

Changing Leaves and Strengthening Roots: A Reflection of a Doctoral Student

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Becoming a Doctoral Student.....	2
The Cohort Experience.....	3
Lessons in Leadership.....	6
Area of Emphasis.....	9
Collaboration.....	12
Scholarship.....	15
Research.....	20
Reflection on the Rubric.....	23
Next Steps.....	24
References.....	26
Appendix: Summary of Artifact Website.....	28

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Introduction

“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The next best time is now.”
--Chinese Proverb

Like the Chinese proverb states and like some of my much-younger cohort classmates, perhaps I should have attempted this degree earlier in my career. When I joined the doctoral cohort in 2011, the time was right for me. My personal life was financially and emotionally settled.

As a first-generation college student, I had an atypical experience. At a young age, I was encouraged to excel in school and just knew I was going to college. My parents were united in supporting my path to college and I found a way to go to college by qualifying for both need-based grants and merit-based scholarships. My dad once said that the best thing that came out of his poor salary was my college education. While I would argue that money does not make one’s life “better,” my parents believed that a college education had the ability to make one’s life less of a struggle.

I started my job as a work-study student in the financial aid office three days after graduating high school. Upon my undergraduate graduation, I took the advice of my supervisor at the time, Dr. Edgar Miller, and pursued an off-campus job. I knew I wanted to work full-time at Marshall, but he told me that, to gain respect as a full-time staff member, it would be essential for me to leave and return with full-time experience. I worked for the West Virginia Higher Education Grant Program for nearly three years before returning to Marshall in 1990.

Upon returning to Marshall, I worked fifteen years in the financial aid office and, after obtaining my master's degree, served as a parent liaison for five years. I was then offered the position of Interim Director of University College, another unplanned opportunity. After serving as interim for fourteen months, the position became permanent. I saw the University from a new perspective and recognized an opportunity to offer more.

Becoming a Doctoral Student

I always thought I might pursue a doctoral degree; however, as I grew older the path seemed more daunting. When my interim academic position became permanent, the desire to continue my education was rekindled. I sensed my supervisors and colleagues had faith in my abilities and I wanted to be prepared to make valuable contributions to Marshall University. I will be forever thankful to Dr. Frances Hensley (retired), then associate vice president for academic affairs and undergraduate studies and my supervisor, for supporting me when I approached her about going back to school. I am also grateful for the support I received from Dr. Rudy Pauley (retired), former associate vice president for outreach and continuing studies at Marshall University, who encouraged me to apply to the doctoral cohort.

I had a very short window in which to apply to the cohort program, write my goal statement, prepare for an interview, and take the MAT. I had scored well on my GRE twenty-five years ago, but I was anxious about the MAT. I told myself that, "Well, if it's meant to be, it will be." Apparently, it was meant to be. I was accepted to the cohort and I immediately began to question my capacity to cope with the major changes I was anticipating at work and home. I recognized that I would need to take better control of

my daily work habits. Working more reasonable hours forced me to relinquish control of some work projects and develop a better sense of collaboration and delegation among my willing and capable staff. My husband and daughter were supportive of me returning to school and they were willing to assume more responsibilities at home. I became a much better time manager.

As I approach the end of my coursework, I realize that I travelled this path quickly and deliberately. This portfolio document will reflect on my cohort experience, classroom assignments, lessons learned, collaboration opportunities, and research challenges. I will conclude by summing up my experience in relation to my ability to begin my dissertation work and my plans for the future.

Throughout the document, I will reference several artifacts that I collected. A full collection is linked and available for downloading on my portfolio website at <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/>. Artifacts are organized by type of experience: Academic Pursuits (AP); Collaboration (C); Professional Pursuits (PP); Research (R); and Scholarship (S). A separate web page is dedicated to each type of experience and the pages are linked on the Artifacts menu tab. A complete list of artifacts is included in the Appendix.

The Cohort Experience

The rigid structure and class meeting schedule attracted me to the cohort. Work constraints would have made it difficult and sometimes impossible for me to attend weekly night classes; therefore, the Saturday class meetings make it possible for me to participate in the doctoral program. I was also attracted to the continuous enrollment model that included six hours of continuous enrollment for fall, spring, and summer

semesters. There would be no time for indecisiveness. There would be no opportunity to sit out a semester. I needed this structure.

As a few classmates left the cohort early in the program, those of us who remained developed a sense of mutual determination and commitment. We oftentimes expressed frustration, but mostly we shared successes, encouragement, and continued commitment to our common goal. We found strength in community.

Meeting continuously with the same group of students sharing their experiences in various capacities in the field of education has provided an unexpected curriculum. Initially, my expectations for this program were narrowly focused on higher education. I have learned nearly as much about public K-12 education from my classmates as from our actual curriculum courses. I now understand more about the challenges and the disconnect between higher education expectations and the “in the trenches” challenges such as standardized testing, accountability, and political rhetoric that K-12 teachers face every day.

Spring of 2013 seemed to be the semester that everything started falling into place. The course rotation included CI 676 Program Evaluation and EDF 711 Survey Research in Education. Both classes were co-taught by Dr. Ron Childress and Dr. Brenda Tuckwiller. There was a sense of cohesiveness that resulted from the opportunity to create a research project that crossed the boundaries of the two courses. I was making connections with learning from prior courses, my doctoral committee was secured, my portfolio artifacts were beginning to accumulate, and we were encouraged to draft the first outline for our portfolio reflection. I have tweaked this same outline over the last year and am currently using it as the framework for this document.

There have been minor disappointments with the cohort structure. I believe that the format of LS 719 Intro to Doctoral Studies would have been better if it had been separate from the Doctoral Student/Faculty Seminar. While our Saturday meetings are quite long, I would have been willing to add an extra hour at the beginning or end of our day in our first semester. The information provided in LS 719 is valuable. The course provided information on the structure of the doctoral program. I believe I would have been more comfortable with the program expectations had I gained that knowledge in the first semester.

While offering both the Leadership and Curriculum and Instruction tracks together in a single cohort, I understand that there was a need to compromise courses typically offered in the individual programs. This was specifically brought to my attention in an assignment in our LS 705 Administrative Theory course taught by Dr. Barbara Nicholson. We were instructed to interview several administrators and explore their thoughts on their preparation for becoming higher education administrators (see Artifact R5-B, Administrator Interviews). Many mentioned courses such as higher education history, law, and finance being valuable in their current or previous positions. I, too, believe these courses would have been valuable if included in the cohort rotation.

My cohort experience has been valuable. The rigid structure kept me on pace while at the same time providing the opportunity to develop connections with both cohort classmates and faculty. Cohort faculty are dedicated to the success of the cohort students. I believe I have developed lasting relationships with at least two of my classmates and a strong sense of camaraderie with the others.

Lessons in Leadership

"Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots." --Victor Hugo

The first semester in the cohort program immediately focused on leadership in my personal context. Dr. Watts in LS 710 Principles of Leadership first dared us to see ourselves as leaders and consider personal characteristics that result in good leadership. Oftentimes, it is easy to get caught-up in the day-to-day tasks that make up my job. In getting caught-up, it is easy to forget that I am a leader. Dr. Watts presented an assignment in which we had to tell of our "personal best" (see Artifact S6-A, Personal Best). I chose to write about the implementation of Week of Welcome and the Student Resource Center at Marshall University in 2010. In no way can I claim responsibility for the culmination of those two successful endeavors; however, Dr. Watts' assignment helped me see the importance of my organizational and communication skills in the role I played in those projects.

Dr. Watts also challenged me to define my own leadership model. After being introduced to several leadership models, I scrutinized each trying to find the model that was a best fit for me. After considering several theories such as great man theory, hero theory, or even situational theory, I was seeing more of my beliefs and behavior in Fiedler's relationship-oriented contingency theory and servant leadership model (Stepp, 2011). Fiedler's contingency theory claims there is no single best leadership style (Fiedler's Contingency Model, n. d.). Instead, the effectiveness of a leader is based on the situation. While Fiedler's model is actually quite complex, the essence shows that persons with a more relationship-oriented leadership style are typically concerned with

avoiding and managing conflict and are more capable of making complex decisions (Fiedler's Contingency Model, n. d.).

Servant Leadership is another model that I strive to reflect in my leadership style. The idea of servant leadership was coined by Robert Greenleaf who established the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (What is Servant Leadership? n. d.). In servant leadership, a leader needs to understand the needs of his followers. In helping meet those needs, the leader gains the respect and dedication of the team while ensuring the members are growing personally and becoming more able and willing to serve others. At that point, it become less of a leader-follower relationship and more of a collaborative effort. The heart of a servant leader considers the collective and individual needs (What is Servant Leadership? n. d.)

After some time and consideration of several leadership models, I determined that my personal definition of leadership (see Artifact S6-B, Personal Leadership Model) was the following:

Leadership is the opportunity and ability to bring together one or more followers in a collaborative effort to accomplish a common objective(s) in a manner that is moral, ethical, respectful, responsible, timely, and mutually beneficial to the leader, follower(s) and any third party community serving as a recipient of the defined objective. (Stepp, 2011, p. 4)

Coles (2000) suggested that we engage affirmatively in leadership by either choosing to lead or be led in all of our relationships. In everything I do in my daily life or in my job, I intend to respond morally and ethically. It is my personal belief that

leadership and morality cannot be separated. Sometimes, I fail, and when I do, I strive for an opportunity to correct my actions. Humility, too, is a leadership skill.

In addition to leadership models, I was exposed to the several philosophical viewpoints in LS 707 Ethical Theory. This course challenged my deep-rooted beliefs grounded in my Christian upbringing. I learned to appreciate Dr. Barbara Nicholson's challenges and, though it was clear we had differing viewpoints, she never made me feel that I was wrong. She only expected me to present a valid argument. In a journal question (see Artifact S8-C, Journal 3), Dr. Nicholson specifically asked us which philosopher's views most reflected our beliefs on moral decision-making. I was faced with a dilemma. Did I truly address my beliefs from a Christian standpoint, or do I try to write something from a different perspective? I chose to discuss Immanuel Kant's views on doing things "with duty" or "from duty" (Kant, 2009). In my youth, I acknowledged that I made moral decisions based on Christian principles "with duty." In doing so, I never made these decisions in fear of a terrible God, but for a loving God who would forgive me when I messed up. Later, as an adult, I feel that I make similar moral decisions "from duty" because the decisions are made based on principles that are not just Christian beliefs, but are simply "the right thing to do" and reflect the moral and ethical beliefs of most world religions and non-religions. I have learned that moral decision-making transcends religious beliefs.

In reflecting on my coursework related to leadership theories, I believe that my life and my work emulate the theories I have discussed. I have chosen to live a life that I would define as moral. As a result of that choice, I believe my leadership style reflects

an attitude of respect for those I lead as well as those I follow. I have also learned that I must uphold standards that I believe to be right even when challenged by others.

Area of Emphasis

“Don’t be afraid to go out on a limb. That’s where the fruit is.” –H. Jackson Browne

The integration of the Leadership and Curriculum and Instruction coursework has given me a different perspective on education. The technology that has been embraced by society in recent years has completely changed the face of education, particularly at the K-12 level. If the technology is not a part of the curriculum, it is evident that technology is a distraction from the curriculum. To combat the distractions, technology needs to be incorporated into the pedagogy. The challenge is in keeping up with the technological advances. This was truly evident in Dr. Lisa Heaton’s CIEC 700 Technology and Curriculum. Though the texts we read were recent, they were already out of date in their discussion of available technologies.

Today’s students are very much aware of the world around them in a trivial way. Trivial knowledge is only “a Google away.” They have a little knowledge about a lot of things, but little in-depth knowledge of anything. Through coursework and discussions with my cohort classmates, it is evident that classroom pedagogy is driven by content standards, standardized tests, and accountability measures. By forcing teachers to cover a wide range of content standards, I question if students are gaining any experience beyond the trivial. By only addressing the surface of a multitude of content, are we corroborating Schmidt’s (2003) suggestion that curriculum in the United States is “a mile wide and an inch deep?” (para. 8).

My own views toward curriculum were challenged in CI 702 Curriculum Theory taught by Dr. Elizabeth Campbell. When first introduced to curriculum theorists, I felt an immediate attraction to the traditionalist work of Ralph Tyler. I consider myself an extremely organized person and Tyler's Rationale seemed to best fit my personality. As the old saying goes, "a place for everything and everything in its place." Tyler's Rationale specifically supported these steps: stating purposes, identifying experiences, organizing experiences, and evaluating the experiences (Hewitt, 2006). Cherryholmes (1988) suggested that Tyler's principles "promised order, organization, rationality, error correction, political neutrality, expertise, and progress" (p. 26). I liked the tidiness of Tyler's prescribed curriculum.

I then experienced the writings of other theorists. While my head leaned toward Tyler, my heart began to lean toward Eisner. When I realized this, I recall thinking that I had grown beyond a need to control the experience to a need to enjoy and be a part of the educational experience. I actually scribbled that in the front of one of my textbooks. Then I asked myself if I could have it both ways. As Tyler and his colleagues established a defined framework, I think it is important to have a plan for the curriculum content for assessment within a range of flexibilities. Eisner (1991) believed that "schooling needs to be 'known' in the Old Testament biblical sense: by direct, intimate contact" (p. 11). I think the key to a successful pedagogy is in the attention to the individual learning styles of the students, but it goes beyond this. Individual learning styles are important, but the exceptional teacher will interpret the individual biography of each student and adapt a plan within the flexibilities of the curriculum.

In writing my theory of curriculum (see Artifact S5-A, Stepp's Theory of Curriculum), I realize and now understand that every teacher, if given the freedom to manage her own classroom, implements her own personalized theory of curriculum. I would also argue that an experienced teacher has the ability to alter the curriculum formula when each new class is introduced. Eisner and Vallance (1974) recognized that education "become a means of personal fulfillment, to provide a context in which individuals discover and develop their own personal identities...a pervasive and enriching experience with implications for many dimensions for personal development" (p. 105). From this humanistic viewpoint, only upon obtaining self-actualization is a student fully capable of influencing the society around him. Change must begin in oneself (Stepp, 2013).

In a recent course, CI 707 Curriculum Change, Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, assigned a case study on curriculum change. I chose to write about changes in the developmental math courses taking place at Marshall University (see Artifact S7-A, Case Study: Developmental Math Reform at Marshall University). In writing about the changes in one discipline area, I thought about the size of the task of reforming an entire general education curriculum in higher education or the implementation of the common core standards in public education. To be successful in fully implementing curriculum change, collaboration between administration and teachers is essential.

In our CI 707 course readings, I found inspiration in the writing of Christy M. Moroye. Moroye (2013/2009) coins the term *complimentary curriculum* which she defines as the part of the curriculum that comes only from the teacher and is an "embedded and often unconscious expression of a teacher's beliefs" (p. 381). My

teaching experience is limited to a single section of UNI 101 New Student Seminar, a transitional course for incoming freshman specifically designated for conditionally admitted athletes. In addition to the prescribed curriculum, I wondered what topics I might be able to introduce in my course that would most benefit my students. This fall, I hope to find a way to include discussions about integrity, respect, confidence, a desire to learn, self-esteem off the field, and a willingness to ask questions. Eisner (2001/2013) questioned: "Are students encouraged to wonder and to raise questions about what they have studied? Perhaps we should be less concerned with whether they can answer our questions than with whether they can ask their own" (p. 283).

The expectations and responsibilities placed upon today's public school teachers are overwhelming. While it is not always evident in policy or political rhetoric, seeing my classmates' responses and reactions to the issues we have discussed has assured me that there are teachers and administrators that truly do care about the success of our students. For me, understanding the challenges faced in public education provides new insight for understanding the relationship between public and higher education. I have gained a new appreciation for those who struggle to provide adequate teacher education programs at a time when it seems that teaching is not valued.

Collaboration

"Focus on faith and grow your roots strong and deep so no one can make you believe in something that is not good for your soul."--Molly Friedenfeld

Wood and Gray (1991) defined collaboration as "a process in which a group of autonomous stakeholders of an issue domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain" (p. 437). Based on Wood and Gray's definition of collaboration, Kezar (2005) developed a

model for collaboration in higher education. The model consisted of three stages: (1) building commitment, (2) commitment, and (3) sustaining. Within each stage of establishing an effective collaboration, there are several processes. Building commitments consists of defining values, acknowledging external pressure, and learning. “The development of a set of values related to the importance or value of collaborative work created a new norm or operating philosophy for individuals” (Kezar, 2005, p 846).

In her research, Kezar (2005) found that campuses typically operated on a student centered, innovative, or egalitarian values approach. In the commitment stage, Kezar (2005) related the necessary contextual conditions of the institutional mission, senior executive support, and a leadership network. To sustain collaboration, Kezar (2005) suggested that it was necessary to integrate structures, provide rewards and incentives, and establish networks

My collaborative work in the cohort became easier as we progressed through the program. I have a strong idea of how to accomplish certain tasks and I have often taken the attitude that I would rather do the work myself than rely on others. I admittedly like to take control of a project. I have discovered that my cohort classmates are very much like me. In learning more about each other, I learned that I must manage my own need for control and learn to trust others in the development of our projects. Since our classmates live across West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Michigan, we found ways to approach the challenge of physical location via phone, Skype, and other electronic options. We achieved consensus by adapting to others’ learning and work styles and completing a project worthy of doctoral students. As Kezar (2005) suggested, we as

classmates had to establish a level of commitment in our group projects that facilitated common values, successful interactivity, and sustainability.

A variety of collaborative course work artifacts are provided in my online portfolio. Artifacts C4 – C9 reflect a variety of group projects from several different courses. Some group projects such as the CI 703 presentation on the Behavioral Systems Family of Models (see Artifact C6-A, Behavioral Systems Family of Models Presentation) were lengthy and required a great deal of planning and several group meetings. Most projects, however, included only one or two planning meetings. In several instances, I was involved with the same group members from previous projects. This provided the advantage of learning strengths and weaknesses for project tasks (see Artifact C7-A, Transformational, Transactional, and Servant Leadership Presentation, and C8-A, Moral Responsibility Presentation).

In addition to class projects, I have also collaborated with other doctoral students and faculty in the planning and implementation of three Doctoral Student/Faculty Fall seminars. Seminar planning also involved the challenge of physical location. The resulting program is a direct outcome of several committee members making an effort to collaborate literally from a distance. While each committee member has a separate task to accomplish, the program is only successful when those separate projects are connected in a meaningful way. Artifact C1-A, Fall Seminar 2011 Program, reflects my attendance at the seminar. Artifacts C2-A, C2-B, C3-A, and C3-B reflect my collaboration in creating the Fall Seminar 2012 and 2013 seminar booklets and signage.

Collaboration is an essential element to success in all levels of education. In my experiences in higher education, collaboration is often necessary to bring together

seemingly autonomous segments of the educational community to attain a goal. For example, recruitment of incoming students is often viewed as the sole responsibility of the Office of Recruitment. That is simply not true. Each point of contact a prospective student and family makes with the institution is a recruitment opportunity. Whether that point of contact is the admissions office, the financial aid office, housing, academic advising, or even a visit to a website, each response should be a collaborative and knowledgeable effort to invite that prospect to become a part of our community. In the same way, all components of the institution are responsible for student retention. These efforts should not be haphazard. They should represent a unified goal of student success that is developed through a range of collaborative efforts.

Scholarship

*“All that is gold does not glitter. Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither, Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”*
--J.R.R. Tolkien

The most challenging collaborative efforts are those that reflect doctoral level scholarship. I worked with Dr. Ron Childress and Dr. Brenda Tuckwiller in CI 676 Program Evaluation and EDF 711 Survey Research. The courses were offered together in the same semester and this provided the opportunity to coordinate class assignments on one research topic (see Artifact S1, Evaluating Developmental Education Programs: A Proposed Model and Guidelines for Higher Education Administrators). I chose to work on developing an evaluation plan including survey research on a summer bridge program offered at Marshall University. Perhaps one of the most important things I learned was timeliness of distributing a survey. Due to the timing of the spring courses, several months had passed since the summer bridge program had been provided in the previous

summer. Survey responses were low, but we did receive enough to finish our project. A more timely survey at the conclusion of the program may have yielded a higher response rate and, perhaps, more invested responses. In addition, I learned something important about item development. When it came time to compile the responses, I found that some of the questions could have been worded better to obtain the specific information I hoped to find. These lessons will provide guidance for future research projects.

My summer bridge evaluation plan reflected a theory-based model developed by Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004). Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman's approach suggest that the evaluator should be able to easily identify the program goals and objectives, understand the concerns of the stakeholders and articulate the expected benefits (Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman, 2004). The five components of the model include: program need; program design/conceptualization; program operation/implementation; program outcome/impact; and program cost/efficiency. Too often, decisions to implement new programs in higher education are made without considering the need and the anticipated impact and cost. I learned that this theory-based approach could be effective in the implementation of a variety of higher education programs in both academic and support areas.

Dr. Childress suggested that my coursework was appropriate to combine into one manuscript to present at a conference. I was at first terrified to submit a proposal to a national organization because I knew there was a chance it would be accepted! Where I was once confident in my presentations skills, my confidence has waned as I have grown older. Though I collaborated on this project with Dr. Ron Childress, my doctoral committee chair, he was unable to accompany me to the Southern Regional Council on

Educational Administration (SRCEA) Conference in Oklahoma in October 2013. I had to present by myself. His words of encouragement reminded me that no one else knows this specific topic better than I do. He was correct.

Upon Dr. Childress' suggestion, we once again tweaked the manuscript from the course projects and presentation and submitted to the National Social Science Association for publication in their National Social Science Journal. On June 26, 2014, we received a letter of acceptance. The manuscript will first be published online and in a quarterly printed journal (see Artifact S4-B, Final Submitted Manuscript).

I presented at the 32nd Annual Conference of the First Year Experience in Florida in February 2013 (see Artifact S2, Providing Consistency in Freshman Seminar Content through Master Teachers and Video Delivery). My co-presenters were my former supervisor, Dr. Corley Dennison, then Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Marshall University, and Sonja Cantrell, Associate Registrar at Marshall University and cohort classmate. Each of us was involved in the implementation of the presentation topic and presented it confidently. Prior to the collaboration on this project, I obtained approval from my doctoral chair for inclusion of this presentation as a portfolio artifact.

By presenting at two national conferences, I renewed a sense of confidence in my presentation abilities. The key to that confidence is knowing and understanding your presentation content. This renewed faith in my own abilities led to further job-related presentations. I co-presented at the West Virginia Association of Academic Administrators (see Artifact PP1, A Multi-Faceted Approach to Student Persistence) and I served on a panel discussion regarding summer bridge programs at the West Virginia

Developmental Education Summit (see Artifact PP3, West Virginia Developmental Education Summit). As a direct result of the national FYE presentation, I was asked to serve as a proposal reviewer for the next annual conference (Artifact PP2, 33rd Annual First Year Experience Conference Proposal Reviewer November 2013).

In CI 677 Writing for Publication, I was out of my comfort zone. I had always been somewhat confident in my writing skills, but it had been a very long time since my writing was scrutinized by anyone. Our papers were not only scrutinized by Dr. Frances Simone; we read and critiqued our papers aloud in small peer groups. It was an opportunity to share work, learn to accept constructive criticism, and also an opportunity to provide input to others. The critiques seemed harsh at the beginning but I learned from my mistakes and eventually produced a piece that was selected for publication in a national newsletter. This certainly boosted my confidence for future writing but also reminded me that we must provide critique to others in a constructive manner. The newsletter article is available in my portfolio (see Artifact S3, Week of Welcome: Building a “First-Class” Tradition).

I had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. Lisa Heaton on two separate projects. I co-taught a module within her CIEC 534 Applications Software in the Classroom Curriculum course. This experience included grading a PowerPoint tutorial, an individual project, and a short paper, and communicating with the students in reference to their assignments and grades (see Artifact AP1-A, Collaboration Letter from Dr. Heaton, and Artifact AP1-B, CIEC 534 Syllabus). One student questioned her grade and, through this experience, I learned the importance of implementing an explicit

grading rubric, how to assess student work in relation to the rubric, and fairly applying the rubric assessment to all student assignments.

I worked with Dr. Heaton in development of my own course, an online version UNI 100 Freshman First Class, a transition class for incoming freshmen students at Marshall University (See Artifact AP2-A, UNI 100 Syllabus & Schedule; AP2-B, UNI 100 Start Here Page; and AP2-C, UNI 100 Content). We offer approximately seventy face-to-face sections each fall and new freshman are automatically registered for the course. The course is highly encouraged but not yet a general education requirement. Students must opt out of enrollment if they cannot participate. By providing an online section, a few more students will be able to participate in the course even if they physically cannot attend some of the required activities.

Even though I had a syllabus and an outline of the course, transitioning the material to an online structure was a challenge. Many of the activities were intentionally created to be interactive activities in the classroom. I was forced to rethink some of the content items to make them appropriate to the online environment while maintaining the integrity of the content and providing an opportunity to meet and measure learning objectives. One of the assignments provides scenarios in which students are asked to identify the appropriate action for specified academic support (see Artifact AP2-D, UNI 100 Sample Module). Throughout the project, I was constantly reminded of the Quality Matters rubric and the expectations for a course in an online environment. The course has not yet been added to the master course schedule, but I am working toward inclusion in a future term.

I have always been a good student and I appreciate knowing that my coursework has a purpose. The level of scholarship in the doctoral coursework has challenged me to plan thoroughly, work smarter, and edit one more time. The scholarship required in this program directly challenged me to face public speaking, a skill that has waned as I have grown older. I have been encouraged to examine my comfort zones, assess my strengths, and identify skill-sets that need expansion and refinement. I had once shied away from presentation opportunities, but now I am embracing conference proposals. I am confident in the value of my content and my ability and skills in articulating my knowledge to others.

Research

“A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.” --Welsh Proverb

When I entered the doctoral program, I was not confident in my research skills. It had only been a few years since I received my master’s degree, but I was not confident in my master’s program being as rigorous as it should have been. As an example, I recall taking ATE 675 Literature and Research and completing no research at all! As a result, the idea of doing research in a doctoral program was daunting.

In the doctoral program, we have gradually addressed the processes of research. There have been multiple opportunities in multiple courses to improve my research skills. In LS 776 Computer Analysis in Educational Research, Dr. Sam Securro introduced us to SPSS, which will always be a challenge for me; however, if needed, I believe that I will be capable of manipulating data within this software system. It was a lot of complicated material presented in a short time, but I have the guide books from the class available to help when needed. Dr. Securro also asked us to critique a journal article. In doing so, we

learned to identify the research question, identify the hypothesis, the independent and dependent variables, and discuss the significance of several statistical measures. I will be quite honest in that statistical measures do not come easily to me, but I am capable of reviewing materials to determine appropriate measures. I also believe that I can effectively write hypotheses.

In the same semester, Dr. Michael Galbraith in LS 703 Research Design introduced us to the ProQuest database where we selected a dissertation and critiqued it (see Artifact R4-B, Dissertation Critique). In doing this critique, I was able to familiarize myself with the structure of a dissertation. This course also provided our first opportunity to write a research proposal (see Artifact R4-A, Research Proposal). Dr. Galbraith's feedback was critical. While struggling to rewrite and reconsider my class proposal, I think I learned one of the most valuable lessons in this program. I discovered that researching college retention as a result of one freshman transition program would be immensely challenging—especially for a beginning researcher. I was highly involved in this freshman retention program and I was eager to prove to everyone that our work had been fruitful, but I quickly realized that the success of that program was well intertwined with other campus initiatives and separating the influence of that one program would be nearly impossible. This realization forced me to reconsider my planned dissertation topic.

EDF 625 Qualitative Research changed my opinion of qualitative research. My opinion was not based on personal experience, but what had been shared by others. I had heard many times that qualitative research was too hard, too time consuming, and that I should plan to only do quantitative work for my dissertation. While that is yet to be

determined, I did enjoy my qualitative experiences and learned that I need to base my opinions on personal experience. In our non-participant observation activities, I learned the importance of listening skills and body language (see Artifact R3-A, Evaluating the Experience of UNI 100 Facilitators). I also learned that interpretation is not completely objective. Qualitative research includes the experience of the researcher and finding a balance between objectivity and the researcher's interpretation is essential.

EDF 625 also provided an introduction to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process through the Office of Research Integrity at Marshall University (see Artifact R3-B, IRB Approval, and Artifact R3-C, Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative [CITI] Human Research Curriculum Completion Report). Dr. Debela provided a presentation by a member of the IRB staff who explained the procedures and provided guidance as we submitted our documentation. I now understand the need for the review process and the expectations for future human subject research projects, my dissertation in particular. I also maintain contact with the IRB regarding some assessment projects in my daily work.

The "personal-ness" of qualitative research was truly illustrated in our reading of Dr. Linda Spatig and Layne Amerikaner's book *Thinking Outside the Girl Box: Teaming Up with Resilient Youth in Appalachia* in CI 706 Multicultural Education (see Artifact R7-A, Reading Report on *Thinking Outside the Girl Box: Teaming Up with Resilient Youth in Appalachia*). I was fascinated by the authors' involvement and the involvement of their group of researchers. Their involvement allowed them to learn more about the successes and failures of the Girls Resiliency Program than from the perspective of a non-participant evaluator.

I have honed my library research skills and my knowledge of APA Style. I believe that I am capable of reading and understanding research completed by others and analyzing their results in consideration of my own research. I am aware of the technologies that are available to assist me in analyzing quantitative data and I am confident in knowing that a qualitative or mixed-method approach is available to me as I begin to plan my own dissertation research.

Reflection on the Rubric

“All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man’s life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom.” -- Albert Einstein

The purpose of this document is to confirm my ability to advance to the next step of dissertation research and writing. To do so, this paper and oral defense must adequately document my achievements in each area of the Doctoral Portfolio Rubric: Collaboration, Scholarship, Research, Depth of Understanding, Reflection, and Communication.

In previous sections of this paper and in my collection of artifacts, I have specifically addressed the areas of collaboration, scholarship, and research. In summary, I have presented evidence of collaboration with a faculty member in teaching and course development. I have collaborated with my cohort classmates in various course projects and I have worked with other doctoral students and faculty in planning two student/faculty seminars. In the area of scholarship, I have provided documentation of collaboration with faculty for publications and with faculty, a cohort classmate, and other Marshall University administrators for national, regional, and state presentations. I have also presented exemplary samples of my coursework. The evidence of research projects

is included along with a brief summary of research methods that might be considered for my dissertation work.

Depth of Understanding is represented in the culmination of this reflection paper. I have synthesized my three years of coursework into one document that concisely relates my learning experiences to my personal and professional growth. I have reflected upon my entry into the doctoral program, my initial fears, skills learned, and confidence gained. I believe that upon completion of my dissertation, I will have successfully prepared for the next step in my professional career. My communication skills are reflected in this paper, my accompanying PowerPoint presentation, the delivery of my presentation, the development of my portfolio website, and the organization of artifacts.

Next Steps

“Anyone can count the seeds in an apple. Only God can count the apples in a seed.”
--Robert Schuller

The next step will be framing a research problem for dissertation research. I have done some specific work in relation to reforms in developmental education taking place at my own institution. This is not only a timely topic at Marshall University, but one also for the State of West Virginia, as well as our nation in general. It is also a topic where there is not a significant amount of research yet completed on the recent developmental changes in both format and pedagogy; therefore, it is a viable topic that will meet a research need. I will be investigating this topic further with my doctoral chair in the upcoming weeks, considering the applicability to dissertation research, and evaluating appropriate research methods.

Though I am ready for new challenges, the next steps in my career are not certain. The completion of a doctoral program is a key that opens many doors and true wisdom comes in knowing which door to open at what time. I can now consider a variety of administrative and classroom options while knowing that I want to continue making influential contributions in higher education and helping individual students achieve their academic goals.

I titled this reflection *Changing Leaves and Strengthening Roots: A Reflection of a Doctoral Student* because I am still the same person I was when I began. Yet, I am different. My roots are still grounded in the same principles and core beliefs yet they are stronger now because they have been tested and tried. My leaves have changed, though. Fall is the season of the most vibrant landscapes of the year. My leaves reflect colorful experiences, new challenges, and a readiness to move forward.

Fall is literally the season of the year when I will defend this reflection and represents the completion of coursework as I prepare to burrow in for the winter's work of my dissertation. Most importantly, fall represents this time in my life where my true colors reflect who I am. I am ready to accept the challenges that lie ahead.

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Appendix: Summary of Artifact Website

The following documents are available for viewing at the links provided below. All subsequent pages are linked from the main introduction page.

Main Page and Introduction: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com>

Miscellaneous Program Documents

- M1: Goal Statement July 2011
- M2: 2011 Cohort Course Rotation
- M3: Annual Review 2011
- M4: Annual Review 2012
- M5: Annual Review 2013
- M6: Doctoral Committee Approval
- M7: Secondary Program Approval

Academic Pursuits Website: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/academic-pursuits.html>

Artifact AP1: Co-Teaching CIEC 534 Presentation Module with Dr. Lisa Heaton

- AP1-A: Collaboration Letter from Dr. Heaton
- AP1-B: CIEC 534 Syllabus

Artifact AP2: Development of UNI 100 Freshman First Class with Dr. Lisa Heaton

- AP2-A: UNI 100 Syllabus & Schedule
- AP2-B: UNI 100 Start Here Page
- AP2-C: UNI 100 Content
- AP2-D: UNI 100 Sample Module

Collaboration Website: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/collaboration.html>

Artifact C1: 2011 Marshall University Doctoral Student/Faculty Seminar

- C1-A: Fall Semester 2011 Program

Artifact C2: 2012 Marshall University Doctoral Student/Faculty Seminar

- C2-A: 2012 Seminar Booklet
- C2-B: Sample Door Signage

Artifact C3: 2103 Marshall University Doctoral Student/Faculty Seminar

- C3-A: 2013 Seminar Booklet
- C3-B: Sample Door Signage

CI 701 Curriculum Development

Artifact C4: Group Project, Tyler and Taba Perspectives on Curriculum

- C4-A: Project Handout

Artifact C5: Group Project, Curriculum Development for Fit Freshmen

C5-A: Project Syllabus

CI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching

Artifact C6: Group Project, Behavioral Systems Family of Models

C6-A: Behavioral Systems Family of Models Presentation

LS 705 Administrative Theories

Artifact C7: Group Project, Transformational, Transactional, and Servant Leadership

C7-A: Transformational, Transactional, and Servant Leadership Presentation

LS 707 Ethical Theories

Artifact C8: Group Project, Moral Responsibility and Protecting the Nation: Security vs. Individual Rights

C8-A: Moral Responsibility Presentation

LS 740 Education Law

Artifact C9: Team Project, Landmark Case Presentation

C9-A: Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke 438 U.S. 265 (1978)

Professional Pursuits Website: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/professional-pursuits.html>

Artifact PP1: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Student Persistence

PP1-A: WVAAA Spring Meeting Program

PP1-B: WVAAA Spring Meeting Presentation

Artifact PP2: 33rd Annual First Year Experience Conference Proposal Reviewer

PP2-A: Invitation to Review FYE Conference Proposals

PP2-B: FYE Conference Proposal Instructions

PP2-C: FY Proposal Scores

Artifact PP3: West Virginia Developmental Education Summit

PP3-A: West Virginia Developmental Education Summit Program

Research Website: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/research.html>

Artifact R1: CI 676 Program Evaluation & EDF 711 Survey Research

R1-A: Research Paper

R1-B: Survey Project

R1-C: Evaluation Project

Artifact R2: CIEC 700 Technology & Curriculum

R2-A: Problem Report: Investigating the Effectiveness of Video Content in a College Transition Course

Artifact R3: EDF 625 Qualitative Research

R3-A: Evaluating the Experience of UNI 100 Facilitators

- R3-B: IRB Approval
- R3-C: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Human Research Curriculum Completion Report
- R3-D: Approved Informed Consent
- R3-E: Approved Anonymous Consent
- Artifact R4: LS 703 Research Design**
 - R4-A: Research Proposal
 - R4-B: Dissertation Critique
- Artifact R5: LS 705 Administrative Theories**
 - R5-A: Policy Analysis Critique
- Artifact R6: LS 776 Computer Analysis in Educational Research**
 - R6-A: Research Article Critique
- Artifact R7: CI 706 Multicultural Education**
 - R7-A: Reading Report on *Thinking Outside the Girl Box: Teaming Up with Resilient Youth in Appalachia*

Scholarship Website: <http://sherristepp.weebly.com/scholarship.html>

Scholarship – Presentations

Artifact S1: Evaluating Developmental Education Programs: A Proposed Model and Guidelines for Higher Education Administration

- S1-A: SRCEA Conference Agenda
- S1-B: SRCEA Conference Continuing Education Certificate
- S1-C: SRCEA Paper
- S1-D: SRCEA Presentation

Artifact S2: Providing Consistency in Freshman Seminar Content through Master Teachers and Video Delivery

- S2-A: FYE Proposal Acceptance
- S2-B: FYE Conference Program Cover
- S2-C: FYE Conference Program Session
- S2-D: FYE Conference Presentation

Scholarship – Publications

Artifact S3: Week of Welcome: Building a “First-Class” Tradition

- S3-A: *eSource* Query Letter
- S3-B: WOW Article in *eSource for College Transitions*, April 2013
- S3-C: WOW Article Query
- S3-D: Email from Dr. Simone

Artifact S4: Evaluating Developmental Education Programs: A Proposed Model and Guidelines for Higher Education Administrators

- S4-A: NSSJ Submission Guidelines
- S4-B: Final Submitted Manuscript
- S4-C: Acceptance Letter from NSSA, June 26, 2014

Scholarship - Coursework

Artifact S5: CI 702 Curriculum Theory

S5-A: Stepp's Theory of Curriculum

Artifact S6: LS 710 Principles of Leadership

S6-A: Personal Best

S6-B: Personal Leadership Model

S6-C: Personal Leadership Presentation

S6-D: Ethical Leadership

Artifact S7: CI 707 Curriculum Change

S7-A: Case Study: Developmental Math Reform at Marshall University

Artifact S8: LS 707 Ethical Theories

S8-A: Journal 1

S8-B: Journal 2

S8-C: Journal 3

S8-D: Journal 4