Residency Portfolio Reflection

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Contents

[Introduction 3](#_Toc288671237)

[Theoretical Framework 4](#_Toc288671238)

[Chart of Portfolio Activities 6](#_Toc288671239)

[SECTION I: SCHOLARSHIP 8](#_Toc288671240)

[SECTION II: OTHER PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC PURSUITS 9](#_Toc288671241)

[Course Work, Growth and Development 12](#_Toc288671242)

[Final Reflection 16](#_Toc288671243)

[References 20](#_Toc288671244)

# Introduction

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 In 1997, I seriously considered pursuing a doctoral degree and took the Millers Analogy Test. The required score was 50, and I scored a 45. I thought about retaking the test, but it would be several years before I did so. A few years later when Dr. Lisa Heaton and several doctoral students offered classes in Clay County through an Improving Teacher Quality Grant, I spoke with Dr. Heaton about pursuing a terminal degree. In our discussion about the MAT, she told me that the scoring formula had changed and that people who scored in the high forties were experiencing very good scores on the new test. Even though she encouraged me to retake the test, I did not begin my pursuit of a doctoral degree at that time.

 In 2006, I became the assistant principal at Clay County Middle School. About a year later, in the spring of 2007, Marshall University Graduate College published an advertisement in the *Charleston Gazette* soliciting interest in a doctoral cohort program to be offered in Flatwoods, WV. My principal, Joe Paxton, suggested that I attend the informational meeting with my colleague, Mary Ann Triplett, and that the three of us consider “getting in on this deal.” After the informational meeting, Mary Ann and I decided to take the MAT and hoped to be accepted into the Cohort Program. On Saturday, July 16, 2007, I took the MAT and was interviewed by Marshall University faculty. I was glad to see Dr. Mary Harris-John that morning. When I expressed concern about taking the MAT, she assured me that I would do great and that the Cohort was within my reach. I did score well enough on the MAT and my interview and paperwork were accepted, so I began courses in August 2007.

# Theoretical Framework

 Educational leadership carries expectations of leadership, management, and supervision. Fink and Resnick (2001) noted that principals must have an understanding of instructional strategies, be effective at encouraging others to buy into and support the instructional philosophy of the school, recruit teachers who will support the instructional philosophy, understand teachers and know them well enough to suggest specific ways to become better at their jobs, create a positive school culture that focuses on student learning, and be effective leaders of the professional learning community. As a public school administrator, one must balance many issues, concerns, and relationships. In order to do this, we must build a culture that tells our story and shares our story with others. McAdams (1996) discussed a framework for Levels of Knowing that can be applied to instructional leadership. In Level One, we know others as strangers and must learn their characteristics and abilities. In education, this occurs when we first meet our students and staff. We must begin to figure out who these people are and what they value. In the Second Level of Knowing, we know people on the social level and begin to bond with them and share common concerns. At Level Three, we have bonded and begin to share the stories of our lives together. As a leader, it is important to foster and grow a professional learning community based on knowing others and reaching Level Three. My experiences with the Flatwoods Cohort and my pursuit of a doctoral degree in educational leadership fit into this concept of Levels of Knowing. As I have expanded my horizons as a learner, I have become a better administrator and have better relationships with my staff because my knowledge level has increased.

 I began this journey in August 2007 with 18 strangers who would quickly become friends and extended family. While I was getting to know my fellow classmates, I was also getting to know myself both as a learner and as an administrator. At the end of my three years of course work, I know my Flatwoods Cohort family well and myself even better. I have come to view the Flatwoods Cohort and Marshall University faculty and staff as extended family because they are now part of the tapestry which tells the story of an important part of my life. We share a common bond and history where we have celebrated each others’ successes and mourned each others’ sorrows; we have common stories that both define and unite us. Part of what defines and unites us and leads to common stories are the academic experiences and portfolio residency requirements.

 The Marshall University Graduate School of Education and Professional Development student population consists primarily of employed professionals so “the typical, traditional residency requirement is inappropriate to serve the needs of the students” (http://marshall.edu/gsepd/edd/Residency\_Portfolio\_Description.asp). In lieu of the traditional requirements, students complete a residency portfolio that requires continuous enrollment from admission to the program to graduation, mandatory participation in doctoral seminars, and development of a portfolio of activities as follows:

**Scholarship** – Each student must include at least one of the following activities:
a. Co-authoring a proposal for submission or co-presenting at a regional or national conference in collaboration with a faculty member.
b. Co-authoring and submitting for publication a manuscript to a peer reviewed/refereed journal, a book, or a book chapter, in collaboration with a faculty member

**Other professional/academic pursuits** - Each student must include at least two of the following activities:
a. Co-teaching a course with a faculty member
b. Serving an appropriate internship involving an outside mentor and a mentor on the LS faculty
c. Developing a course in collaboration with a faculty member
d. Collaborating with a faculty member in another activity, approved in advance by the student’s committee (<http://marshall.edu/gsepd/edd/Residency_Portfolio_Description.asp>)

The following chart illustrates the Scholarship and Other Professional/Academic Pursuits of my residency portfolio:

# Chart of Portfolio Activities

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Portfolio Activity** |  **Date(s)** | **Performed in Collaboration With** | **Description of Activity** | **Sample of Courses Supporting this Activity** |
| Presentation and publication | October 2007 | Dr. Teresa Eagle and Mary Ann Triplett, MU Doctoral Student | SRCEA Fall Conference Charleston, WV*21st Century Leadership Skills* | LS 710 Principles of LeadershipCI 677 Writing for Publication |
| Round Table Presentation/Discussion | October 2008 | Dr. Mary Harris-John and other MU Doctoral students | Doctoral Seminar, Marshall University Graduate College *Conferences, Presentations, and Other Portfolio Opportunities* | LS 707 Ethical Theories LS 710 Principles of LeadershipCI 677 Writing for Publication |
| Publication | December 2008 | Dr. Fran Simone and Beth Campbell | Principal Magazine*Gaining Ground on AYP* | LS 710 Principles of LeadershipCI 677 Writing for Publication |
| Co-teaching with Faculty Member | Spring 2009 | Dr. Mary Harris-John and Ryan Haught, MU Doctoral Student | Co-taught LS 660 Internship School Management II at Clay County Middle School Clay, WV | LS 705 Administrative Theory LS 710 Principles of LeadershipLS 740 Public School Law |
| Research | Summer 2009 | Dr. Eric Lassiter and Beth Campbell | Gathered qualitative data for the Math and Science Partnership Collaboration and Communication Research Project | EDF 625 Qualitative ResearchCIEC 700 Technology and CurriculumLS 647 Adult and Continuing Education |
| Round Table Presentation/Discussion | August 2009 | Dr. Calvin Meyer and other MU Doctoral Students | Presentation to New MU Faculty at OrientationHuntington Campus*Teaching to a Difficult Text* | CI 702 Curriculum TheoriesCI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching |
| Round Table Presentation/Discussion | October 2010 | Dr. Mary Harris-John and other MU Doctoral Students | Doctoral Seminar, Marshall University Graduate College *Middle School Task Force* | LS 707 Ethical TheoriesLS 710 Principles of LeadershipCIEC 700Technology and CurriculumCI 706Multicultural Education |

# SECTION I: SCHOLARSHIP

 One of my first pursuits in the area of scholarship was to collaborate with Dr. Teresa Eagle and Mary Ann Triplett on a paper and presentation for the Southern Regional Council for Educational Administrators’ National Conference in Charleston, WV in October 2008. The content focused on using a shared leadership model to better meet the needs of learners in the 21st Century school setting. Empowering others and listening to their suggestions is an excellent way to create ownership and interest. Part of this process involved analyzing the call for proposals for this conference, developing an idea that fit the topics of interest, and working with Dr. Teresa Eagle and Mary Ann Triplett to develop a paper for submission. This was an excellent experience. While this was my only conference experience as a presenter, I did participate in other activities that involved round table and panel discussions including: “Conferences, Presentations, and Other Portfolio Opportunities,” “Teaching to a Difficult Text,” and “The Middle School Task Force.”

 During my three years as a doctoral student, I participated in three panel discussions with Marshall Faculty and fellow students. In August 2009, I participated with Dr. Calvin Meyer and several doctoral students in a panel discussion at the orientation session for new Marshall University faculty. The session topic was “Teaching to a Difficult Text.” We shared methods for tackling *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (Pinar, et. al., 2004), the text used in our Curriculum Theory class. At the October 2009 Doctoral Seminar, I participated with other doctoral students and Dr. Mary Harris-John in a panel discussion on “Conferences, Presentations, and Other Portfolio Activities.” Each of us shared the portfolio opportunities we had participated in thus far and offered recommendations for how others could find conference and other portfolio opportunities. In October 2010, I participated in the Middle School Task Force roundtable discussion at the Marshall University Doctoral Student Fall Seminar along with Dr. Mary Harris-John, Betsy Brucker, and Traci Knight. Our discussion included issues facing middle school administrators including cyber bullying, technology applications, and Adequate Yearly Progress goals. The panel discussions provided an opportunity to share what I had learned and to learn new things while listening to others share their experiences. Each of these activities helped me to know my Flatwoods Cohort and doctoral faculty better and to discover new topics of interest for my personal and professional growth. Through these activities I came to know some new people on the first Level of Knowing, to expand to Level Two and deepen Level Three interactions with faculty and students. McAdams (1996) stated that “much of what is required to describe and understand the individual person is grounded in the person’s culture and in the sociohistorical setting within which the person’s life makes sense” (p. 296). The “setting within which my life makes sense” has changed over the course of the doctoral program. I have grown as an individual and as a scholar and am more confident in my abilities as a scholar, leader, and person.

# SECTION II: OTHER PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC PURSUITS

 In the summer 2009, I co-taught LS 660 Internship School Management II with Dr. Mary Harris-John and fellow doctoral student, Ryan Haught. Ryan and I drew on our experiences as practicing principals to answer questions and share information with students in the class. I presented a lesson related to leadership theories beginning with the Great Man Theory and ending with Transformational Leadership style. I enjoyed the course and the interactions with Dr. Mary Harris-John, Ryan Haught, and the students. My leadership style adheres to the transformative model. I believe it is important to grow leaders and to share leadership responsibilities with others in the school setting. Shields (2010) defined transformational leadership as follows:

Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. Transformative leadership, therefore, inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. (p. 559)

I believe that sharing leadership tasks is essential to creating a positive work environment where everyone feels valued and critical to the success of the school. Sharing leadership duties is important, but another element of transformative leadership is possessing an understanding of both curriculum and teaching.

 During the summer of 2009, I also worked briefly with Dr. Eric Lassiter and Beth Campbell on a project analyzing the communications and partnership developments between Marshall University, six county school systems, and two Regional Educational Services Agencies in their implementation of a Math and Science Partnership grant to improve teacher quality. My task was to attend professional development training at Braxton County Middle School and take qualitative notes on the interactions and presentations of materials. Qualitative research requires in-depth communication skills. While taking notes, one must observe and record everything possible to provide an accurate description of what is occurring. The goal is to record an objective accounting of events and interactions which will be shared with others. This may seem easy but is actually a difficult task. I learned from this experience that being the reader is easier than being the recorder.

Currently, Mary Ann Triplett and I are working with Dr. Bobbi Nicholson conducting qualitative research on the Globaloria Project. We are researching the electronic reports and notations of teachers participating in the project to determine the effect of participation on their teaching styles and feelings about the effectiveness of the program. The Globaloria initiative was established in 2006 by the World Wide Workshop Foundation and is a project designed to give middle and high school students the opportunity to design and develop online games and share them with other students. The goal is for students to experience learning through Wikis and other online tools that help them to develop a network of peers. Teachers participating receive training and support from Globaloria staff as well as building their own support network with other teacher participants (<http://www.worldwideworkshop.org/programs/globaloria>). Participating in qualitative research endeavors like these has improved my intuitive reading and observation skills. The activity of seeking to answer why effects occur requires a level of involvement and dedication that requires attention to detail and reporting facts while withholding opinion. This experience has helped hone my research skills by requiring that I critically analyze the content and search for common themes occurring in the responses. This type of research requires active reading with a focus on details and linkages of content.

One of the most exciting scholarly portfolio moments for me was having an article published. In December 2008, I had an article published as an online exclusive with *Principal Magazine*. Dr. Fran Simone, Beth Campbell, my nieces, Kelsey and Kara, and my brother, Jesse, all helped with editing the piece. (Jesse, Kelsey, and Kara listened to the oral reading so often that they could recite the paper.) When I received the magazine showing my name and article title in print, I was so excited and proud of what I had accomplished, and I was thankful for the help and support that led to the publication. The CI 677 Writing for Publication course not only improved my writing skills but also my teaching skills. After this course, I employed the teaching model that Dr. Fran Simone used to assign a grade only after the student’s paper had received feedback producing a paper deserving of an “A.”

These scholarship activities gave me opportunities to expand my horizons through researching topics that improved my administrative skills while bonding with classmates, professors, and family members. Each paper, presentation, panel discussion, and class activity added to the story of who I am and who I want to be. Every experience led to a deeper understanding of Level Three in the levels of knowing in which my family and extended family develop the “stories of us.”

# Course Work, Growth and Development

 Mathematics has never been a strong area for me, so I was worried about the EDF 517 Statistical Methods course. My worries were quickly cast aside as I realized that much of the work for the course involved learning how results of studies are compiled and what these results meant. Dr. Edna Meisel made the math function part of the course relevant and worked with me until I could perform and understand the functions. Before this course, I would gloss over the statistical information provided in articles, but after the course, I focus on this area because I now understand that the research piece is critical to the validity of the results. My last course to complete the program was LS 776 Advanced Computer Analysis. The purpose of this course was to understand the software used to interpret survey results. The two statistics courses and others such as the LS 703 Research Design and EDF 711 Survey Research in Education have changed how I read and what I read. I once thought that National Geographic was a scholarly magazine, and during a recent visit to my doctor’s office I was reading a copy. As I was reading, I thought, “Yes, this is interesting, but where is the proof? Where is the research to validate these claims?” I wanted to see the survey instrument or a summary of what information was sought. I wanted to see tabulations of the results and know what was being measured and how. I wanted to know the results and the limitations. I now take magazines or books with me so that these questions are satisfied with scholarly reading. Much of my reading is dedicated to materials related to course work; however, I try to connect projects to my job so that the reading serves a two-fold purpose.

 The readings and writing assignments for some of the curriculum courses have been beneficial in my work setting. In CI 701 Curriculum Development and CI 702 Curriculum Theories, I had to review and thoroughly research the theories and models behind curriculum development and implementation. This information has helped me when evaluating teachers. When I see teachers who adhere more to traditional theories and methods such as those outlined by Hewitt (2006) as preparation, presentation, association, generalization, and application, I can discuss this with them and explain why this is acceptable, but I can also introduce them to other methods such as Constructivism which as Kroll (2004) suggests engages learners more and requires that they act on information and reconstruct it to either incorporate new knowledge into existing beliefs or change their existing beliefs to mesh with the new knowledge. Thanks to CI 703 Theories, Models and Research of Teaching, I can share with teachers that they can consider the content of Joyce and Weils’ (2009) *Models of Teaching* for techniques to improve their quality of instruction. I am a more informed instructional leader with materials to back my ideas and suggestions. My brother, Jesse, is currently pursuing a certification in educational leadership. We were discussing an assignment on teaching models which referenced Joyce and Weils’ (2009) research in their text, *Models of Teaching*. I was pleased to tell him that I actually had the book that was referenced and had completed a doctoral course on the subject. Another section of the course dealt with leadership styles. A second time, I could impress my brother with knowledge from my course on LS 705 Administrative Theory as we discussed Transactional and Transformative styles. This course identified the various models of leadership theory and style and their historical basis. Educational leadership has changed over the years, and leaders for the 21st century face challenges that our predecessors could not have imagined.

 Today’s leaders and teachers are faced with students who have grown up in a digital world with fast access and quick rewards. These learners present challenges that require educators to change their styles without sacrificing content. In the CIEC 700 Technology and Curriculum class, I read Tapscott’s (2009) *Grown up Digital How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World* and learned the potential value of using technological tools such as cellular phones, iPods, and the Internet to capture students’ interest, share information with them, and allow them to demonstrate learning. I also explored some of the assistive technologies that are available to help learners better adapt to classroom settings. I was able to apply this knowledge in IEP (individualized educational plan) meetings for students with visual impairments, motor skills deficiencies, and hearing impairments. Knowing where to find materials and how to research their merits was beneficial in helping the education specialists place the orders for appropriate assistive technologies. I worked with the teachers and students to learn how to use the materials and shared with regular classroom teachers how the assistive technologies worked and how they could be incorporated into daily classroom routines.

NCLB (*No Child Left Behind Act*) requires that schools demonstrate AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for all students or face sanctions from the state department of education. Clay Middle School has not met AYP goals for the past six years due to the standardized test scores of our special education students in reading and mathematics. To address these deficiencies, we have purchased educational programs designed to address the learners’ deficiencies. In the Program Evaluation course, I learned the process for evaluating the goals and effectiveness of programs. Information from this course has helped me to analyze the programs that we chose and research their effectives. We spend a large portion of our county’s special education budget to purchase and implement these programs, and we must analyze the programs to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the learners. Information from this course can help me to work as an external program evaluator. While I do not have time to pursue such endeavors at this time, it is something that I want to revisit.

 While I have gathered much information through my doctoral experiences that I can apply to my professional life, I have also found benefits in my personal life. In the LS 707 Ethical Theories class, I spent much of my time thinking about and analyzing what I believed and why. At times this made me uncomfortable because introspection is difficult. It is much easier to just say that I believe something than it is to explain and argue why I believe as I do. Readings for this course such as excerpts from Styron’s (1972) *Sophie’s Choice*, Dostoevsky’s (1880/1970) *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Conrad’s (1899/1997) *Heart of Darkness* engaged me in both internal and external dialogue to delve into my feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. I came away from this course realizing that personal growth is difficult but worthwhile.

 LS 626 Institutional Advancement offered a unique perspective into the areas of fundraising and the responsibilities that accompany membership in an organization dependent upon raising funds to operate. I work with a few nonprofit organizations, so the next time that we are conducting fundraising efforts I will have insights to bring to the discussions and planning. One important fact I learned is that when approaching others for donations, it is important to note my own financial commitment to the organization. Understanding others is an important element of relationship development, and relationships are critical to fundraising.

# Final Reflection

 I have been fortunate to bond with Flatwoods Cohort members; they and my family have helped me to reach this Third Level of Knowing. The Marshall University faculty members have been exceptional in their support of the Flatwoods Cohort. Each of the instructors has taken time in person and online to ensure that each of us came away from the courses and experiences with what we needed to advance to the next phase. Dr. Mary Harris-John has been an exceptional chair and has taken time to help me with doctoral work, research work, portfolio feedback, professional development, and issues with my current position. Dr. Lisa Heaton has been instrumental in helping me to reach this phase of writing my reflection and has been a valuable resource with writing templates and feedback. The other two members of my committee, Dr. Louis Watts and Dr. Jennifer Pitzer Sirk , have been helpful in answering questions related to my courses and in cheering me on when I needed it.

 At the onset of the program, I expected academic growth, but I did not expect personal growth to occur. I have grown as a learner in that I have learned a great deal about research on the doctoral level. This level of research requires intuitive and analytical reading and then a synthesis of the ideas to formulate data-driven conclusions and assertions. The reading and writing assignments for courses have improved my critical reading levels and my writing skills. Before completion of this program, I would not have thought that I could produce an article suitable for publication. I am now a more capable researcher who can distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly research and produce writing that is both sound and effective.

 Not only am I a more confident student but also I am a more confident person. Before these doctoral experiences, I could not have stood before a group of administrators such as those in SRCEA or the WVCPD and given a presentation offering insights into effective administration and improving learning. I also would never have submitted a piece of writing for publication consideration. I feel more confident in my abilities as an educational leader. I believe that I am capable of leading a school and leading a school system in a positive direction. I am ready to move upward on the educational ladder, and I realize that I can make this upward move anywhere.

 I have been fortunate to work for a principal who treats me as an equal, and I enjoy my job as the assistant principal for Clay County Middle School. At one time, I was convinced that I would end my career in this job. However, over the course of my journey with the Flatwoods Cohort and movements through the Levels of Knowing, I have come to realize that the world holds opportunities for me to grow both personally and professionally. Before I can move on, though, I must finish the dissertation leg of my academic journey.

 When possible, I have tied course assignments to my job so that I could conserve both time and energy, and so I could practice what I have learned. As I consider dissertation topics, I again am looking for ideas that relate to my job. Recently two friends have said to me that they would much rather work for a male rather than a female administrator. I am interested in whether or not this feeling is widespread throughout the education community. If people feel this way, I want to know why, and I believe that exploring the perceived effectiveness of male and female administrators from the perspective of both teachers and administrators would be an interesting study.

 Another topic of interest is the effort that schools are making to reach AYP status. At Clay County Middle School, we use the Read 180 program as an intervention to address the needs of special education students and struggling readers to help them meet the content standards and objectives for both reading and writing. The goals are to improve students’ classroom performance and to increase their WESTEST II (West Virginia Educational Standards Test) scores on reading and language arts subtests. In the CI 676 Program Evaluation course, I outlined a plan to evaluate the effect of participation in Read 180 on student achievement and WESTEST II reading and language arts scores.

 A third topic of interest to me is the concept of In Loco Parentis. With the economy in a downward spiral, many parents are working two jobs to make ends meet. These parents often drop their children off at school long before the teachers arrive and pick them up late in the day after the extended day programs have ended. If school officials are aware of this, they are responsible to provide supervision. If parents leave their children unattended, the school is still responsible. Where does our responsibility for their children end? I think this would be a topic that administrators would find compelling.

 In the spring of 2010, I observed Pamela Alderman’s portfolio defense, and I was very impressed with her presentation style and her artifacts. After the defense, I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Dr. Harris-John about my experiences with the Flatwoods Cohort and the course work. We discussed the fact that the course work is on an entirely different level from any preceding educational endeavors. The depth and level of readings are so much more advanced and enriching. The level of writing requires an analysis and time frame that is much more demanding than previous courses. I have changed and grown as a learner and am much more focused on internalizing the content of the courses. We discussed my growth both professionally and personally and that I had really outgrown Clay County, but that I did not need to be in hurry to leave since I needed to finish my courses, defend my portfolio, and write my dissertation. In LS 720 Public School Finance class, Dr. Cynthia Kolsun asked about my future plans. I told her that in the past sometimes my decisions were dictated by the circumstances in which I found myself rather than following a plan. This time, I have a plan in mind. I plan to finish my dissertation and then seek employment on a regional or state level. I am content where I am for now, but I know that I could be content elsewhere and plan to explore my options.

 I am now prepared and ready to begin the dissertation writing phase of my learning. My course work has prepared me as a researcher. I can differentiate between quality and non-quality sources. I am aware that the dissertation phase is a process that involves conducting quality research, refining ideas, writing, revising, reviewing, and rewriting until a quality product is produced. I understand the value of feedback and its role in shaping quality writing. I am very interested in the perceptions of females as administrators and have conducted some preliminary research in this area. I have read several scholarly, peer reviewed articles and developed a bibliography for this topic. I have also read two dissertations related to the topic paying particular attention to the research questions and the instrument used to gather information. I believe that my experiences and course work have prepared me to begin my literature review. I am ready to work with my dissertation committee to move forward in my goal to become Dr. Anita Stephenson.

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