if you are stressed about your relationship with one of the most important people supporting your thought process!

I learned this lesson by default. My original advisor had been assigned to me based on my content area, and I didn’t question the assignment, as it made sense to me at the time (What did I know?). I recall now that whenever we met, I had this “blown away” feeling. I



came away from meetings feeling like I was not competent enough and that my ideas were not good enough. If I presented an idea or thought, somehow, it seemed to get convoluted or reduced, and I didn't feel valued. I didn't understand this was happening until I changed advisors (due to circumstances beyond my control) and had an entirely different experience: I felt in control, valued, and competent.

### ***Developing exam questions***

*Know there will be a methods question.*

One of the questions will definitely be a methods question. The others will likely relate to your content areas.

*When developing your questions, think about your content areas and where it is you want to be considered an expert or authority.*

This will be your opportunity to claim your areas of expertise. For me, I had developed interest and experience (academic and practical) in (1) the concept of culture; (2) early intervention for infants, toddlers, and their families; and (3) infant mental health. I chose to develop questions that got directly at those themes (culture, early intervention, and infant mental health). They could all be easily connected, and they had a lot of overlap, but they were also distinct areas that could be addressed. Moreover, my methods question pulled the three content areas into sync and drew on the ways in which my content areas were connected.

I worked with my advisor to develop my questions. I didn't know where to start, so this is related to a necessary comfort level with your advisor! This calls for a certain amount of risk-taking, and we can't take risks without knowing that we are ultimately safe. I simply took a stab at my questions and drafted between six and eight questions that got at my methods and my content areas. As the first round of questions was less than adequate, I remember drafting a revised version for submission to my advisor. Those were the questions that my committee adapted for my exam. There were fewer questions on my exam than those that I submitted to my committee. There were no surprises on my exam (but that does not mean there can't be), although the questions on the exam were a little

different from the ones I submitted to my committee. The questions you develop should be broad enough to establish yourself as an authority in the field and give you an opportunity to go deep into a content area, so that you can convince others of your expertise.

### ***Academic preparation for exam***

I operated with the belief that there really wasn't much I could do to actually study for my exam. I took the approach that years of coursework and study were my preparation for the exam, and there wasn't much I could do immediately preceding the exam to prepare (i.e. "study") for it.

*So don't stress out about studying for the exam.*

### ***Organizing my bibliography***

One thing I *did* do in preparation for my exam was organize my bibliography by concept. I had already prepared my bibliography for my committee according to content areas: The headings were: methodology, culture, early intervention, and infant mental health. I then took key concepts within those headings/topics and arranged my bibliography around the concepts. For example, I took the concept of "cross-cultural studies of infant development" within the topic of "infant mental health" and grouped all of my references together that pertained to that concept. This was helpful when it came time to actually write my exam because I had a quick way to cite references.

Therefore, another piece of advice is to *organize your bibliography for quick reference*. That way you can spend your exam time developing content rather than formatting your references.

Additionally, this assumes that you will have your bibliography in a format that you can quickly cut and paste for citations within your exam rather than developing it from scratch, which is a huge time saver. While I did not use it for my exams, EndNote is an amazing tool for doing this that many others rave about. So if you are technologically inclined, I recommend this resource.

## ***Personal considerations related to the exam***

### *Consider your timing.*

If not knowing the results will torture you, make sure you time your exam so that you can have your review meeting as soon as possible afterwards. I had been advised to plan about three or four weeks between my exam and the review meeting with my committee. My advisor and I planned the exam for early November so that I could have the review meeting before the end of the semester rush, and it meant that I did not have to wait an extraordinary long time to find out the results. I know others who planned their exams and then had to wait into the next semester to find out how they did. If it matters to you, give it consideration.

### *Be rested.*

I took personal steps toward preparing for my exam that included being rested as the exam approached. Because I was working in a demanding full time job at the time of my exam, I made sure that I didn't schedule anything "heavy" at work the week of the exam. (I was fortunate to have some autonomy over my schedule.) I also had/have a busy family life with four children, so I made sure that my exam did not coincide with any significant family events. (This almost seems too obvious to mention, but it was critical for me.)

### *Allow time to accommodate yourself outside of the actual exam.*

Although the exam itself is one week long, the exam process (including the "prep" time before and the "recovery" time afterward) takes longer than a week. For example, I would be picking up my exam on a Friday afternoon, so I actually had to use the Thursday evening to set up my exam station. That included moving all of my books and resources, my computer, and my personal stuff into my dedicated exam space so that I could be away from home for a week. I chose to stay with a friend who would be away for the weekend and then working every day and who had a spare bedroom that I could use as my dedicated space. But that also meant that I would have to move in temporarily and make arrangements for myself that were not already in place (like bringing and setting up a coffee maker!)

On Friday, the day of the exam, I deliberately took it easy. Although I reported to work, I used it as a “catch up” day with no scheduled appointments and nothing pressing to do. A friend of mine took me out to lunch and helped put me in a positive frame of mind. I was relaxed and rested going into the exam, which was important to me. Retrospectively, I think it was key to my success that I had taken such care to lay out what my life would be like going into the process—the care that I took to arrange my schedule and my life before the exam was very helpful to my psyche and to entering the exam week. Although the personal preferences of other students may be quite different, the point is to *know what your preferences are and accommodate them as part of the exam process.*

### *Before, during, and after the exam*

In addition to considering to your psychological, emotional, and physical needs before the exam, don’t forget to think about what you’ll need *during and after* the exam. Having the private space was important so that I would not be interrupted—at all! The only person who had access to me was my husband, and that was with the understanding that he would only contact me in an emergency. (“Emergency”, defined as a life threatening situation. I especially want to share this with students who are mothers!) Being isolated from the rest of the world was important to keep me from being distracted. I could work when I wanted to and take breaks when I needed them. It was important that I had a place where I could go outside and get fresh air with a walk, while maintaining my thought process. Being able to attain flow is important, so do whatever it takes to set up your environment to make that conducive.

### *Stick to your schedule!*

Another step I consciously took was to set my pace and maintain a schedule. The first thing I did when opening my exam was to read through the whole thing and set up a timeline for what I needed to have done by the close of each day. Since isolation from the outside world meant that I would lose my markers for the day and time, I set up a “calendar” of Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, etc. and wrote down what needed to be completed each day. This enabled me to maintain my pace. I worked into my schedule meals and breaks, and kept to my schedule of getting up and going to bed. For example, since I know

that I am a morning person, I would set my alarm for early morning and do my most concentrated work then. I deliberately did not work late into the night, even though I felt pressured to, only because I knew it would be counterproductive for me. It was important to maintain my schedule so that I would devote (roughly) equal time to all of my questions and leave enough space to consider the exam as a whole. I needed to maintain balance in the week. I had to trust and stick with my “plan of action” that I established right at the beginning. It worked for me, but it also meant that I could not lose track of the day or the time because I had to keep a certain pace.

*Additional personal considerations*

When it was time to plan my exam, my advisor assumed the one week period would be from a Monday to the following Monday. However, I requested to have my exam from a Friday to the following Friday so that I could use the weekend following the exam to regroup with my family before returning to work on Monday. That consideration proved invaluable, as I had no way of predicting how mentally drained I would be. And because my family had not seen me since we all parted for work and school eight days earlier, it was good planning to go home and crash with them. We had the weekend together before returning to work on Monday. Of course, others’ circumstances and preferences may be quite different, but the important thing is to consider these personal circumstances.

*Finally, have a back-up plan.*

Do you have enough paper for your printer? An extra print cartridge? A spare battery for your laptop? Another computer to use if yours goes on the blink? A disk for back-up?

*Think of your exam as a 168-hour cognitive marathon and plan accordingly!*

*A last bit of advice:*

Don’t stress about the exam too much, because the program gives you the opportunity to rewrite parts of it if you need to! Knowing this was one of my sanity-savers, even though I wasn’t required to put that option to use. It was simply comforting to know that I didn’t have one chance *only*.

## ***II. A Candidate's Reflections on 'The Mystery of the Comprehensive Exam'***

As I prepared for my 'comps' (qualifying exam), the process of taking the exam seemed so mysterious. It remained a mystery; even though I had an informative committee that clarified the goals and intentions of the exam; even though I had read two books on how to survive and complete a doctorate; even though I had advice from friends and colleagues who survived their comprehensive exams at other institutions. The mystery remained because I had never been tested in such a manner.

You will likely find taking your comps at UNH somewhat of a mystery, although not a shocking surprise. The research and knowledge I gained through the UNH comps experience might best be titled: "All I learned trying to outsmart the comps". Going into the process, I did not know how I would respond or how to best prepare for it. So if you feel confused now, or even after reading my thoughts, you are *normal*. As I watch my friends prepare for and take the comprehensive exam, it becomes clear to me that this exam is a new form of evaluation for all of us.

In my search for the answer to the question of how to pass the comps and advance to candidacy, I e-mailed all current Ph.D. students who had passed their exams, asking them what advice they would give to me. This is a compilation of the advice I received, with my added comments.

If you are now questioning the accuracy of this information because of sampling problems and a lack of controls to threats to validity contained in the question, rest assured you are thinking like someone studying for comps.

## *Advice from Others Who Made it*

### ***Brent***

From perspective on how I felt through the whole experience, I think 6 months out I just felt mild stress. I read, I collected research, and just thought about the exams a little bit.

At 6 weeks from the exam, I really began to pick up speed. I had a bit of a spurt of academic vigor and read with greater intensity and intention than ever before. I believe the six weeks prior to the exam were some of the best of my whole grad school experience. I was reading a couple of books in a single day and I was learning tons. I had also set up a one of the best things ever. I convinced a friend to help me out by becoming my research assistant and secured permission from the library for her to take out books in my name. As I studied, I would come across books and periodicals I would want to read, I would copy this list down and give it to my friend. When she would stop by to see me she would bring presents. To a Ph.D. student, receiving a difficult to find research study is better than getting gifts at (enter your culturally significant holiday where gifts are given here). I budgeted \$500 for this task and paid her \$ 10 an hour. In the end, she spent 24 hours finding research and I think it was the best \$240 I have ever spent. This is one thing I would love to see grad students help out with because I found no desire to fight with the copier in the library when I had so much reading and studying to do. Taking turns being a research assistant is also something you could do in exchange with others in your cohort.

Secondly, as much as I enjoyed studying, I found the exam to be painful. I was stressed enough to not sleep well. I also was taking in lots and lots of performance enhancing stimulants in the form of caffeine. I sat in my chair for so long that I began to get achy and sore. I was more exhausted each day and finding it more and more difficult to concentrate. By the end of my exams I was writing for 10 minutes and resting for 10-15 minutes, writing for 10 more minutes and resting for 10- 15. I began at a pace of working 60 and resting for 5 minutes. Emotionally, I felt at my lowest on the third day. I felt that I had nothing original to say and all my arguments and thoughts

were terribly boring and uninspired. I went for a walk and tried to locate my academic self-esteem.

In the end, I learned that what I thought was inspired work was different from what my committee thought. The question I felt the best about was the one I had to work on after the exam. The question I thought was incoherent and uninspired received high marks from my committee. A couple of weeks after the exam, I had to agree. What I thought was great was great in my head because that is where the transitions in my argument still were. Basically, I lost some perspective, so expect this and accept that you will probably rewrite a question. Fortunately, it may be the question you know the most about.

One critical thing: back up your work and print out papers quite often. A computer crash would not have been good for my computer or me-in fact I am sure my computer would not have survived the incident. During your comps is no time to be computer shopping. Lots of back-ups on disk, lots of print outs will allow you to keep moving forward.

### ***Carina***

A lot of my advice would only help if you have a sense of your questions in advance. Before comps: My approach was to create outlines that would respond to each possible question or topic area (what I really thought about it) and then see which authors, articles, etc. seemed to support my claims. I only re-read articles or book passages if I wasn't sure whether their point supported mine. During comps: When I took the exam, I wrote on a question I felt fairly confident about first. Then, I took on the toughest question, the second toughest, etc. I tried to stay to my timeline (1 -2 questions a day, with the last day for editing and review). I got stuck at the end without finishing one of the questions and I had to re-write one. So, maybe working a little more time each day would have been good. I scheduled myself to work 10 hours a day, but I took lots of breaks to walk around, stretch, and eat.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** you need support. Talk to friends about what you are doing and ask them to support you in specific ways.



Whatever you think you might need - one of my friends made a care basket with an almost fully prepared meal and another sent me a card. Others sent email, which was less helpful because I tried to stay off-line for the week.

**MOST IMPORTANT:** make sure you have a good place to work and that you have the full support of your partner or roommates. I moved my computer downstairs and only brought down books, articles, etc. as I needed them. By the end of the week, my whole library was downstairs, but at least I wasn't "browsing" while I should have been writing. Some of my colleagues borrowed offices for the week or found a space away from home to work.

### ***Margaret***

I took my comps a year ago August. Probably the best thing I did was to organize my notes, articles, etc in piles relevant to my questions. The 2 or 3 weeks prior to taking the comps, I reread everything, but I didn't try to read anything new. I also practiced writing some opening paragraphs for each of the questions I had given my committee. While writing the comps, I did as much outdoors as possible before going to the computer, and I took breaks. When I got the questions by email, I figured out about how much time I could devote to answering each question and still have time to edit everything, and when I reached that time limit, I went on to another question.

### ***Barbara***

My comps were the one thing I feared most about the whole PhD program - but, happily, they were nowhere near as horrible as I thought they'd be -actually, they were, and still are, quite useful. What helped me was, after talking about the ideas of questions with my committee, I started writing, just writing and writing and writing for weeks before the comps on questions I thought the comp questions might relate to - so when my comps came around, I had all sorts of fresh new ideas very roughly put - from which to pull from for my comps. For me it worked because writing forces me to think deeper, and it raises new questions which I then write about, which brings me even further into my thinking.

### ***Mike***

This is what I did:

1. Arrange a quiet place to work. I used my home office, and my wife and I reached an agreement that she would take the week to visit others, eat out, etc. We planned quality time together each evening. It could be easy to get too focused and lose balance during this intense week, so plan some mental escapes to stay fresh.

2. I live about an hour from campus. So, my advisor and I agreed that he would mail the packet to me if I promised not to open it until 8 am on a Friday. I then had to have it postmarked back to him at 4 pm the following Thursday. Saves time and driving hassle and keeps the integrity of the test time.

3. Day I (Fri.), I spent most of the day framing my responses and thinking. After opening the packet, I made separate folders for each question. Then, I went back through all of my texts and class notes/handouts and placed appropriate references into each folder. If there were holes in what I needed, I knew about it then and could begin to get additional resources. Take time to prepare to respond, don't jump right into the writing.

4. My committee required 3 open responses and 1 analysis of an article. I spent one day (7 am - 7 pm) focused on each response (sat, sun, Mon. & Tues.). Weds & Thurs. were reserved as editing/cleaning - bolstering days.

5. I don't think you can study for this type of assessment. That has been done over all of the coursework you have completed. I would focus on organizing what you have done so that you can access the knowledge and resources.

### ***Robin***

I just completed my comps this summer. The best thing that I did to prepare was to have everything I'd done for courses organized into piles prior to taking the exam. I set up a room where I could work and basically did not leave it for the week during the comps. Much is based on prior work that you've done. What takes the longest is just

organizing your thoughts, finding the research to support what you've said, and writing the exam. I tried to rough out one question for each of the first four days and then to revise. One question was particularly difficult and I had to spend time in the library doing more research and spent two days working on that.

### ***Jamie***

Rather than focusing on “studying” for my comps, I focused on organizing for them. I was of the opinion that my coursework over the preceding 2.5 years had adequately prepared me with the knowledge I just needed a system in place to be able to access that knowledge in a relatively easy fashion during the weeklong process. The best thing I did to help with that (and all subsequent writing I’ve done) was investing in EndNote and using it religiously to keep track of my references. It allowed me to find resources quickly, generate my bibliographies, and generally feel more in control. In addition, I made sure I came up with a schedule ahead of time that both addressed how I would pace myself (I took a half-day per question for the first two days to just get ideas down. Then a full day per question after that with the seventh day reserved for editing and polishing), as well as how I would take breaks and get workouts in. I know that I can’t focus for long without some physical activity, so I knew I had to make space for that and I am really glad I did. I also made sure I had food prepared ahead of time so that I could get good food quickly to keep my body nourished rather than resorting to less healthy options for a quick fix. I also knew I would need minimal distractions, but I don’t really work well from home. Therefore, I planned my exam for spring break when I would be able to work from my office at Morrill Hall with minimal people around.

I will admit that it was an exhausting process, but not unbearable. You can do anything for a week! In fact, the fear beforehand I think was the worst part for most people. I made sure I took advantage of my colleagues who had already taken their comps to get samples of bibliographies, samples of questions, even samples of their answers. All of that helped make the process more tangible and less nebulous and allowed me to see that it was completely doable. So, don’t be afraid to ask for help.

## Model Qualifying Exams

In this section, there are a number of models of different qualifying exams. This is meant as a reference for some of the different ways the qualifying exam can be organized and designed. This is by no means exhaustive, but more to offer examples. For more details about what to expect from your particular exam, you should talk to your guidance committee and advisor.

### Model Questions I

1. In designing a study, the researcher should construct a *conceptual context* that positions her to address a problem or issue in a particular way. This is an interactive and iterative process that enables the researcher to argue for presumed relationships among her problem, purposes, and paradigmatic stance, and to establish a theoretical base for the question(s) that will guide her inquiry. Describe your understanding of the meaning and purpose of the conceptual context within an overall research design. Then discuss how your understanding of the meaning and purpose of the *conceptual context* for *your* proposed study has informed, or been informed by, (a) the way in which you are portraying yourself as a researcher, and (b) the type of qualitative methods you will be using.

2. Ever since the concept of *culture* emerged at the end of the last century as a way to interpret human social behavior, scholars have made an academic game out of defining it. Moreover, the question of whether culture exists at all has prompted a lively discourse in academic circles. Discuss the fundamental challenges to defining culture, including how it has been supported or challenged as a viable concept in recent academic debates. Then focus on one of the following two questions as a way to address more specifically how you might apply your understanding of culture and related notions (e.g., cultural interpretation) to your future research.

- In the December 1999 issue of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, G. Alfred Hess argues that one of the "right" questions for researchers to be asking is how children really learn and how that learning is influenced by the cultural context in which children are raised. What do you

understand *cultural context* to mean in this situation and how will this understanding inform the way you frame your research into how families impacted by poverty view infant well-being?

OR

- Develop an argument for the following claim as it relates to your proposed research: Families who are impacted by poverty share behaviors and ways of being that allow them to be viewed as a *cultural* or *subcultural* group within the larger population of Americans.

3. Current best practices in the field of early intervention (as defined by Part C of IDEA) support the idea of service provision in "natural environments." This reflects the movement in early intervention away from clinical, center-based, medical model services toward developmental, home-based, family- centered services that are now mandated to occur in "natural environments." Discuss the implications of this mandate, including the challenges currently faced by many early intervention providers and EI programs. Then consider how a study (like yours) that is informed by a cultural interpretation might contribute to a different or more enhanced understanding of these implications for practice (including, perhaps, how we might define "natural environments").

4. The field of "infant mental health" is relatively new and has been largely informed by growing understandings of the influence of an infant's environment on her overall development and the impact of environment on brain development. These understandings, as part of the broad array of influences on development, point to what infant specialists refer to as an ecological framework. Discuss the relationship between infant development and environment, and how an ecological framework is informing and influencing current understandings of infant development. Then extend this discussion to include consideration of how your understanding of this relationship and the ecological framework are informing your work with families impacted by poverty.

## Model Questions II

*Answer questions 2, 3 and 4. Select either 1 or 5 for the fourth answer.*

(Curriculum) 1. Choose at least two distinct views on the curriculum in addition to your own. Compare and contrast them on (a) what should be taught, (b) the sources of knowledge, (c) the delivery of instruction, and (d) the justifications for each of these elements of curriculum.

(Phil. Issues) 2. An account of what constitutes a caring community and an engaged faculty derive, in part, from the work of Nel Noddings, Jane Roland, Martin, and Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot. Describe the individual contributions of each of these authors and discuss the possible applications and limitations which their works, if applied in schools, might have. What criticisms of the ethics of care do you think jeopardize its applicability and how might these authors respond to the criticisms?

(Instruction) 3. “Teacher Engagement” has been treated by some researchers as deliberate attention to students. Noddings calls it “engrossment” while Lawrence Lightfoot describes it as “attention.” Still others, such as James Neuliep, identify engagement as “immediacy.” Should teachers in a school community share a common commitment to engagement with students? What is the school’s role in promoting engagement? What motivates teachers to engage, and how can colleges and schools of education promote engagement through teacher training?

(Research) 4. The perspective of qualitative inquiry writ large is grounded in assumptions about the social world, and implications of those assumptions for social science, that include the following:

- An acknowledgment of *multiple or partial truths*, highlighting the need to attend to the meanings that happenings have for people involved in them (including those of the researcher, those of individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audience interpreting a study)

- An acknowledgment of *contextual dependency*, highlighting the need to attend to the particular (and unpredictable) nature of occurrences rather than their general character and overall distribution
- An acknowledgment of the quintessentially *interactive* and *intersubjective* nature of constructing knowledge, highlighting the need to reflect on the interplay between researcher and researched, and, in particular, to remain attuned to the subjective lenses of both.

These assumptions help to define the nature and substance of the qualitative approach. However, they may also make it harder for some readers and potential users of the research to judge the accuracy of what is reported (its truth-value), the methodology (its rigor), and the usefulness of the study (its broader significance).

Discuss how you would address issues of truth-value, rigor, and significance in a qualitative study of teacher engagement. In your response, consider such factors as your relationship with study participants, how you will portray yourself and your purposes to them, how you will deal with subjectivity, how you might assess the trustworthiness of your data, and how you will establish the usefulness and transferability of your study.

(Curriculum) 5. An argument is growing in your school community regarding curriculum and assessments. Some community members are demanding high stakes testing based upon a set curriculum, while opposing views are equally strong in developing student and curriculum assessments which take into consideration the influences of environment, faculty strengths, professional development, and student needs. What is your position on the matter and how would you defend it? Cite sources that support your position as a curriculum specialist, and those arguments that are likely to arise in opposition to your position. How can you best defend against those objections? How can you best respond to these objections?

## Model Questions III

### *Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education*

Define and provide a rationale for the application of cognitive developmental theory to higher education referring to the work of Loevenger, Hunt and Perry. Indicate what barriers you think have posed obstacles to the influence of cognitive developmental theory in higher education and suggest ways in which we might overcome these barriers.

Educational theorists have been widely divided over the question of which curriculum theory or theories should inform decisions about American education. Discuss three different views as they apply to higher education (such as Bloom's notion of the classical core curriculum, the New Jersey group's reformed curriculum built around notions of diversity, multiplicity, and inclusiveness, and Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation) and make a case for a theory or theories of your choice. In your answer, be sure to respond to what you would take the best objections the proponents of the other views would raise to your own position.

### *Research Methodology*

Given that a doctoral student is interested in investigating the relationship of ego development and levels of conceptual development to tutors' on-the-job experiences, and participation in tutor development sessions, describe at least three alternative empirical research routes she might take. Critically appraise the alternative research methodologies she might employ, pointing out the virtues and defects of each.

### *Ethics*

Some have argued that the ethics of care holds great promise as an ethic for educators. Keeping your discussion tied to the undergraduate experience, particularly the first and second year college students, assess the judiciousness of this remark by clarifying: (a) what it means for an educator to have an ethic; (b) what it would mean to apply the ethic of care in the context you've chosen; and by discussing (c) the benefits and liabilities of taking Noddings' ethic of care as an ethic for higher education.



Drawing upon your own experience, describe at least one ethical issue that arises either in the context of educational research or within your own educational practice that you see as troublesome, neglected, and worth addressing. Outline the assumptions that you think lie at the heart of these problem/dilemma; explain how you think we might better deal with it; and indicate what theorists have best aided you in making sense of the problem and in reaching a proposed resolution. What concerns or dimensions of the problems do you still sense are intractable?

### *Chosen Research Topic*

Based upon your reading of the relevant literature (Mezirow, Brookfield, Schon, King, and Kitchener, among others), provide a conception of critical thinking that you might employ in your own research. Compare and contrast this conception with that of Richard Paul's notion of strong critical thinking. How might this comparison alter your own view of critical thinking? Articulation your view might include what the literature tells us about the relationship of critical thinking (as you have finally conceptualized it) to (a) one's disposition to engage in critical thinking, (b) stage of ego development, and (c) conceptual level.

Describe and assess the role of gender in the theories of Loevenger, Kegan and Hunt. In your considerations address (a) the education of female adult students; (b) their transition into college, and (c) their development as critical thinkers.

## Model Questions IV

### Area of Inquiry: Reading and Writing Instruction

*You are to answer the following four questions:*

1. It is conventional wisdom that effective interventions in literacy need to be implemented early in a child's school career. What does this mean for the current success and future of high school (or secondary-based) interventions? If students are still experiencing difficulty at the secondary level, how can we expect them to make good progress? What kinds of interventions might be effective? What can the authors of secondary models learn from the work in early interventions?

2. Drawing on the work of either Shirley Brice-Heath, James Moffett, or Gordon Wells, discuss his/her understanding of the cognitive demands associated with generating oral discourse in and out of school. Elaborate on the role you believe orality should play in the reading and writing classroom. Use examples from your readings as well as your own teaching to illustrate your points.

3. Quantitative and qualitative research methods use "different techniques of presentation to project divergent assumptions about the world and different means to persuade the reader of [their] conclusions (Firestone, W. [1987]. *Meaning in Method: the Rhetoric of Quantitative and Qualitative Research. Educational Researcher*. 16(7), 16-21.) Some argue there is a basic incompatibility between the two based on the differences suggested above, while others argue for the complementarity of paradigms.

a. Discuss your position regarding this statement and provide a supporting rationale.

b. Given your interest in developing a cross-grade tutoring program that pairs at-risk high school readers with struggling first and second grade readers, discuss how you would design and analyze such a study based on your response to (a) above. (Carney)

4. One crucial, but often unexplained, assumption in literacy instruction is the importance of metacognition - particularly that the

explication and evaluation of process in some way causes students to be more proficient at those processes. We see this assumption at work in much teaching that involves portfolios. Yet at the same time, it is very common for proficient artists and athletes to be almost inarticulate about what they do. They speak of intuition, instinct, the 'feel of the game.' In your answer examine this assumption about metacognition. What evidence is there that explicit thinking about literacy processes develops competency?

## Model Questions V

### Area of Inquiry: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

*You may select any three questions to answer from Section A. You must answer one of the two questions in Section B.*

#### Section A:

1. Public sector collective bargaining laws are predicated on the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Consequently, the industrial labor model was adopted as the preeminent way in which employee-employer relations were cast in the public sector. Discuss the issues surrounding the use of this model in higher education labor relations.
2. Detail the implications that adult development theory has for creating meaningful change in the higher education workplace.
3. Discuss the role of the federal government on higher education since World War II.
4. What is the most serious challenge facing higher education today? Provide a rationale for your selection and possible alternatives for facing the challenge.
5. What is the canon and what is its impact on higher education policy?
6. Discuss the relevant and current issues faced by American institutions of higher education as they attempt to design and implement affirmative action plans.

#### Section B:

Attached is a research paper published in *College Teaching*. Write a description and critique of the research. The critique should include a discussion of at least the following points:

1. quality and comprehensiveness of the literature review;

2. appropriateness of the research design;
3. quality of the measurement instruments;
4. adequacy of the procedures;
5. appropriateness of the data analysis and presentation of results; and
6. validity of the conclusions.

When addressing these points, you might consider what you would do if you were the editor of the journal. Would you accept the paper for publication? Are there issues that you feel the authors should address before you would publish the paper? If you would not accept the paper for publication, why not? Overall, what is the quality of the research?

2. Write a research question for higher education. Demonstrate your knowledge of research design by discussing a suitable methodology to answer that question.

## Model Questions VI

*You may select any three questions to answer from Section A. You must answer the research question in Section B.*

### SECTION A

1. In the last couple of years there has been a national call to restructure the governance patterns of our schools. This movement asserts that the locus for some of the decision making should be moved from the central office to the schools. Provide a definition and discuss the pros and cons of restructuring.
2. The clinical supervision model, developed nearly twenty-five years ago by Goldhammer and Cogan, is one method of improving instruction. Other teacher supervisory models have been initiated and researched by Mosher and Purpel, Hunter, Eisner, Blumberg, Glickman and others. Please discuss the relative effectiveness of at least four approaches to teacher supervision and evaluation. As an educational leader, which model do you advocate?
3. There is a growing awareness of the impact that culture has on organizations in general and schools in particular. Formulate a definition of culture that is applicable to schools. Use this definition to discuss why and how school administrators should use their understanding of culture to effectively lead their schools.
4. Joel Spring writes: "Curriculum is a battleground in American education" (p. 233). Expand on what Professor Spring refers to in this quote citing authorities and examples. Spring, J. 1994. *American Education*, Sixth Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
5. Michael Fullan argues that the change process is nonlinear. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of his assertion. If he is correct, what does this mean for the educational leader who is trying to implement a change?
6. Several educational studies have targeted the restructuring of salaries in the teaching profession as key elements of serious educational reform. Outline the principles of the major alternative

compensation plans. Discuss the history, advantages, and disadvantages of these alternative plans. And last of all, discuss the link between teacher compensation plans and evaluation systems.

## Section B

1. Attached is a research paper published in the *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*. Write a description and critique of the research. The critique should include a discussion of at least the following points:

- 1) quality and comprehensiveness of the literature review; 2) appropriateness of the research design; 3) quality of the measurement instruments; 4) adequacy of the procedures; 5) appropriateness of the data analysis and presentation of results; and 6) validity of the conclusions.

When addressing these points, you might consider what you would do if you were the editor of the journal. Would you accept the paper for publication? Are there issues that you feel the authors should address before you would publish the paper? If you would not accept the paper for publication, why not? Overall, what is the quality of the research?

## Model Questions VII

### *Research Question*

In considering the methodological assumptions of your proposed dissertation work the following questions will undoubtedly arise. What kinds of revisions can be made to a theory in response to "hard cases" which allow you to keep the theory identifiably intact? At what point does a hard case lead you to radically revise or reject a theory? From your examination of the following two examples discuss: (a) how the named theorists deal with this dilemma, and (b) what you see as the implications of these examples for your own research.

Example 1: Hard cases raised in discussion of Rawls and Dworkin liberal theory by Virginia Held and Carol Pateman and responded to by Ken Howe and Will Kymlicka.

Example 2: Hard cases raised by Judith Butler and another postmodern critic to the feminist theories of Seyla Ben Habib and Alison Jaggar and responded to by Marilyn Frye and one other theorist you deem appropriate.

### *Ethics Question*

As an educator dealing with issues of sexual orientation and multiculturalism, give a philosophical justification for your view of how to take account of multiple moral perspectives without embracing some form of relativism. In your essay be sure to indicate the strongest objection a committed moral relativist would raise to your view and what you would offer by way of reply to that objection, Do you think your reply is philosophically and morally adequate?

Parker Palmer claims that every epistemology carries its own moral trajectory. Susan Haack, on the other hand reminds us of just how easily the integrity of inquiry is threatened by political agendas. In light of their observations we can ask: How tightly coupled are ethical and epistemological theories along a continuum with someone like Lorraine at one end arguing that they are (or ought to



be) very tightly coupled, arguing even that adequate epistemological theories must satisfy certain ethical criteria, with others, such as Susan Haack at the other end, arguing they are not and ought not to be tightly coupled. Place yourself somewhere on this continuum, outlining what you take to be a satisfactory position and its justification, and answering the objections one might anticipate from either end.

### *Teacher Education*

Defend the role of educational philosophy in teacher preparation. In particular, how would you justify philosophy's role to teacher education students (undergraduate and masters level) and to teacher education faculty who are skeptical of its merits?

### *Special Topics*

What are the virtues and limitations of a participatory democracy approach to gender inequalities (including issues associated with sexual orientation) in schools?

## **Sample Qualifying Exam Questions**

This section provides a sampling of more questions from the different areas of specialization to give an idea of additional questions that have been asked on qualifying examinations.

### **Philosophical/Conceptual Questions**

- Explore frameworks that offer various perspectives on human growth and development as a means for understanding the practice of adventure education. Specifically, compare and contrast growth and development through constructivist and care theories in adventure education.
- Explain your understanding of the important similarities and differences between Rogoff's extension of Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism and Gergen's and McNamee's constructionist theory. Explore some of the practical influences each has on your own actions as a practitioner of teaching, helping, and inquiry.
- Identity has been defined in the research literature several different ways. Compare and contrast 3 different researchers' conceptualization of identity including Erikson, McCaslin and one other of your choosing. What are their underlying assumptions, factors that compose their identity and factors that are ignored? In what ways do you identify with these researchers or does your definition differ? You may want to use a chart to organize this information along with your text.

Which definition of identity would be best suited to help you understand the confluence of academic and social identities in students engaged in a classroom context? What features of the classroom context are most salient in the process of identity formation? Support your position with a critique of the relevant literature.

- Characterize the developmentalist perspective in moral education; and using Kohlberg, Rest and perhaps Turiel as its chief exponents discuss the differences among them. Articulate what you take to be the most serious challenge(s) to each perspective discussed by Lapsley, Berkowitz and Lickona and indicate how and whether you think each can adequately respond to the challenge(s).
- Set out and critically appraise three distinct, alternative conceptions of the self that underlie approaches to social political theory. Pay particular attention to the theorists' resultant differing views about the relationship of the individual to society or the role of the individual in society and their conceptions of individual agency. After the appraisal is done, make it clear which theory you think best supported and closest to that you yourself might employ in any future theory of justice.
- You've indicated that one of your longer term interests is to develop a pragmatist's theory of justice. Describe, as well as compare and contrast, (incipient) theories of justice you find in the works of Dewey, Mead and Misak (i.e. analyze the points of compatibility and/or tension that exist within this tradition around justice.) Indicate the fundamental critique a nonpragmatist contemporary justice theorist such as Rawls or Waltzer would pose to a pragmatist conception of justice. What reasonably adequate response(s) do you think could be forthcoming from any of the trio of pragmatists you have discussed and how would you yourself respond to the challenge differently from Dewey, Mead or Misak?
- Dewey is one philosopher frequently relied upon by experiential educators, primarily because he speaks directly about experience. After giving a brief account of Dewey's notion of experience and what he means by educative experiences in particular, indicate how you think outdoor educators can appropriately apply Dewey's ideas to facilitate learning experiences. In answering this question, provide well-referenced examples of how Dewey's ideas are appropriately being used in the current outdoor education field. Indicate also ways in which

you think his ideas may be misapplied or ways in which you think some outdoor education programs may be, in Dewey's terms, miseducative ; In these latter cases indicate how Dewey's ideas might want to be used differently to make these programs more educative.

- What and how things are said in schools are critical aspects of their institutional texture and larger societal function. Construct a comparison and critique of the different approaches to language in education embodied in the ideas of Foucault, Bakhtin, and Vygotsky. Then *locate* and *justify* your own position on language in education in relation to these three theorists. Finally, assess how a conceptual framework informed specifically by the ideas of Foucault, Bakhtin, and Vygotsky would impact the framing of a study on the imposition of English as the instructional medium in Third World schools.
- The role of “experience” in education has been valorized, criticized, and interrogated from many different perspectives in the field of curriculum theory. Choose three curriculum perspectives from list given below and: (a) Describe the nature and significance of experience in relation to the conception of curriculum and the desired educational outcomes promoted by this perspective; (b) Describe specific instructional methods consistent with this understanding of experience; and (c) critically assess the perspective, based on your own views of the relationship between experience and education.

(Notable proponents of each approach are included here for clarity in identifying and distinguishing each perspective. However, you may choose or add others as you feel appropriate and you may contest the placement of particular figures.)

- Neo-Conservative theory (E.D. Hirsch, Jr.; Chester Finn, Dianne Ravitch, William Bennett)
- Liberal theory (Amy Gutmann, Ken Howe, John Dewey, David Sehr)
- Critical theory (Michael Apple, Paulo Friere, Paul Willis, Dan Liston & Lanny Beyer, “early” Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux)

- Postmodern theory (Thomas Popkewitz, “later” Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz)
- Care theory (Nel Noddings, Jane Roland Martin) and/or feminist perspectives of other kinds (Diller, Houston, Morgan, Ayim, Misak, Lugones, Tronto)
- Lewis, Enciso and Moje (2007) explore “critical sociocultural theory” as a more nuanced adaptation of traditional sociocultural theory that attends more closely to issues of power, identity and agency and defining agency as “the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power” (p. 4).

In the interests of exploring the plausibility of this claim and at the same time bringing the discussion to bear on emancipatory goals of education, answer the following questions.

- a) In what ways specifically does critical sociocultural theory (choose a robust representative) attend more closely to issues of power, identity and agency than sociocultural theory set out in Vygotsky and Rogoff?
- b) Explain the tension between sociocultural influences and the role of the individual as it emerges in both kinds of theories (sociocultural theories and critical sociocultural theories) with respect to the question of autonomy of the individual.
- c) Critically appraise the theories in terms of their capacity to make the autonomy of the individual intelligible. In what ways are both types of theory still deficient?

### **Article Critiques**

- Attached is a paper by David Carr entitled “Moralized Psychology or Psychologized Morality? Ethics and Psychology in Recent Theorizing about Moral and Character Education.” This essay appeared in *Educational Theory* (Vol. 57, No.4, 2007). Write a critical appraisal of this article indicating why and in what ways you find it a valuable piece of work as well as your own critique of it. Your appraisal should include a discussion of at least the following points:

1. central thesis and the main arguments offered in support of it
2. evaluation of the central arguments
3. what you take to be the best objection(s) to the central thesis,
4. how the author would respond to the criticism(s) you raise and also what you have offered as the best objection(s)
5. how this article is useful to you in critically appraising your own and others' practical and theoretical approaches to experience education.

When addressing these points, consider what you would do if you were an editor of, or a reviewer for a journal in teacher education and this paper was submitted for publication. Would you accept the paper for publication? Are there issues that you feel the author should address before you would publish it? If you would not accept the paper for publication, why not?

### **School Practice**

- What recommendations would you make for a school wanting to use “student outcome data” as a means of school/classroom improvement? Using social practice theories as a lens, develop a conceptual argument for the benefits and limitations of different models of assessment, including standardized testing, formative assessment, peer feedback, and student products and performances.
- Including issues of diverse populations in schooling has been described as multicultural teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and cultural sensitivity. In your response, please:
  - a. Review the literature in this area and develop an overarching description of this movement including the basic tenets and strategies for enactment. Briefly present a critique to these approaches.
  - b. Explain whether or not you think this movement is compatible or incompatible with current educational trends toward accountability and assessment.
  - c. Finally, focus on a population *other than* Hawaiian Indigenous youth at risk for school failure and outline

the core components of a non-classroom, school-based intervention for them based on the principles you describe in Part 1. What criteria might you use to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention?

- Discuss how and why Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Schools have emerged to address current educational needs in American Public School Systems. In your discussion, demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of this movement and address how the weaknesses need to be addressed in the future for this movement to be successful.
- In your new job as an assistant professor, you are assigned to teach an upper level undergraduate course on motivation theory. The course is a 7 week (half semester) module course. Most of your students are in a teacher certification program. Develop a syllabus for this course, including:
  - A description of the class
  - An overview of the major topics and theoretical perspectives included
  - Key readings
  - Major assignments that would demonstrate their knowledge of motivation theory and its application into the classroom

Then, justify the choices you've made. Why did you make these decisions? What perspectives have you omitted from the course and why? How does your course structure reflect your own beliefs about motivation?

- Achievement goal theory describes the classroom context as emphasizing different goal structures. Provide an overview of research on classroom goal structures, including key antecedents, outcomes, and future directions for research. Then compare this conception of the motivational environment with that of sociocultural theory, including:
  - Assumptions about the environment
  - The role of the learner, teacher, and peers
  - The significance of curriculum and learning materials.

Finally, which theoretical stance is more closely related to your conception of the motivational environment? Why? What key research questions about classrooms do you think need to be answered using the perspective you've chosen?

- The motivational climate of a classroom depends on several key areas, such as teacher practices, the nature of the task, and social relationships. Construct a model of classroom motivation based on existing research literature that encompasses these areas. Consider the project-based learning literature to generate specific instructional strategies that would support the elements of your model. What are the limits to this model for enhancing student motivation?

### **Science Education**

- Your school district has decided to make a serious commitment to teaching local and global citizenship. The science curriculum guidelines have been redesigned and the middle school science curriculum now calls for an 8 week unit on understanding the causes of climate change and actions humans might take to minimize climate change. Please design the basic framework for an 8 week unit and be explicit about how you are using the relevant and current research in inquiry-based science to design the unit.

In designing your unit, please include instructional components that address the carbon cycle and the greenhouse effect, global warming and climate change, and climate change impacts. Then include an action component that engages students in designing and implementing changes in the school and/or the community.

In articulating your rationale for the design of the unit, please discuss the cognitive capacities of middle school students and developmentally appropriate curriculum, relevant research in inquiry-based curriculum design, and the value of incorporating real world problem-solving as a component in middle school curriculum. In answering the question, be sure to consider: 1) Shepardson et al. (2009) Seventh grade students' conceptions of



global warming and climate change. *Environmental Education Research* Vol. 15, No. 5, October 2009, 549–570 and 2) Sobel (2007) *Climate Change Meets Ecophobia*. *Connect Magazine*, Synergy Learning, November/December 2007.

- (Some) science educators hope to do more than teach their students scientific knowledge, or teach them about science; rather, they aspire to cultivate in students the ability to do science, to act like scientists in the construction of their own scientific knowledge. In order for a teacher or a researcher to set up conditions that might effectively realize this educative goal it would seem that at least three epistemological tasks must be engaged:
  - (a) an accurate account of science or scientific knowledge must be formulated;
  - (b) an accurate account of what it means to act like a scientist must be clarified; and, following upon these,
  - (c) a clear enough definition of success.

Choosing your own particular branch of science and drawing upon both epistemological and science education theories as well as representative figures, critically evaluate current inquiry-based science education with respect to its epistemological adequacy. Specifically, render a judgment on whether you think it gives satisfactory answers to (a), (b), and (c) and so whether inquiry-based science education as currently conceived can establish pedagogical conditions that are indeed educative in the desired sense. In your answer be sure to indicate in what ways, if any, current attempts at inquiry-based science education may be what Dewey would call mis-educative; and what changes, if any, you yourself would seek to implement to ensure better science education. In particular, if you find yourself seeking to improve current inquiry-based science education by greater attention to social interactions, indicate the specific sorts of social interaction you have in mind, justify their epistemological relevance and demonstrate how their inclusion would significantly alter answers to (a), (b), and (c). Please illustrate your points with examples. Finally, assuming you offer some suggestions for improvement, indicate what you think the best epistemological

objection might be to your suggested improvements to inquiry-based science and how you would answer that objection.

### **Outdoor and Experiential Education**

- What does the literature tell us about the role of adventure therapy as a tool for addressing issues of juvenile justice and substance abuse? What are some of the elements/approaches that work with clients with these issues, as well as concerns/issues that have been raised regarding the field of adventure/wilderness therapy? What are future steps/recommendations that need to be made to address these concerns and issues?
- Present and discuss the historical, social, and political context behind evidence-based practices and its use in working with identified youth. Pay particular attention to federal program recognition. What efforts have been undertaken within the field of adventure programming to address this influence, pointing out the successes/ accomplishments over the past 5-7 years, failures, and future opportunities? What are the growing expectations for this type of research?
- Describe the roots and current status of therapeutic adventure work in the US. Discuss how AT/TA practice has been defined. What are the critical issues facing the field currently and how can they be addressed? Pay particular attention to the Miller Bill, and the TAPG's Best Practices efforts and its potential integration with AEE's Accreditation program and standards.
- Youth Care Workers in Clinical settings: who are they, what issues do they face, and how can programs best support them? Describe how the hypothesized link between the "non-technical" therapeutic alliance/relationship and therapeutic outcome can inform the training of youth care workers.
- Many outdoor and experiential education programs seek to help students cultivate an environmental ethic. You have indicated that you agree with many of the critics that these programs fail to

bring about the kind of transformation needed. Bringing to bear on the task what you know about moral developmental theories, traditional ethical theories, as well as environmental ethics, and using specific examples to illustrate your points, give an account of the chief critiques of these attempts to cultivate an environmental ethic you think worth attention. Then, employing whatever ethical concepts and theories you yourself find most useful, answer the general question: What would it mean to have and act on an adequately transformative environmental ethic?

In answering this question, outline what sort of moral education you think is required if outdoor education programs are to have any hope of cultivating (instilling, inspiring, nurturing, teaching) an environmental ethic that will make an honest and useful contribution to helping people live on a planet in ecological crisis. In your answer be sure to consider assumptions made about the following variables and constructs as well as the role each plays in your own visionary environmental ethic:

- the moral community
- motivation
- feelings
- the role of reason/methods of decision making

You of course are not limited to a discussion of these notions and may substitute others you think of equal or greater importance. The key task here is to clearly indicate your vision of an adequate environmental ethics education and, importantly, how you would know if it were realized. Finally, having offered what you consider to be a more palatable approach to environmental ethics education, indicate the *best* objection you think might be honestly and conscientiously raised to it by known environmentalists you respect. Describe how you would answer this criticism.

- Provide a rationale for how adventure programming effectively “works,” illustrating the central concepts of your rationale with a particular population involved in adventure experiences. Present a current model of adventure programming that explains the process of this program and give an account of both the strengths and weaknesses of this model. Also present some

alternative interpretations of the process that are not covered by this model.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

- Along with the Marimed staff and others, you wrote the article “Impact of a culturally relevant residential treatment program on post-discharge outcomes for Hawai’i youth” in the *Journal for Therapeutic Schools and Programs*. Outline and justify the next quantitative study that should be conducted to further the Marimed program, and suggest possible publication outlets. Make sure to specifically discuss how you would devise accurate ways to measure demographic variables so the greatest meaning could be derived from your study. Last, spend one page or so discussing ways, quantitatively or qualitatively, that ‘demographic variables’ (or ‘labels’) might be handled in a separate study so they could meaningfully address issues that are important in considering program outcomes.
- Refer back to your response to Question 1. Develop a research question or questions and design a study that examines the relationship between student engagement and assessment practices in that school, in light of your previous response, drawing on data that may be of concern to different stakeholders in the school. Be sure to provide a clear conceptualization of “student engagement” and “assessment practices” in your response.
- What does the outcomes/evaluation literature suggest that we know and do not know about AT? Based on this previous work done researching adventure therapy, provide an overview of three appropriate research designs for studies that could meet some of these needs. At least two (2) of these designs must match the evidenced-based paradigm of one federal agency (e.g., OJJDP, SAMHSA) in its design, with the focus on the study supporting the effort of the evaluating program’s effort to be “listed” as positive intervention.

- Design a mixed methods study to address one of the general research questions about classroom contexts that you identified in Question 2. After introducing the general question framing your study, identify the specific sub-questions that will be addressed by the qualitative and quantitative sub-studies. Then, describe specific design components of the sub-studies, being sure to specify sampling methods, measurement of key variables, coding, and how you will establish validity and reliability. Next, describe the specific analytic techniques that you will use to analyze your data, and how the analyses that you conduct will allow you to address your research questions. Finally, compare and contrast the types of conclusions and inferences that you can make using each method, and discuss how these conclusions inform each other. What are the strengths and limitations of mixed-method versus single-method research in conducting research on classroom context?
- Drawing upon your proposed research approach—and specifically the application of the kind of qualitative methodologies you have selected for your envisioned dissertation study, address the following questions:

Define the methodological approach to your dissertation study. How does your methodological approach facilitate your ability to address both specific (particularistic, context-specific, local, in-depth) and circumstantial (relevant in a broader context; attentive to the interplay of social, cultural, and contextual influences) dimensions of your topic?

How do you come to define unit(s) of analysis in your study?

How could you approach your study with a quantitative perspective and how would that change the kind of questions you could ask and answer? What would be the strength and weakness of this approach?

- Design a quantitative study evaluating the effectiveness of a hypothetical outdoor education program designed to promote ethical behavior. Begin by providing a brief description of the

program, describing how its major components are informed by the theory underlying outdoor ethics education discussed in Question 2, experiential education philosophy discussed in Question 1, and the adventure programming model discussed in Question 3. Next, describe the specific components of your study, specifying the target population to which you would generalize your results, the sample and sampling method, outcome and predictor variables, and measures of these variables. What specific challenges would you encounter in conducting your study and how would you overcome these challenges?

- Participant observation as a qualitative fieldwork strategy raises issues of relationships (power, social, personal), role presentation (degree of involvement and portrayal of involvement), control (of research, social, and personal agendas), and reciprocity (types and degree of disclosure and exchange), among other considerations. These issues are further defined and complicated by concerns that center around the following:
  - 1) the emergent nature of qualitative fieldwork, including how to balance original intentions and agendas with unanticipated questions and insights
  - 2) the relative emphasis of participation (researcher as a contributing part of a social reality) and observation (researcher as an observer of a reality separate from her self)
  - 3) the need to balance requisites of gaining access and trust with the obligation to attend responsibly to the eventual revelation and public sharing of knowledge (including how to treat unforeseen or unexpectedly acquired knowledge)
  - 4) commitment to the research agenda, that is, balancing research aims and the need to engage authentically with research participants
  - 5) the so-called ‘paradox of intimacy’ whereby relationships with participants are developed more rapidly than the researcher’s knowledge of their practices (de Laine, 2000, p. 53, drawing upon Mitchell, 1991).

Assess the nature and impact of these issues in the context of a proposed study focused on informed consent in participant observation research. How do current understandings of informed consent play against the uncertainty inherent in participant observation research and its reliance upon relationships and participants, as expressed in the above issues?

## **Conclusion**

While the prospects of taking the qualifying exam can be daunting, there are a host of resources available to help ease some of the stress of the process. This guide is just one part of facilitating that process. In addition, use your committee, your colleagues, others in department, and loved ones to help you as you undertake this necessary step in your doctoral program.

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