Reflections on My Doctoral Program

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# Introduction

“*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*” (Laozi, Chinese philosopher).

A definition of lifelong learning in my world encompasses a journey of a thousand miles. The distance might seem insurmountable at times, which just underscores the significance of concentrating on single bits of learning that are encountered or consciously sought on the way. The steps in this journey take on a different shape and meaning based on the distance traveled and the exhaustion level and represent a variety of learning experiences: coursework, presentations, work on manuscripts and subsequent submissions for publication, and design or co-teaching of online graduate courses. My doctoral program experiences are a part of my lifelong learning adventure, and the necessity to concentrate on every single step while not losing the focus for my journey has proven challenging and extremely rewarding on several occasions. The intrinsic reward of achieving my goal and supporting my own growth as an instructional leader has outweighed any extrinsic motivation for obtaining the doctoral degree.

My choice of educational leadership as a major and curriculum and instruction as an area of emphasis contributes to my goals of becoming a better-versed educational professional. Therefore, my reflection paper takes the audience through my journey of a thousand steps of becoming a better instructional leader while honing my skills as a graduate student, budding action researcher, and a well-educated citizen. This reflection on my doctoral studies revolves around my understanding of instructional leadership and its development through my exploration of curriculum, instruction, and leadership concepts through the framework of graduate level research, scholarship, and collaboration.

My ever-evolving understanding of the term “instructional leadership” has been supported by coursework in the fields of technology, theory, writing, statistics, and instructional and leadership methodology. The artifacts accompanying the reflection paper attest to my growth as a graduate student and an instructional leader and consist of the publications/submissions for publication, collaborative presentations with peers and professors, research proposals with IRB approval, and my personal definitions of curriculum and leadership theory. These artifacts depict the growth in my understanding of the history of public education and the complex relationship between theory and application in the sphere of curriculum and educational leadership. They also attest to my readiness to embark on the dissertation using the knowledge gained in my coursework.

My reflection paper is organized around the themes of depth of understanding, scholarship, and collaboration. Within these themes, I present 17 artifacts that provide evidence of my learning and accomplishments in the field. These artifacts are housed on the Weebly site that can be found at <http://ingasdocportfolio.weebly.com>. The site reflects the themes outlined in the paper, with Collaboration part divided into two separate pages: Teaching/Designing and Presentations.

# Cohort Experience

I am pursuing my doctoral degree as part of a cohort. The experiences of going through coursework, engaging in collaborative projects, and building lifelong collegial and personal relationships are just a few aspects of cohort membership. As in every program, there are positive aspects and drawbacks to consider. I believe that my cohort experience has afforded me an opportunity to engage in doctoral level coursework without sacrificing my work hours or reducing doctoral program experiences because of living in a remote area. The tightly knit learning community created throughout the three years of coursework in our group will continue its productive existence throughout years to come. Joyce, Well, and Calhoun (2009, p. 263) emphasize the role of social interaction in enhancing academic learning. Interactions and developed social, emotional, and academic support systems within the cohort have helped me make friends with every member of the cohort and develop very productive relationships because of our continuous involvement in collaborative projects. Group members also provided me with continuous moral support in difficult times, when coursework seemed overwhelming. In addition to the professors providing great academic guidance, cohort members have been instrumental in helping me continue my studies.

Some might argue that coursework offerings within a cohort framework are more structured than they would be otherwise. I, however, believe that I have not been limited in my exposure to various courses and gained invaluable knowledge through multiple curriculum and administrative theory classes, learned how to conduct statistical analysis and use SPSS, and engaged in several applied knowledge classes that allowed me to explore models of teaching, survey research, and tenets of multicultural education. I have also been exposed to and enjoyed multiple opportunities to present at conferences, engage in online teaching, design a class, and get published. I do not think I have missed any valuable doctoral student experiences because of the cohort membership.

Being a part of the cohort has provided me with a variety of doctoral experiences in terms of coursework, collaboration, online teaching opportunities, and social/emotional support provided by my fellow students. I have grown as a professional and developed lifelong collegial relationships with my professors and cohort members, and am very thankful for the support network Marshall faculty built for students within the cohort.

# Depth of Understanding

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." - Helen Keller

I began the doctoral program during my second year as a principal, a period in which I was still evaluating my understanding of leadership, instruction, and change concepts. The coursework with its emphasis on leadership and curriculum theories, research, and collaboration helped me develop a more concrete understanding of my leadership style, its practical application, and its implications within the field of public education and student achievement. I was able to take a structured look at my leadership style through the principles of leadership and my daily actions as a principal. My personal model of leadership (**EXHIBIT A**) connected my distributive leadership to the ethics of involving other stakeholders in building a vision of excellence for every student and teacher. The road to embracing the distributive leadership principles was not easy. However, taking a focused look at the distributive leadership framework while capitalizing on my knowledge of various leadership approaches has helped me reflect on my development as a leader, especially as a woman leader in a secondary school.

The first class in my doctoral studies, taught by Dr. Watts, focused on principles of leadership. The course allowed me to explore my own definition of leadership and evaluate the impact of my daily practices on the empowerment of all stakeholders through relationship building. Leadership is a complex concept that has defied various attempts to be defined in a unanimous and straightforward way. Burns (1978) states that human engagement with one another constitutes the most powerful aspect of deeply human relationships. Power is exercised through building relationships and, according to Burns; particularly through relationships among individuals. This relationship is supported by the essentials of power: motive, resource, and purpose. Leaders and followers engage in a continuous relationship that leads towards certain goals and purposes.

The development of this continuous relationship development within the framework of leadership serves as my pervasive focus of study, with the concept of distributive leadership permeating my daily actions and interactions with all school stakeholders. Complex factors affecting student achievement require a complex system of support, one that consists of engaging professionals to lead a school to success. In order to build teacher capacity, an administrator needs to empower them to help lead schools toward student success. I believe that truly effective distributive leadership in schools should become a hub of vision, innovation, and continuous learning, playing on the strengths, individuality, and learning experiences of its members who are representative of various groups within the school (Elmore, 2008). School administrators, as experienced as they can be, often feel insecure in addressing the issues of promoting high quality instruction that promotes the schools’ goals for student excellence. But if they are open to nurturing and supporting human resources within their schools, they can foster collaboration, which can lead to school improvement.

Leadership incorporates the concept of power in its definition even though power and influence in relationships between leaders and followers can acquire infinite dimensions depending on the uniqueness of various contexts. These contexts range from ultimate control over the followers’ actions and thoughts to empowerment of the individuals and organizations working toward the fulfillment of common vision (Burns, 1978).

The concept of power was largely discussed in classes facilitated by Dr. Nicholson. We engaged in lively debates about leadership ethics; reflected, questioned, and evaluated our worldviews and our leadership practices through the lens of our personalities and job assignments. My reflections about the nature of morality, working for the common good, and keeping individual value vs. societal needs in mind (**EXHIBIT B**), led me to explore the deontological views that lead me in my daily decision-making process. I have learned to consider the power of my emotions in leading my administrative work while keeping the ethical principles of ensuring student well-being and meeting the needs of society to develop productive citizenry in mind.

Foster (1986) views power in terms of empowerment in stating, “Leadership is not manipulating a group in order to achieve a preset goal; rather, it is empowering individuals in order to evaluate what goals are important and what conditions are helpful.” I agree with this statement, as I view my role as a leader as empowering my principals and teachers to help students become successful. I have to provide systems of support, challenge the existing norms to promote needed changes, and sustain vision for educational excellence without getting lost in everyday minutia.

A leader in a postmodern age is like a butterfly, constantly changing directions with the wind that represents a variety of complex external forces; “fluttering in a turbulent environment” while maintaining clear personal and institution mission and vision (Kezar, Garducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Interactions and a changing reality determined by social contexts lead to the absence of a single reality in the interpretations of leadership. Rhetoric is a key skill for leadership as it “focuses on persuasion, networking, and negotiation” to create social reality and lead an organization toward successful future (Kezar, Garducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006).

Social reality is becoming more complex as the student and teacher population grows more diverse. The issues of race and gender equality in educational systems are not the sole aspects of diversity. Culture in terms of ethnic, geographical, and feminist concepts contributes to the complexity of issues and demands a more comprehensive approach to building a culture of learning while ensuring that the needs of all the system stakeholders are taken into consideration.

I was able to explore the complexity of multicultural issues in the course on multicultural education led by Dr. Lassiter. I believe that the readings on thinking outside the girl box within the framework of Appalachian culture (Spatig & Amerikaner, 2014), evaluating the history of Indian education in the United States, and exploring Latino views on education, identity, and effects of schooling have allowed me to become more cognizant of the seemingly homogeneous culture of my students (**EXHIBIT C**). I have learned to reflect on my administrative and teaching practices through the layers of cultural identities carried on by students and teachers while keeping in mind the institutional practices that would lead to respect or disregard of their needs.

As I reflect on my learning in Dr. Nicholson’s courses on ethical and administrative theories, I realized that I also strive to be an ethical leader. I believe that ethical leadership in any organization is vital, as the role of a leader is not just to manage the facilities or create work schedules. School principals need to become instructional leaders and ensure that they create learning environments conducive to growth of all stakeholders. Leaders have to ensure that their followers grow as human beings and professionals, and that their work benefits the society rather than just contributing to the material wealth of the individual and its organization. The attitude of the followers toward their leader determines organizational success; therefore, their views of the leader as “walking the walk” of their beliefs and values help establish that belief in the morality and trust in effective leadership.

The concept of instructional leadership permeates my major, leadership studies, and my area of emphasis, curriculum and instruction. As a public school administrator, I view myself as an instructional leader, not a school manager. In this light, the courses on administrative and curriculum theory have provided me with numerous opportunities for reflection and learning in both domains. I have grown to believe that school leadership is essential in building and fostering positive school culture by promoting cohesion, a sense of well-being, and an understanding of purpose among all staff members, as well as building a shared vision for a successful future (Marzano, Waters, & McNully, 2005). The research by Marzano et al. substantiated my reflection on the personal best application of my leadership theory to my work (**EXHIBIT D**) in the Principles of Leadership course with Dr. Watts. This reflection shared several critical points learned during my first year in public school administration: there is a time to talk and a time to listen; have the same expectations for yourself as you do for your staff; and keep the big picture in mind despite the daily minutiae.

The coursework aimed at administrative and ethical theories led by Dr. Nicholson caused me to reflect on my personal and professional beliefs, reevaluate some, and become stronger with others. One of the initial questions in class concerned the whole versus individual good debate. I remember writing,

In my reflections about the nature of my morality, I believe that deontological views guide my daily decisions and reflect their validity through the lens morality characteristic to deontological views. Thus, it is out of sense of duty that I would believe that it is more honorable to fight for the whole, my actions "addressed to an end infinitely greater, a national collectivity" (Sartre, 1946). I believe that fighting for the whole benefits more than one person and has more potential to reflect common sense morality (Kaufman, 2010), which is concerned with the values of justice and respect independent of one’s focus on individual well being (**EXHIBIT B**).

I espouse these beliefs in my daily actions. However, they have surfaced on the conscious level just recently, through challenging discussions and questions posed by Dr. Nicholson. I believe that I continue to fight for the whole in my position as an assistant superintendent. In fighting for the whole, a human has to choose justice over individual well being on a daily basis considering it a legitimate end in itself, putting personal happiness on the backburner. The depth of choice between justice and personal happiness (which might coincide from time to time but will differ for most human beings) contributes to the honorableness of the aim of fighting for the whole, which in my case is ultimate student success after graduation.

The concept of effective leadership in public education is inextricably linked to a deep understanding of curriculum and instruction. I think that my area of emphasis in curriculum and instruction has helped me become a better administrator and instructional leader, as the coursework in this area provided me with varied opportunities for growth in classes on curriculum theory, curriculum change, multicultural education, and models of teaching.

Curriculum theory and history of education have always fascinated me, as these concepts provided a vision for student excellence and historic validity to education. In Dr. Campbell’s class, Curriculum Theory, I was able to evaluate multiple theories and apply their elements to my personal curriculum theory. Herbert Spencer’s question “What knowledge is of most worth?” (Spencer, 1860) has become a centerpiece of my curriculum theory. This question has served as a guiding point as well as a point of controversy among curricular theorists of all ages. Views espoused by Hall, Dewey, Caswell, Bobbitt, and Tyler about the role of education in a child’s life and in shaping American society have many times been in conflict. I often ponder if the knowledge of classical subjects and purely academic matter is more important than social preparation for life. Is a child-centered approach more effective than molding the child into the existing subject-matter curriculum?

The views of progressives, social reconstructionists, and essentialists have been prominent in curriculum development history, and these views are all evident in the contemporary field as well. Various theorists have influenced my thinking. However, Spencer’s question about the worth of specific knowledge serves as a guiding concept of my curriculum theory. My curriculum theory rests on the belief that knowledge is power (**EXHIBIT E**).

Possession of knowledge empowers individuals to embark on the journey of social mobility, which is made increasingly challenging by the diversity of complex skills needed to be successful in the changed economy affected by exponential advances in technology. Theoretical and applied concepts of knowledge have served as sources of debate throughout centuries. I follow the ideas of Dewey (1964) who sees the reciprocal relationship in theoretical subjects needing to become more practical as they relate to the scope of life while practical subjects become more charged with “theory and intelligent insight” (p. 425). Curriculum as a gender, racial, aesthetic, and especially institutional text, adds to the vibrancy, complexity, and controversy in the further development of the field of curriculum theory and elaboration of its relationship to the practice.

So, what comprises this elusive concept of knowledge? I believe that the body of knowledge has its permanent components as well as the changing ones. I side in some part with essentialists in my belief that the students should be exposed to the wealth of knowledge about the world and its history to help them ground their world views within the within democratic principles. Louise Berman (1967) echoes this belief by noting that learning opportunities should provide “essence of experience.” Thus, the focus should shift to social, intellectual, and ethical values rather than only concentrate on the content of academic subjects.

Unlike essentialists, however, I do not believe in assessing student learning through standardized tests and using textbooks as the sole source of curriculum. I respect the individuality of students and teachers in their mutual work in education, which reflects Dewey’s progressive views. Phenomenological views on curriculum support these views in noting that evaluating learning via statistical methods cannot be the only method; and such “messy” disciplines as phenomenology add to the complexity and richness of the institution of learning (McNeil, 1986). However, the dominance of curriculum as an institutional text catches schools in the net of contradiction between goals associated with social efficiency and broader educational goals, between striving to prepare citizens for democratic life, and for technical roles in our complex society.

The ongoing debate about the schools working either toward social efficiency or promoting individual success reflects the difference between empiricism (standardized testing) and phenomenology. Grumet (1976), in talking about empiricism, states that it concentrates solely on quantifiable behaviors, and in so doing, upon “passive, manipulable subjects who have surrendered their capacities to direct their own conduct, report their own experience” (pp. 31-50). Bode (1927) also insists that sole reliance on scientific method in evaluating student learning leads to the trivialization of the curriculum. If education is ever to contribute to the advancement of democracy, it needs to get away from the delusion of obtaining objectives by “sociological determination” (pp. 138-139).

I believe that every student can learn, and that I as a teacher can affect that learning in a positive way. If the schools provide the students with a means of empowerment, they embark on the challenge to provide an individualized approach to a diverse group of students, focusing instruction on the three R’s of the current-day curriculum: rigor, relevance, and relationships. Being able to read, write, and do simple math is not enough. An individual must possess information manipulation skills gained from reading, writing, or doing math, which adds to the complexity of the instruction in the classroom and brings the three R’s to a new level of meaningfulness.

Teaching is also a moral endeavor. Fullan (1993) explores teaching as a moral profession, calling for teachers to combine their sense of moral purpose with a desire for social change. According to Fullan, moral purpose (or making a difference) concentrates on bringing about the improvements. Moral purpose keeps educators close to the needs of their students while change agents provide them with the tools to accomplish their moral goals. Change, of course, is a volatile concept, and Fullan is cognizant of this issue. He outlines four core concepts for building individual change capacity: vision building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration. These concepts can be easily translated into the institutional capacity for change that includes shared vision building, organizational structures, norms, collaborative work cultures, and practices of inquiry.

Curriculum theory, just like phenomenology and a life surrounding it, is a messy concept. Curriculum and pedagogy are inextricably linked, rendered through the human lens of diverse backgrounds, race, ethnicity, political decisions, and a multitude of other factors. For me, the simplicity of curriculum theory lies in determining what is best for an individual child and doing everything in my power to help that child succeed. This is the motto of my daily work in education and the underlying belief supporting my personal curriculum theory.

The Models of Teaching class helped me continue to reflect on my curriculum theory while exploring my preferred model of teaching. The most challenging aspect of the class lay in teaching about the model through the instructional approaches advocated by this model. This challenge led me to reflect on my personal teaching model in the light of behavioral (**EXHIBIT F**), information processing (**EXHIBIT G**), social family, and personal models (**EXHIBIT H**). I saw the applicability of each teaching model in my classroom. However, reflection on each teaching model has helped me learn more about myself as a teacher through the lens of my personality. I realized that personal teaching model never fit my personality and content area while the information processing model was most frequently used when I was teaching. During this class, I did learn more about the social family of models and became more comfortable with the strategies to help students work in a collaborative setting.

Throughout my coursework, various courses in leadership studies and curriculum and instruction have contributed to my theoretical understanding of leadership and curriculum theories and the subsequent application of those theories to my personal models of teaching and leading. I realize that my distributive leadership style is also transformational in nature (Burns, 1978), that engaging teachers in school leadership aspects helped me become an ethical leader and focus on developing my servant leader capacity. These changes were triggered not only by my daily administrative work but also by the exposure to various administrative theories that helped me reflect on my leadership style through theoretical lens.

My instructional leadership skills were greatly enhanced by exploring curriculum theories and models of teaching in depth. My identification with Herbert Spencer’s question on what knowledge is of most worth combined with Dewey’s views on knowledge and its societal applicability guides my curricular choices and informs my decision making in regard to student coursework in our schools.

# Scholarship

“Cut the fat” was a motto in the Writing for Publication class with Dr. Simone. Before starting the class, I considered myself a decent writer, mostly because the comments provided to me on the completed work in my master’s level coursework were generally “Good Job!” Dr. Simone’s class with its emphasis on academic writing, personal reflection as a writer, and peer review dramatically changed my perspective. Seeing my “bleeding” papers shocked me at first, made me question my ability to write, but in the end helped me become a more thoughtful and precise writer.

I am thankful for Dr. Simone’s advice on not obsessing too much over the first draft of my work, as the advice helped me learn to power through free writing and organizing the paragraphs into a coherent piece of writing. I do write more consistently and hope to continue developing a habit and accepting that the “right to fail is of the essence of creativity” (Jalongo, 2001, p. 40). Little did I realize that good writers spend enormous amount of time on revisions, and no good writing undergoes minimal work. Jalongo’s reference to Bogdan and Biklen’s words, “Remember that you are never “ready” to write; writing is something you must make a conscious decision to do and then discipline yourself to follow through” (p. 2) has helped me realize that hard work with revisions and perseverance were instrumental in becoming a good writer. There was no magic in writing.

Revisions, revisions, and more revisions accompanied my writing of the first article for publication. The course requirement of submitting an article for publication was scary and exhausting, but very exciting. My topic focused on the use of distributive leadership in developing the leadership team at my high school. I decided to write about my passion and share the strategies that proved useful to me. I submitted the article to *Learning Forward Journal*, with not much hope of publication. Surprisingly, the article was selected for publication in *Learning Principal*, an online brief published by Learning Forward. The revisions for publication took on another meaning, as my original article was reduced by half, with only the most relevant pieces left for the final version (**EXHIBIT I**).

I have changed my views on myself as a writer. I have become leaner in my writing and start to unconsciously watch “the fat,” as I was guilty of peppering redundant or flamboyant words when simpler structures would do the job. I am more mindful of my audience. In writing academic papers, I devote more time to reflecting research through my lens of perception rather than hiding behind the words of others. These skills will definitely help me in future writing endeavors, with the dissertation being the next big challenge.

Revision and editing have become a staple in other coursework as well. Classes led by Dr. Childress have always been a true staple of learning through research. In the spring of 2013, I took survey research and program evaluation classes with a goal of developing a survey and learning to conduct program evaluations. I decided to concentrate on the use of the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program implemented in all McDowell County schools for this purpose. McDowell County schools have always struggled with low student reading scores, and the need for a systemic approach to reading supports was vital. Having a language arts background, as a principal at the time of conducting my research, I have struggled to create a vision for school-wide literacy. My research on SSR provided information on its effectiveness in helping students develop reading comprehension skills and helped me create a framework for program implementation and identify the needs for program success. The survey research and program evaluation courses allowed me to look deeper into the program evaluation process while gaining a deeper understanding of stakeholder perceptions on the implementation of the SSR program in McDowell County Schools. Conducting the survey, analyzing the results, and developing suggestions for administrative practices were just a few parts of the complex process of preparing a presentation, presenting my research at the SRCEA Conference in Oklahoma City in October 2013 (**EXHIBIT J**), and submitting my manuscript for publication in the SRCEA Yearbook (**EXHIBIT K**).

My interest in the framework of distributive leadership and its permeating influence throughout various organizational levels led me to conduct research on change and technology in Dr. Heaton’s class, Technology and Curriculum. With Dr. Heaton’s support and Dr. Childress’s help with revisions for the paper, the work was also accepted for a presentation at SRCEA 2013 Conference (**EXHIBIT L**).

# Collaboration

## Presentations

Being a part of a cohort has provided an invaluable experience of learning in the cocoon of professional and personal support. Being able to present my research with the professors and fellow cohort members added to the significance of learning as a cohort. Dr. Heaton’s Technology and Curriculum class was based on collaboration and emphasized interactive and interdependent nature of teaching and learning in the networked society. One of our assignments consisted of interviewing a Net Generation representative as a subject for our gaming research (**EXHIBIT M**). Excerpts from this interview contributed to my participation in a collaborative presentation “Gaming and Learning? Taking a Look beyond the Book” with Dr. Heaton, Melissa Farrish, and Lee Ann Porter. Our presentation elaborated on the influence of gaming and its educational concepts on learning structures in schools and argued that gaming principles could be effectively used in today’s schools. The initial presentation was delivered at the 24th International College Teaching and Learning Conference in Ponte Vedra, FL, in April 2012, with subsequent presentation at the West Virginia Technology Conference in July of the same year.

Presenting with my peers was a tremendous learning experience. Working as a team to create a presentation with a single focus on principles of learning, usually via email, presented several challenges and points of success. Being in a group with educated, strong-minded individuals has taught me to listen to the points of others, learn to deliver a cohesive presentation, and synthesize the research of others into one coherent whole. Working with Dr. Heaton, Lee Ann, and Melissa has strengthened my collegial relationships and taught me to put away my habit to jump in and lead. I had to learn to listen, become a partner in presentation, and work toward common goals of our collaborative presentation.

## Teaching/Designing

Teaching on a college level has always seemed unrealistic and unattainable to me. Therefore, when I learned about the portfolio requirement for co-teaching or co-designing a class, panic set in. However, growing partnerships with the professors contributed to great experiences in doing both. Early on, I was asked by Dr. Watts to help with the LS 510 Principalship class (**EXHIBIT N**). My experience of working with aspiring principals, leading discussions on a variety of topics ranging from special education to legal issues, and providing feedback on different leadership topics contributed greatly to my confidence as a school administrator and doctoral student.

I have also managed to gain insight into the connection between preparation programs and the practical application of concepts learned. In her article “Constructing 21st Century Teacher Education” (2006), Linda Darling Hammond states that the three critical components of teacher preparation programs include tight coherence and integration between courses and between coursework and clinical practice at schools; extensive and intensely supervised clinical work integrated with coursework that links theory and practice; and the proactive and close relationship with the schools serving diverse population and incorporating models of good teaching in their daily practice. Principals make instructional and organizational decisions every minute, based on their awareness of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of “development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests, and approaches to learning” (p. 2). In this light, my work with prospective principals revolved around making the connections between classroom, organizational structures, and student learning within the framework of legal, social, and institutional mandates.

Working with aspiring principals was challenging but at the same time very rewarding. I was able to apply the principles taught in the course to respond to student case studies by offering practical solutions to their current theoretical problems. Co-teaching the World Wide Web (WWW) unit in Dr. Heaton’s class, CIEC 534 Application Software in the Classroom Curriculum Area, was more challenging as, at that point, I had been out of the classroom for a couple of years (**EXHIBIT O**). My comfort level as an expert on the topic was low. Consequently, I spent many hours learning the content in order to be able to provide meaningful feedback to students.

The most rewarding collaborative experience was with my cohort members in CIEC 715 Online Course Development and Delivery with Dr. Heaton. I worked with my cohort members (Jill Wood, Melissa Farrish, Allison Pyle, Darrell Brewer, Whitney Shakuri-Rad, and Jennifer Riggleman) on the development of CIEC 561 Wired for Learning (**EXHIBIT P**). I learned a great deal about Symbaloo as an online tool as, again, I needed to become an expert in facilitating student learning on this topic.

In my module, I wanted to create active learning experiences for the students. I tried to combine the concepts of active learning and just-in-time learning, avoiding the structures that would contribute to the routine transfer of knowledge. After reading Dewey’s and Bruner’s ideas on student learning, I have become more open to being a facilitator of learning, not an expert in the subject area. Bruner (1966) believed that children learn more effectively through their own discovery of the ideas instead of being lectured to. He contended that a man’s presence in the evolution is achieved through cultural means. Education within this vehicle of culture was triggered by the human need to tell the children what path of life to take even though the children are fully capable of establishing the views and paths of life on their own.

According to Bruner (1966), students are capable of identifying their learning objectives through purposeful intellectual activity from an early age. Children need to develop this skill early on. When learning as adults, they will have to not only learn the new view but also unlearn the already established understandings. Work with adult learners still requires the creation of the learning experiences where the application of purposeful, focused activity to the real world is vital. Working on the online module activities of using Symbaloo in education helped me evaluate my curriculum theory beliefs through the practical lens of creating relevant learning opportunities for adults. My goals for creating the module lay in providing adult learners with applicable tools for everyday work in the classroom.

Engaging in online teaching and design experiences helped me apply the models of teaching and curriculum theory to the work with adult learners. Using my own curriculum theory has helped me create learning experiences for adult learners that were consistent with Dewey’s and Bruner’s views on curriculum and the social and information processing models of teaching. Working with others on the development of the modules and co-teaching the course has resulted in a more focused and theory-based approach to teaching and learning on a graduate level.

# Summing It All Up

Throughout the three years of coursework, I have been exposed to a vast amount of knowledge in the fields of curriculum and instruction and leadership studies. The courses combined applied and theoretical aspects of both fields and allowed me to develop a comprehensive understanding of myself as an educational professional and an applied researcher.

The evidence presented in my portfolio artifacts site and the reflection paper document my ability to use my depth of understanding in the fields of curriculum and instruction in scholarly pursuits, presentations, and submissions for publication. The exhibits also provide evidence of my ability to collaborate with professors and peers, conduct research, and engage in meaningful learning to be shared with identified stakeholders. I believe that my perseverance through the coursework and the use of my learning experiences to benefit my own growth as a learner will help me engage in meaningful dissertation process.

My professional interests as a public school system administrator lie in exploring distributive leadership and its effects on student learning. The effect of leadership teams on the development of school learning cultures is a topic I would like to research in depth as a part of my dissertation. In the West Virginia public schools context, the role of leadership teams has been structured through Closing the Achievement Gap (CAG) or the School Improvement Grant (SIG) process. CAG process was authorized the West Virginia Legislature and led by the West Virginia State Department in regard to implementation of coaching support and training initiatives in schools facing an achievement gap in student subgroups. The goals of CAG process lay in reducing the achievement gap in the subgroups, especially in African-American and low socioeconomic status subgroups. SIG process also incorporated school improvement strategies to improve school climate and culture, instruction, and, subsequently, student achievement. However, recent revisions to Policy 2510 Assuring Quality of Education: Regulations for Education Programs (WVDE, 2014) identify the role of the leadership teams in the school systems and therefore warrant a deeper look into their function and significance. My dissertation should contribute to the body of literature on distributive leadership in terms of its contribution to the development of professional learning communities and the subsequent role of teacher leadership in fostering student achievement.

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# Appendix: Artifacts

## Depth of Understanding

**EXHIBIT A** Personal Model of Leadership in *Principles of Leadership* class with Dr. Watts

**EXHIBIT B** Journal 4 Entry in *Ethical Theories* class with Dr. Nicholson

**EXHIBIT C** Final Paper in *Multicultural Education* class with Dr. Lassiter

**EXHIBIT D** Personal Best paper in *Principles of Leadership* class with Dr. Watts

**EXHIBIT E** Personal Curriculum Theory in *Curriculum Theory* class with Dr. Campbell

**EXHIBIT F** Behavioral Model in *Models of Teaching* class with Dr. Childress

**EXHIBIT G** Information Processing Model in *Models of Teaching* class with Dr. Childress

**EXHIBIT H** Personal Model in *Models of Teaching* class with Dr. Childress

## Scholarship

**EXHIBIT I** Teacher Leader Voice and Capacity Building Lead to Student Growth - published article in *The Learning Principal*

**EXHIBIT K** Study of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as an Intervention in Low Performing Schools: Policy and Administrative Implications- submission for publication in SRCEA Yearbook

## Collaboration

### Presentations

**EXHIBIT M** Co-Presentation at the 24th International College Teaching and Learning Conference in Ponte Vedra, FL and at West Virginia Statewide Technology Conference in Morgantown, WV

**EXHIBIT J** An Evaluation of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as an Intervention in Low Performing Schools: Policy and Administrative Implications – Paper and Power Point Presentation at SRCEA in October 2013

**EXHIBIT L** Pioneers Becoming a Community: The Role of Administration in Technology Adoption Paper and Power Point Presentation at SRCEA in October 2013

### Teaching/Designing

**EXHIBIT N** Co-Teaching LS 510 The Principalship with Dr. Watts

**EXHIBIT O** Co-Teaching CIEC 534 Applications Software in the Classroom with Dr. Heaton

**EXHIBIT P** CIEC 715 Online Course Development: CIEC 561 Wired for Learning Symbaloo Module