**Finding One’s Own Voice**

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**Introduction**

Ever since I was a small child, languages have been a part of my life. It seemed effortless and allowed me to explore the world around me. I thought I could say anything and that I knew it all. Then, errors were expected, tolerated, and even encouraged at times. I had a large network of friends and family who were very supportive. Growing up in a trilingual home where German, English, and Spanish were spoken, I knew that there were many different ways of expressing myself to obtain my desired results. Many years later I realized that not everyone spoke these languages or observed our same traditions. This realization was a turning point. I started questioning the world I knew, my perceptions, my thoughts, and who I was as an individual.

Starting the doctoral program at Marshall University made me feel like that young child once again. I began an uncertain journey. I thought it would be a repeat of the same concepts and lectures I had heard before during my previous courses and programs. I thought the next few years were going to be as simple as learning language when I was a child. I found myself one more time surrounded by peers, faculty, and staff on campus who I would collaborate with- and support me. I learned that this new group and I did not all speak the same “language” since many of us came from a variety of different fields and backgrounds. What we meant was not always the same even though we used the same words. During my coursework, peers and faculty tolerated errors to help me think critically. These interactions with peers, faculty, and others, helped me re-shape my thinking about education. Previously my thinking had been quite linear and based on my own practices. Opportunities during my courses to collaborate and contribute expanded my views and influenced how I perceived other’s thinking and ideas. I became more flexible and was able to see many sides to an issue and consider the larger impact issues could have beyond my own practice. Collectively, all these interactions, opportunities, and collaborations have changed who I am as an educator.

Since languages were of great interest to me, I began my education career as a high school foreign language teacher. Seeing how my students began discovering new ways of looking at the world around them and making connections was fascinating and brought me great joy. Students made connections and experienced those “aha” moments often. Their own thinking, views, and ideas regularly shifted when they understood some of the connections between their own cultural context and those in other cultures and practices. These connections and enlightening moments took place even during simple daily interactions such as understanding the true meaning of the food items at Taco Bell or those of popular expressions from movies and songs. I was able to see change and how it affected me, my students, and in turn, others within their social circles.

 Later on, approximately four years after I first started teaching, I began working with English Language Learners (ELL). My work with ELL students also allowed me to see how the acquisition of language helped these students begin their discovery of a new world around them. Seeing those connections happen and creating a process of self-discovery and change in all involved helped me better understand who I was and brought change to my professional and personal life. As a doctoral student I too became a “language” learner. Even though I was not in the literal sense learning a new language, I experienced similar stages as my students. I can compare my educational journey as a part of the Marshall University Doctoral Program, to Krashen’s stages of language acquisition: Preproduction, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency, and Advanced Fluency (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). During Preproduction, students have minimal comprehension and do not verbalize. In the Early Production stage, students have limited comprehension, produce limited responses, uses key words and familiar phrases. At the Speech emergence stage, they have good comprehension, produce simple sentences, still make some grammatical errors, and often misunderstand idioms. Once at intermediate fluency, they have excellent comprehension and make minimal errors. Once Advanced Fluency is achieved, students have near native levels of speech.

This model, one of the most accepted and referenced models in language acquisition theory, is used to describe the phases language learners go through. These five stages are very helpful in providing a framework for understanding, teaching, and helping ELL students. My development as a doctoral student somewhat parallels the stages of language acquisition.

During my Preproduction stage, I had minimal comprehension. I did not verbalize much at all and tended to have minimal interactions. The terminology was frequently new to me and, to be quite honest, it often did not make sense. This was especially evident during my first semester in the program. Starting the program by enrolling in a complex curriculum theory course did not make for a smooth beginning.

Soon thereafter, during my Early Production stage, the terminology, theory, and many concepts introduced during the courses began making sense. My comfort level increased and I was able to have more input in my courses and collaborate with peers and faculty. I was able to use the proper educational terms and jargon, my new language, and apply my new knowledge in small doses.

During my Speech Emergence stage, I had a good grasp of curriculum theory and the literature in the different areas introduced in my courses. I was able to contribute to the knowledge base around me. I was able to try new things such as choosing to present on concepts new to me such as phenomenology and synectics and ventured out of my comfort zone when I prepared a paper to submit for publication in Dr. Simone’s Writing for Publication class. I continued to make some errors and assumptions based on my preconceptions, yet I broadened my thinking and activities.

Eventually, I entered my intermediate fluency stage. I had a good understanding of who I was as an educator, how curriculum change affected my thinking and practice, and more importantly, the part I wanted to play in curriculum reform. In this stage I continued to make some errors. I still had a somewhat narrow understanding of research design and other concepts such as survey construction and data analysis. These errors I continued to make were change agents that influenced how I approached future projects I became involved with such as student questionnaires I helped create for the doctoral seminar.

As I prepare to present my portfolio and begin the final part of my program, I find myself in the Advanced Fluency stage. Here I am confident I have near “native” competencies, understanding, and I am ready to contribute to the larger knowledge base of my in the fields of ESL and teacher quality. Granted, this is not my final stage. Occasionally, I revert to previous stages. Altogether, these stages have shaped me as an educator, a contributor, and as a professional.

Throughout the rest of this reflective paper, I will discuss the experiences I had during the program that helped me grow and develop academically and professionally. These include elements and examples of my coursework and experiences and represent a snapshot of different facets of this incredible journey. I will discuss each area that comprises the portfolio process as I relate the experiences that influenced my growth and that how those influenced who I am today. I will begin with collaboration, follow with depth of understanding, continue with scholarship, then discuss research, and end with concluding thoughts.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration is both a process and an outcome in which shared interest or conflict that cannot be addressed by any single individual is addressed by key stakeholders. A key stakeholder is any party directly influenced by the actions others take to solve a complex problem. The collaborative process involves a synthesis of different perspectives to better understand complex problems. A collaborative outcome is the development of integrative solutions that go beyond an individual vision to a productive resolution that could not be accomplished by any single person or organization. (Gardner, 2005, para. 8)

Throughout the program, collaboration was not only an option but a necessity. Often, educators tend to work in isolation. Their classrooms are their kingdoms. This silo-like environment is usually a result of the lack of time, resources, and other limitations that forces them to figure things out on their own. Upon entering the program, even though I had been out of the classroom for some time, I reverted to some of that silo-like behavior.

 I regularly heard of groups that consistently met and worked together. Often, peers would talk about their support groups. At first, I thought I would not be able to do that since I had a family and a full-time job that left little time for that level of collaboration. I perceived fellow students to be a well-oiled machine that worked together and had no room for outsiders. A classic example of being in the Preproduction stage, I did not say much or try to participate, mainly due to the lack of understanding of some of the concepts and partly for not believing I could contribute. It would be difficult and lengthy to address all opportunities for collaboration the program afforded me. From simple tasks such as taking on clerical responsibilities for a group, helping coordinate doctoral seminars, and twice being a presenter with peers, to conducting a session with Dr. Sue Hollandsworth and other faculty, co-teaching and co-presenting at an international conference. I will discuss a few of these opportunities that help illustrate my personal and professional growth.

Early on in the program, in CI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching, one of the course requirements was to make group presentations. It became evident that the traditional division of content and then taking turns to present it was not going to work. I had done collaborative work before, however, this experience quickly taught me to adapt and be willing to work outside of my comfort zone. I was working with other individuals I did not know. We all had very different styles and brought a completely different set of skills to the project. Due to our schedules, commitments, and different geographical locations, we had to be creative and maximize our resources. Our task was to present the concept of Synectics and advanced organizers. Our group only had about two weeks to prepare. At the end of the project I learned that there are many ways to accomplish one task. By collaborating with my peers electronically, face-to-face, and by phone, we were able to amalgamate our thinking to explain the abstract concept of synectics. Most of all, we discovered how our own diverse experiences influenced and enhanced the final product. I learned then that it would be impossible to achieve the same results individually.

As a part of my full-time job at the West Virginia Department of Education, I use technology and collaboration daily. Looking back, I can see that, prior to my involvement in the doctoral program, my sense of technology and collaboration were centered around that which was familiar. While taking Dr. Heaton’s CIEC 700, Technology and Curriculum, I had to collaborate on a group project covering the Net Generation in the Workforce by Tapscott (2009). Together, with fellow classmates Keri Fero, Amanda Knapp, and Beth Pauley, we had to create a PowerPoint presentation to address the topic. Once again, my sense of collaboration was challenged since we had particular parameters that we had to follow. My first challenge was working with a Wiki. Such a public medium, where so many of our classmates were also posting, was distracting at first. Having collaborated in numerous projects by then I thought this would be an easy task. I quickly learned that collaboration does not necessarily have the same meaning for students or faculty. As Austin and Baldwin (1991) define collaboration as “broad and flexible.” Not all share the same understanding. Having group members who were truly members of the Net Generation also presented a different set of challenges. Several group members were active bloggers, had a wiki, and were active on Facebook and Twitter. Communicating in such a public and open manner broadcasting thoughts and ideas instantly was something I could not relate to. This became a process of self-discovery where I also questioned my technology beliefs and practices and how they impacted my participation in the workforce. Working through the process, made me examine how effective the technologies I used daily actually were. It made me look at other possibilities that eventually lead to more efficient ways of conducting my daily tasks. The process made more comfortable with technology and these interactions solidified my connection with my fellow peers and faculty. One of the many things I discovered was that one of the failures I had experienced when collaborating with others was a lack of common understanding. Often we were speaking the same language but not saying the same thing. Semantics played a large role but a more fundamental issue was the way the Net Generation views technology not as a resource as I believed it to be, but as a way of life which created bigger obstacles. Understanding how the other members of my group think and why they think the way they do allowed me to be a better collaborator.

When true collaboration and networking occur, new opportunities open up when one is not even looking. As a result of these projects I had the opportunity to co-author and co-present a paper for the 21st International Conference on College Teaching and Learning, with fellow students Kandas Queen and Ashley Stephens, and one of my professors, Dr. Lisa Heaton in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. Preparing the presentation, “Portfolios: Innovation vs. Tradition,” introduced me to a whole new way of collaborating. Again I collaborated with my peers but this time also with one of my professors requiring a new approach and skill set. Integrating content knowledge, technology, delivery methods, and collaborating across state lines since some members lived out of state, required a different approach to what I was familiar with and comfortable. It required using a variety of mediums to finalize one project and product. I was no longer able to wait to receive work via email in pieces at a time to be compiled later into one final product. In the past, I exchanged electronic documents with my group to make corrections or edits. The need for immediate and simultaneous collaboration introduced me to new technologies that I knew about but rarely or ever used. Some examples of these new technologies used as collaborative educational tools are Twitter, Facebook, and Skype. It expanded my use of Wikis and learned different uses for technology I was already using such as Google Documents. Most of these are now an integral part of my daily work which has enhanced my productivity and has made me a better problem solver. When working with our constituents around the state, I am now able to collaborate comfortably via Skype and attend and/or facilitate meetings remotely. At the WVDE we now have a Facebook page and have Twitter communities.

I learned much through the experiences and contributions of the other group members. Also, writing a paper on the residency portfolio, with the presentation being one of the portfolio requirements, had a metacognitive effect. Writing and presenting about what I was experiencing gave the project a much deeper level of understanding because I could relate to the process firsthand. Presenting to others about the portfolio and sharing the presentation with my peers expanded my views of what it means to collaborate in non-traditional ways through the use of technology. Document sharing and peer-editing could just be independent tasks. I learned that collaboration is more than the traditional sharing of tasks or information. I learned that the sharing of experiences and supporting others is also an integral part of collaboration. I no longer think of collaboration as a tool but as a process. This experience helped prepare me for future experiences such as co-teaching two courses: Second Language Acquisition CISL 550 Dr. Nega Debela, and Application Software in the Classroom Curriculum Area CIEC 534 with fellow student, Stacy Murrell. Co-teaching these courses provided the opportunity to collaborate in an area where I was comfortable, second language acquisition, and in one area in which I was not as comfortable at the time since I had been out of the classroom for some time, new technology in the curriculum. What I learned through the process from my peers, professors and my students prepared me to better understand curriculum change and its impact. This experience gave me the skills necessary to succeed in a variety of situations. Skills such facilitation, asynchronous collaboration with the ability to present, defend different points of view, and agree with views different than mine. These courses often allowed me to become the learner as well as the instructor. As a result of teaching online courses I am now able to better plan, facilitate and deliver virtual meetings, trainings, and discussions.

 My current position at the WVDE requires that I provide technical assistance to IHE representatives who are located throughout the state. The ability to deliver this assistance in a time and cost effective manner is a priority. Having taught these online courses involving students with different ability levels, interests, and with different needs prepared me to better serve my constituents today. I am now confident, prepared, and willing to think “outside of the box” in my daily tasks at work. Just as I helped my students discover new possibilities through language, I discover new possibilities and opportunities through collaborations that I use today.

**Depth of Understanding**

He who learns but does not think, is lost. He who thinks, but does not learn is in great danger. - Confucius

When talking to practicing educators in the field, I find that generally they know what good teaching is, what curriculum means, and how they both fit together. I too believed that I understood curriculum and that I had a good grasp on all the related theories and concepts. Most of my training had been in secondary education. Like my ELL students in the past, I had the equivalent to their “social” language which gave the impression of a deeper understanding. I knew the right words and had just enough surface knowledge of relevant concepts. To the untrained eye it appeared that I had a solid grasp of scholarly research. What I lacked to an extent, was the “academic” language. This language, or in my case, knowledge, as stated by Chamot and O’Malley (1994) is far more complex and demanding. The surface knowledge I had, did not allow me to make the necessary connections to see the impact of curriculum change. I did not have the background yet to see the “big picture” and how to understand research findings.

Bennet (2006) states that as our frame of reference and knowledge becomes deeper and more complex we begin to “reconsider how we learn, think and act” (p. 175). As a new doctoral student my expectation was to revisit issues, concepts, and theories that I was already familiar with and used daily. Often, my thoughts, beliefs, and practices were shaped by my prior schema and greatly influenced by my role as an information specialist at the time. There was a hint of arrogance in my belief since I often asked myself, what could my professors possibly teach me? During my tenure with the ERIC Clearinghouse I used to look at research for most of the day when answering constituents’ questions. I was certain that the actual learning occurred on the job and not in a university classroom. Starting a Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program seemed like a natural choice that would validate what I believed I already knew. I felt it would be an easy task since I had been involved with curriculum, instruction, and research for a long time.

It did not take long to quickly find out that what I had learned in some areas of research, theory, and even curriculum was surface knowledge. This was evident early on in LS703 Research Design. Even though I had completed research projects, I was not prepared for the demands of that course. I was of the mindset that a question was a question. I thought that if I asked what I wanted to know I would get the right data that would answer my research question. Through peer discussion and class discussions I learned how to formulate good research questions. Questions are the most fundamental and obvious part of research but often are the most challenging. A bad question can invalidate one’s entire research. As stated by Marion (2004), this is the “most crucial part of research” (para. 2). Understanding how to formulate a question that will help define the focus of my research helped me understand its purpose. What I learned then about research design provided the foundation and has given me the confidence to begin the next phase of the program as I get ready to begin my own research project.

In addition, in courses such as EDF625 Qualitative Research and EDF 626 Advanced Qualitative Research I gained varied perspectives about research. I had never been involved in true qualitative research. I used to be a firm believer that good research was quantitative. Numbers did not lie I thought. Understanding the power of an interview and being able to see and hear the subjects and receive that immediate feedback opened a whole new host of possibilities. I am now able to construct much better surveys. I have become a more confident facilitator. Often individuals do not ask the right questions for what they truly want or need. As a result of these courses and experiences I am better able to help others find the information they seek even if they do not know how to ask for it.

Research is one of the most important components of the program. As a result of the courses and experiences, I am now able to identify and articulate research problems from the literature. I am also able to develop appropriate research designs, develop data collection plans as well as analyze and report those data.

As I progressed through the courses and experiences of the program, I felt as if I were looking through a microscope at my own practice as an educator. With every course and every experience I was able to reflect and analyze what I did in my classroom, then in my work in the private sector, and now in my current work involving educator quality. After every course my idea of curriculum would change. I learned that curriculum is not a static concept which forced me to ask more critical questions deepening my understanding.

Courses such as CI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching and CI 702 Curriculum Theories helped me define myself as the educator I was and understand who I had been. As I struggled through Pinar’s (2004) text *Understanding Curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses*, I was able to see the connections between the many theorists. During these courses I had the opportunity to study and discuss curriculum theories in detail, but most importantly, I had to create my own unique personal theory which taught me much about my own practice and helped explain, why I approached teaching and learning the way I did. I defined myself as a constructivist with cognitive tendencies and a touch of behaviorism. As a constructivist I believe that every experience in this program has shaped me and guided my choices. Using Piaget’s words, I constructed my knowledge (Ackerman, 2002). The program allowed me to create my own experiences and build upon my existing knowledge thus creating new experiences. However, as a “mild” behaviorist, I still believe that reinforcement and the way our brains are wired and shaped/conditioned by our experiences influence how we learn, react, interpret, and internalize those experiences.

Through the course of the program, I learned about many theorists and their influence in the field of curriculum and instruction. Many have influenced my own thinking. Some have had a direct impact in my practices. Vygotsky helped me understand and validate my beliefs regarding the relationship between language development and thought. This understanding and validation was evident primarily in my work with English Language Learners. I too think that how we communicate, especially when learning another language, shapes our learning. I can definitely see the impact of the social contexts of the program (interactions with peers and faculty) as explained by his social constructivist theory, in how I learned, internalized experiences, and how grew personally and professionally. Piaget and his work on the stages of cognitive development also deeply impacted the way I taught, approached curriculum, and how today I plan and deliver technical assistance. The idea that we construct our own knowledge through experience is evident not only in my practice as I facilitate the learning of others, but it is also evident in my own learning style while a part of the doctoral program. As a result of my work with those theorists, I am better able to target the technical assistance I provide to those I work with. I am also better equipped to facilitate trainings and lead discussions with teachers, county leaders, and other stakeholders around the state in my work in the area of teacher quality and systems support.

I learned that it is very difficult to define myself in absolute terms. For example, I am less of a behaviorist than I previously believed. This change in thinking reinforces the notion of constant knowledge evolution. As I continue to reflect I discover additional possibilities. What once was surface knowledge, including theories, strategies, and concepts has now deepened and is applied daily in the projects, tasks, and initiatives at work and as I look ahead into the writing stage of the program.

**Scholarship**

Boyer (1990) quotes William Bowen, a former president of Princeton University who refers to scholarship as an internal “need as human beings to confront the unknown and to seek understanding for its own sake” (p. 17).The concept of scholarship can be difficult to understand. The process of contributing to the body of knowledge is no easy task. Early on in the program, we are told about the importance of scholarly research and the expectation that we be involved in contributing to it. One of the most important things I have learned is that you cannot force scholarship and expect it to be meaningful. To use a cliché, it is about the journey and not the destination. Boyer captures it best when he says that it is not about “just the outcomes, but the process, and especially the passion, give meaning to the effort” (p.17).

The doctoral program has given me numerous opportunities to engage in a variety of scholarly activities. These activities helped me to master and explore the many dimensions of curriculum. They also gave me the opportunity to engage in meaningful collaboration with my peers and with the larger education community. Learning about learning has given me the skill to incorporate best practices into many areas of my professional life. Sharing this knowledge with individuals from institutions of higher education with whom I interact as a part of my job allows me to continue growing as a professional. The program has prepared me to engage in these types of activities and not only contribute to the field of education but also continue learning in the process.

Prior to my involvement in the doctoral program I had had many opportunities to present at national and international conferences as part of my job with the ERIC Clearinghouse. Generally, these presentations were about a specific service, product, or someone else’s research. Partly due to the reputation of the ERIC Clearinghouse and its work at the national level and the relevance of the services they offered, I never experienced rejection when submitting presentation proposals. Often we were invited to present or participate at relevant national and international conferences. It was not until CI 677 Writing for Publication that I truly understood the rigor, expectation, and purpose of scholarly writing. This was a turning point for me as well as a humbling experience. Experiencing rejection from a professional association and accepting that maybe the piece I submitted was not informative or did not have anything to contribute to one’s field can be a sobering experience. Having gone through the process and now having a much better understanding of what is involved. In the course I learned about different writing styles, purposes, and audiences which has made me a better writer and researcher.

Collaborating with Dr. Heaton and several peers on a presentation for the 21st International Conference on College Teaching and Learning was another turning point. Being able to apply the different technologies and strategies I had learned in the program and being able to share my experience with an international audience was not only fulfilling but a great learning experience. I learned of concerns and obstacles others have encountered when trying to implement a process similar to the portfolio process. Some mentioned institutional push-back. Others mentioned regulations from different boards as an obstacle. It was interesting to see how many had been waiting to see if it would work for others before they implemented such process. Interacting with others interested in the field of education and sharing some of the same ideas as well as differences brought my participation in the program full circle. Now, I am more open to looking at alternative ways. I am better suited to make the necessary connections or network efficiently to develop ideas and implement them as well. All aspects of this scholarly experience from the planning, to the actual presentation, to the debriefing and discussion afterwards, helped me understand the process. From my constructivist point of view there cannot be a better kind of learning. Because of that particular experience I am now a better presenter and facilitator.

The connections that I had made in the program afforded me another excellent opportunity to present with a faculty member, Dr. Hollandsworth. This was a true example of integration and relevance. I was asked to co-present a session at the doctoral seminar regarding the new West Virginia Professional Teaching Standards, which is a large part of my current job. The presentation was attended primarily by peers in the program but also by many faculty members. The lively discussion, criticism, and feedback were extremely educational.

**Research**

Theoretically speaking, we are all researchers. Navigating through our daily tasks and activities we generally have an objective or a goal. We make a plan, implement it, and through trial and error we succeed or fail and make adjustments accordingly. Research has many purposes. According to Soy (2006), research produces new knowledge, challenges old knowledge, explains, provides solutions, and describes phenomenon.

Research has been an integral part of my doctoral program since my first course, LS719 Introduction to Doctoral Studies, with Dr. Eagle. In fact, every course and program component had a research piece. I was exposed to research that included many different methodologies and design. From the small quantitative research projects in EDF517 Statistical Methods, to the larger work generated in EDF711 Survey Research I have gained a well-rounded perspective and skill set regarding research as a whole. I created a survey for Dr. Childress’ EDF711 Survey Research, to be used by several cohorts of practicing teachers as a pre and post evaluation of the material presented during a summer institute It gave me hands-on experience in research methodology, implementation, and analysis. The activity also provided additional content knowledge raising my own awareness of the learning styles, preferences, and perceptions of other educators.

Other courses such as CI706 Multicultural /Diversity Issues, EDF625 Qualitative Research, and EDF626 Advanced Qualitative Research allowed me to explore types of research outside of my comfort zone. Having been involved with ELL students I had my own theories regarding attitudes and perceptions of how foreign-born students felt and were perceived. In Dr. Debela’s course EDF625 Qualitative Research, I was designed a small research project dealing with attitudes and perceptions toward foreign born individuals. In the process I again learned about designing and conducting the research. It was very enlightening to see how some of my observations regarding how these foreign born individuals were perceived were at a very small scale validated. During EDF626 Advanced Qualitative Research I was able to expand on this project by using techniques such as recording, logging, and transcribing.

All these experiences have shaped me as a researcher and set the course as I prepare to begin writing my dissertation. I could not say that one experience or course played a bigger part in this development. It is the combination of all the experiences and the opportunities to apply what I learned in a variety of situations and contexts that are responsible for my interest in research and my ability to adapt.

**Conclusion**

Looking back, the experiences have been amazing, the relationships probably life-long, and the growth exponential. As I approach the end of the program I know I could have not done it alone. The support system and networking provided in and by the program are invaluable. The person I was three years ago is quite different from who I am today as a result of my experiences in the program. The road was challenging, demanding, but extremely rewarding.

The combination of all the elements described throughout this reflection piece has given me the confidence to conduct research and contribute to the field of curriculum and instruction. The emphasis in the area of leadership provided a new layer of knowledge and insight into an area that I thought was of no interest to me. It allowed me to understand the implications that great leadership has on implementation of best practices. As a result, leadership is an area that I would like to pursue and explore as I continue to grow as a researcher. This new understanding and comfort in this area as allowed me to advance professionally, be involved in a variety of initiatives such as the development of the new WV Professional Teaching Standards, as well as my work in the teacher evaluation.

My perspectives as an educator, leader, and a researcher have broadened and I am now able to articulate them clearly. My understanding of research is solid and my ability to synthesize existing research to improve practice and further the research is one of the many tools the program provided me. My involvement in several collaborative projects that included research design, survey design, survey implementation, and data analysis, input in course development, as well as interviewing techniques, transcription and logging, and statistical analysis, have prepared me well to be a researcher and a contributor to the field. Today I am an active member of a large professional community and part of a large network of policy makers and practitioners. I am a valued participant and contributor in several state-wide initiatives and have the skills needed to further such work. I am certain that my committee would agree that I am ready to move on to the next level, a level where I have the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to plan, implement and finalize a major independent research project.

As I prepare for the next phase, I would like to further investigate the relationships if any, between teacher preparation, and years of experience on the job, type of licensure held, and student performance on standardized achievement tests. I believe that change has to be systemic in order to be effective. National and state initiatives have invested time, effort, and large amounts of funding in the areas of student performance, teacher preparation and induction. I would like to look at these areas in our state as the choices and options are tightly prescribed due to current legislation and availability of programs.

I am very proud of who I have become throughout the journey. I grew from what I believed was an effective educator to a knowledgeable agent of curriculum change and well prepared practitioner. What this journey has taught me is that my educational experience has been one of discovery, collaboration, trial and error, and constant change. With the end of the first leg of this journey in sight—a terminal degree—I realize it is only the beginning. The doctoral program introduced both personal and professional change. It has prepared me well for the road ahead. It has helped me define who I am and how I influence and interpret the world around me. When thinking in terms of the stages of language acquisition, I believe I am now at the Advanced Fluency stage.

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