**Residency Portfolio Reflection**

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*“All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts.”*

-William Shakespeare

# Introduction

As with any stage production, my life has had many acts. Some have been filled with laughter and joy. Others have had more than their share of tears and sorrow. Yet through it all, these events have served to form the basis of who I am as a person. They have shaped my choices, altered my beliefs and served as the driving force behind my aspirations both personally and professionally. It is these same experiences which have also continually fostered a sense of leadership in the ventures I have undertaken. From high school class president to school administrator, I have been drawn to roles which have enabled me to work in conjunction with others to establish organizational goals and then take the actions steps necessary to transform vision into reality.

Just as life experiences have shaped my perspectives so have my hobbies and personal interests. Throughout my life I have been fascinated by theatre and the cinema. These entertainment outlets have served as an escape from the pressures of reality and an inspiration for my creativity. I had always found teaching to be a process akin to acting. Each day I walked upon a stage before a crowd filled with both fans and critics. Occasionally my performance managed to transport the audience to other lands or led them to draw parallels between themselves and to the world around them. On other days I sat behind my desk, feeling defeated by my failure to convey to my students the information they would need to be successful in the classroom.

I have felt similar highs and lows as an administrator I have come to see myself no longer the actor I once was but now I have taken on a new role. Just as a cinematic director is charged with selecting a cast and ultimately collaborating with countless other individuals to create a product which is both unique and satisfies the needs of an eager audience, a principal is given a similar task in that they must pull together a staff and join with the community to provide educational experiences which results in the preparation of students to function as productive citizens within an ever changing society.

# Personal Background

Some of my earliest memories center upon my grandmother sitting beside me at her kitchen table, carefully examining my school work. Though she lacked formal training, she was in fact an educator in the truest sense of the word. Her greatest pride came from the academic accomplishments of her children and grandchildren. Despite toiling for long hours doing housework or other menial tasks to supplement the family income, she never tired of taking the time necessary to support her offspring throughout their educational careers. There was never a question of ‘if’ I would go to college, the only question lay in which field of study I might choose to pursue. It was during my sophomore year that I chose to apply for acceptance into the school of education at West Virginia State University. The years of undergraduate study passed quickly. Soon I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in elementary and a specialization in social studies and accepted my first teaching job at a small school in rural Logan County. I remained there for well over a decade, perfecting my craft and coming to see the boundless fulfillment that came from my position as a reading teacher. The time also afforded me experiences which shed light into the administrative functions within the building. The principal was often called away due to his obligations as a state senator and in his absence I was often charged with overseeing operations at the school. Initially, I was reluctant to assert the authority given to me in his absence yet as my confidence grew so did my enjoyment of overseeing the supervision of the staff and interactions with the community.

I had been a veteran classroom teacher for nearly 15 years when I began the process of obtaining my principal’s certification. Having worked in an environment which afforded me countless opportunities to take on tasks typically reserved for the school administrator, I quickly came to see that I had an affinity for providing the guidance and feedback necessary to be an effective principal. Seeing the joy that I felt working in such a role, many colleagues were lead to point out that I should consider obtaining my administrative certification. After a bit of research and soul searching, I applied for acceptance into the 18 hour principal’s certification program at Marshall University in the spring of 2009. Shortly after this time that I began to contemplate the idea of entering the doctoral program. Initially, I was hesitant because I was not certain I would be able to juggle the advanced course work in addition to the responsibilities of being a single mother, a full time job, and my part time work as an adjunct in the literacy department at Marshall. Then during the fall of the same year, I decided to apply for acceptance in the doctoral program and I was also hired as the assistant principal at Chapmanville Middle School. Thus began yet another act in the saga of my professional and educational career.

# Theoretical Framework

Ironically, I was accepted into the EdD program on the same day that I was awarded my job as assistant principal at Chapmanville Middle School. Despite my lack of formal experience within the field of educational leadership, I had begun to form a framework for my personal beliefs related to leadership during my administrative certification studies. I continued to add to my knowledge base throughout the course of my doctoral coursework. I feel that this process culminated during the semester in which I was enrolled in LS 710 with Dr. Watts. Typically this course is undertaken early in the doctoral rotation yet as circumstances would have it, I completed the course during my last semester of classes. Over the course of the semester, I was exposed to a variety of leadership styles yet I found that the premises behind transformation and charismatic leadership to be most closely aligned with my own beliefs. It was during this same period of time that I also came to see the metaphor of leaders as directors.

Bass (1985) originally defined charisma as the emotional component of leadership which describes leaders who by the power of their own person have profound and extraordinary effects on their followers. He denotes the following four characteristics of transformational/charismatic leadership:

*Idealized Influence (II) - the leader serves as an ideal role model for followers; the leader "walks the talk," and is admired for this.*

I believe that leaders must be the role models for all those their organizations. I personally feel that there is nothing more hypocritical than an individual who issues mandates and then fails to follow the guidelines of his own policies. When leaders step forward and embrace their policies and initiatives, their followers are far more likely to be supportive and develop a deeper respect for the overall goals of the organization.

*Inspirational Motivation (IM) - Transformational leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate followers. Combined these first two I's are what constitute the transformational leader's charisma.*

Charisma can be infectious! Individuals who possess it are capable of motivating and inspiring those around them to accomplish great things. This can be a powerful asset for leaders who face obstacles within their organization and need to dig deep to muster support. The ability to inspire is not necessarily a characteristic that can be taught though I believe everyone has the capacity to stir others if they allow their personal interests to ignite the passions of their followers.

*Individualized Consideration (IC) - Transformational leaders demonstrate genuine concern for the needs and feelings of followers. This personal attention to each follower is a key element in bringing out their very best efforts.*

The most successful leaders truly care about the wellbeing of their followers. I feel this goes far beyond concern for an individual’s workplace productivity. A leader must be empathetic to the situations that their followers face in their personal lives. By demonstrating genuine concern for others, a leader builds bonds that are essential in the establishment of compassionate workplace environment.

*Intellectual Stimulation (IS) - the leader challenges followers to be innovative and creative.*

Innovation is a vital element within any type of organization. Without creativity, any organization will become stagnate. Leaders must be continually in search of new ideas and seek input from their followers to ensure that there is an ongoing effort to move forward. It is the combination of these four characteristics which I believe best encompass my personal beliefs. Charismatic leaders use symbols, imagery, and are highly persuasive in communicating a vision to followers (Antonakis & Day, 2012). These same techniques are used by successful directors as they attempt to transform their vision into a product which is a collaborative compilation which reflects the efforts of a multitude of individuals; therefore personally solidifying the metaphor of leaders as directors.

# Portfolio Process

I have always been a proponent of the reflective process. I continually find myself engaged in the practice of reflecting upon the choices I have made in my life and considering the implications of these decisions. The process of collecting and compiling the materials for my portfolio has truly been a reflective act from start to finish.

Marshall University Graduate College requires each doctoral candidate to compile and present a portfolio which is reflective of the student’s experiences during the course of one’s studies. Completion of the portfolio process is necessary for admission to candidacy and serves as a transition into the dissertation phase of the program. The following chart addresses the following required components of the portfolio process:

1. Scholarship (one required): Co-authoring a proposal for submission or co-presenting at a regional or national conference in collaboration with a faculty member.
2. Other Professional/Academic Pursuits (two required):
   1. Co-teaching a course with a faculty member.
   2. Collaborating with a faculty member in another professional activity, approved in advance by the student’s committee.

The following chart provides a visual overview of my portfolio activities:

**Chart of Portfolio Activities**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Portfolio Activity** | **Date(s)** | **Performed in Collaboration With** | **Description of Activity** | **Sample of Courses Supporting this Activity** |
| Research/Facilitation | March 2010-March 2011 | Dr. Barbara O’Byrne | Mingo County ITQ Grant Program | CI 702, EDF 515,  EDF 625, LS 532 |
| Co Teaching | Spring 2011 | Dr. Barbara O’Byrne | Literacy Facilitator CIRG 623 | LS 710, CI 702,  LS 625, EDF 625, EDF 626, LS 515 |
| Doctoral Seminar Committee Planning | March-October 2011 | Various Faculty Members (Amy Blankenship, seminar chair) | Planning for doctoral seminar session | LS 710, LS 645,  LS 532, LS 705 |
| Doctoral Seminar Session Presenter | October 29, 2011 | Dr. Michael Galbraith (Facilitator) | Social Media and Networking | LS 710, LS 645,  LS 532, LS 705 |
| Statewide Conference | November 17-18, 2011 | Dr. Barbara O’Byrne | Literacy Leaders: A Closer Look at the Challenging Role of Developing Quality Literacy Education Programs | CI 702, LS 515 |
| Research and Facilitation | March 2012-March 2013 | Dr. Barbara O’Byrne | Logan County ITQ Grant Program | CI 702, EDF 515,  EDF 625, LS 532 |
| National Conference Presentation | September 6-9, 2012 | Dr. Michael Galbraith | Fostering Teacher Leaders: The Role of the Principal in Developing Leadership within a Facility | LS 532, LS 625,  LS 515, EDF 625, EDF 626 |
| Co Teaching | Fall 2012 | Dr.Barbara Obyrne | Special Topics CIRG 580:  Vocabulary and Comprehension | LS 710, CI 702,  LS 625, EDF 625, EDF 626, LS 515 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

## Scholarship

During my time in the doctoral program, I have presented at two conferences which allowed me to intertwine my interest in leadership and curricular issues. The highlight of the portfolio process for me has been these presentations which I have undertaken at both the state and national level. My first presentation was undertaken with Dr. Barbara O’Byrne serving as a co-presenter. She and I had worked closely on several previous projects and the subject matter for our presentation was an offset of one of our conversations related to my interest in the role of school administrators in implementing quality literacy programs within a school. We worked in conjunction with a reading specialist and classroom teacher to gain their input on how leadership effects literacy instruction for the session which was entitled ‘Literacy Leaders: A Closer Look at the Challenging Role of Developing Quality Literacy Education Programs’. Our presentation was well received by those in attendance at the West Virginia State Reading Conference in November of 2011. Following the session, we received very favorable reviews and comments in the form on an evaluation conducted by the conference organizers.

Shortly after my presentation at the reading conference, I received an email notification that the Southern Regional Conference of Educational Administrators was accepting conference proposals. After speaking with Dr. Michael Galbraith, my committee chair, we began to consider possible topics for submission, eventually settling upon the topic ‘Fostering Teacher Leaders: The Role of the Principal in Developing Leadership within a Facility’ and we were subsequently informed that our proposal had been accepted for presentation at the September 2012 conference which was to be held in New Orleans, Louisiana. To prepare for the session, Dr. Galbraith and I reviewed an extensive amount of research related to teacher leaders as well as conducted conversations with both teachers and administrators to ascertain their perceptions of the role principals play in fostering leadership within teachers. The session was well received by those in attendance, and we were approached by several individuals who asked questions related to the subject matter.

My studies and subsequent experiences endowed me with a sense of self-confidence and a wealth of knowledge which were a valuable asset to me as a presenter. I found the preparations and resulting dialogues with my co-presenters to be very valuable. I gained tremendous insight into the presentation process and I truly valued their expertise. The opportunity to interact with my co-presenters and peers while at each conference further strengthened my connections with those associated with Marshall’s Ed.D. program and further build professional vitae.  
Other Professional/Academic Pursuits

My background in literacy education and curriculum issues has had a profound influence upon my professional interests. This same interest is reflected in the choices I have made related to the activities undertake as a portion of my portfolio piece. During the spring of 2010, I was chosen by Dr. Barbara O’Byrne, chair of Marshall University Graduate School’s Literacy Education Department, to co-facilitate a grant program within Mingo County which focused upon the development of leadership among teachers and the strengthening of instructional practices related to literacy. I found this year long project to have been a true learning experience in every sense of the word. I was not only given the opportunity to share my expertise related to literacy instruction but was also charged with fostering specific skills within the participants to better prepare them to serve as teacher leaders within their schools. My work with the grant was immediately followed by co-teaching CIRG 623 with Dr. O’Byrne. Though I had previously taught several courses in the literacy education program, I enjoyed the collaborative opportunities this experience provided me. It led me to reflect upon my experiences as an instructor while fostering leadership within participants and engaging another professional in an ongoing dialog related to curricular issues. Having been an elementary and middle school level teacher for nearly two decades, the opportunity to work in higher education has provided me with a very unique perspective related to how the educational process changes over the course of a student’s academic life. I feel that my later experiences co-teaching and participating in another ITQ program only served to further my skills and broaden my perspectives related to my role as an instructor as well as educational leader.

While considering activities which would be suitable for inclusion in my portfolio, I was invited to join the planning committee for the annual doctoral seminar session. I found the planning stage for the session to be most enjoyable. It afforded me the opportunity to interact with my peers and professors outside the classroom and fostered a deeper relationship with these individuals which I believe may not have developed had I not been a part of the planning committee. Serving as a seminar facilitator for a session focusing upon utilizing social media was insightful in that it allowed me to share how I have used social media tools both professionally and as a doctoral student.

During the spring 2012 semester, I was nominated by Dr. Galbraith for recognition of outstanding leadership, service and scholarship as a doctoral student at Marshall University. Following his nomination I was then invited to a luncheon where I was awarded a certificate by Dr. Farmer, chair of the GSEPD Recognition Committee. The committee cited my dedication to the field of education and my contributions as a doctoral student as the basis for the award. Later that same year at the Fall GSEPD Part Time Faculty Seminar, I was awarded a certificate of appreciation for my efforts as a part time faculty member in the Literacy Education Department.

## Research

My initial research course in the doctoral program was not what I considered to be a positive experience. I enrolled in a web based version of EDF 517 Statistical Methods. I opted for this type of class format due to work constraints which made it difficult for me to travel to live sessions on a weekly basis. Though I successfully completed the course, I felt as though I had obtained little information which would be useful to me during the dissertation phase of my program. I pondered retaking the class in hopes of gaining a stronger grasp of the statistical concepts which served as the foundation of EDF 517. Yet during a subsequent semester while enrolled in EDF 625 with Dr. Debela, I was first introduced to the concepts underlying qualitative research which soon proved to be more aligned with my personal goals as a researcher. I have always felt myself to be more introspective than analytical. My thought processes have been driven by the need to develop a fuller understanding of the underlying facts which influence a situation as opposed to merely crunching numbers to determine information about a topic. I closely identified with the goal of qualitative research which is to allow the researcher to delve into an environment and examine the details which transpire in an attempt to develop a better understanding of human behavior and the reasoning behind the exhibited behaviors (Bilkin & Bogdan, 2007).

Qualitative research cannot be reduced to a technical list of procedures as is the case with many types of scientific research (Barbour, 2001). It is an ever changing process that requires more reflection than replication. It seeks to find patterns in the world around us and provide us with a way to better understand our unique roles as individuals in an ever changing, diverse global community. In light of this fact, I immediately felt that this would be the research method which I would use to collect data for my dissertation regardless of the subject which I settled upon. The final assignment for the course required us to use our knowledge of qualitative research to conduct and report our findings on a topic of our own choosing. Though my selected topic in no way reflected a possible dissertation topic, I seized the opportunity to apply my observational skills to collect data and analyze data to draft a report which would then be submitted for IRB review. I am pleased to state that the report was fully approved by the IRB. Additionally, Dr. Debela assisted me with editing the document which would be included as an exemplary model of beginning qualitative research in a handbook for future students enrolled in the course.

Due to the varied opportunities that have come my way, I have also worked within projects which were heavily reliant upon quantitative data. The application process for both the Logan and Mingo County ITQ grants required extensive use of statistical data related to overall student performance on a series of standardized testing instruments. The resulting data was then examined to determine respective strengths and weakness in academic performance which ultimately determined the focus we would took in applying for grant funding through the WVDE. Though this means of data collection for me lacked the personal of qualitative methods, I was appreciative of the concise measure of academic performance it provided.

My enrollment in EDF 626 with Dr. Spatig deepened by interest in qualitative research by allowing me to see how I could apply the methods to education’s public sector. During one of our many conversations, Dr. Spatig and I discussed many issues related to rural education and how these affected my position as a school administrator within such an area. These conversations led to the drafting of a research proposal focusing upon the varying perspectives of teachers and administrators as they relate to recruiting and retaining faculty in rural communities. I conducted interviews with both administrators and non-tenured teachers and was intrigued by the wealth of information which was gleaned from these conversations. It was not merely a repeat of the statistical data which I had uncovered during the literature review but rather the personal stories of individuals struggling to come to terms to the issues of working and living in a rural setting. The resulting collection of data provided me with a real opportunity to sharpen my qualitative skills within a setting akin to the one in which I will conduct my dissertation research.

# Concluding Reflections

**“***You simply have to put one foot in front of the other*

*and keep going. Put blinders on and plow right ahead”*

-George Lucas, Director

In closing, I have chosen to reflect back to the statements which I wrote as a part of the doctoral application process. I can vividly recall sitting at the desk where I worked as a reading teacher and drafting the following portion of the goal statement which I submitted just prior to admission to the program: “I am a firm believer in the fact that education is an ongoing, lifelong process. I have committed myself to just such a path. One in which I will continually strive to deepen my knowledge and educational experiences.” Since drafting the statement, I have moved into an administrative position and have completed another three years of studies, yet I am more adamant than ever regarding the fact that learning is a lifelong process. It is not confined to a specific period of time nor is it limited to a prescribed set of courses. It is a fervent belief that lies deep within oneself which acknowledges the fact that learning is a natural, ongoing process for those who chose to embrace it. Though I had long viewed education as an ongoing, sequential process which held the hope of a degree at the end of each phase, I now view my education as a fluid series of natural events which add to the depth and breadth of my knowledge and experience.

Reflecting upon the course work that I have undertaken during the last three years, I feel that I have been challenged as both a student and a leader. Having a long standing interest in school curricular issues, I found Dr. Meyers’ CI 702 to have been rigorous experience which imparted a great deal of curricular knowledge yet more importantly left me with the confidence that I would need to take on any challenge that lie ahead in the doctoral program. During the preceding semester, I enrolled in the last of a series of courses I had under the direction of Dr. Jack Yeager. I personally found his teaching style to have been both entertaining and engaging. His vast experience in politics and education shed unique light upon the multidimensional aspects of educational leadership on the public school level. I found Dr. Kulsun, Dr. Watts, and Dr. Cunningham’s perspectives as former public school administrators to be very influential. My conversations with them enabled to me to seek out an internal balance as both a doctoral student and school administrator. I believe this sense of compartmentalization allowed me to survive the most hectic of semesters.

Ironically, I began my first semester in the EdD program enrolled in LS 705 with Dr. Nicholson and then completed coursework with enrollment in her LS 707 class. It was during enrollment in her courses that I felt as though my intellect was lacking yet in hindsight I have come to see that it was not insufficient intellect but rather a lack of exposure to varied perspectives which often left me perplexed and uncertain. Yet this temporary sense of disequilibrium ultimately imparted me with a greater sense of my personal integrity and a broader understanding of the world around me.

When considering the coursework which had the greatest impact upon my perspectives as a leader, I would be remiss if I were not to discuss the series of human resource courses (LS 625, LS 532, and LS 780) which were taught by Dr. Galbraith. I found his insight into the field of human resource management to be most insightful and inspiring. Far too often I found myself absorbed by the relentless demands of my job yet the management courses have allowed me to examine situations in a broader sense. I now am reminded of the need to take into account the human dimension in every decision that I am expected to make as an administrator. Throughout this learning process, Dr. Galbraith continually challenged my thinking and encouraged me to work diligently toward meeting my personal and professional goals. I was profoundly impacted by his expertise and ultimately chose to pursue human resource management as the area of emphasis for my degree program.

I stand on the edge of attaining a long term goal which promises to alter the course of my life. I hope to use my doctoral degree as a means to attain position within the central office or state department of education before eventually using my education and background to acquire a professorship within an institution of higher education. I feel that my time as a doctoral student has left me with the stamina and willpower necessary to take on any challenge that lies ahead. I have come to relish these trials because they impart within me a sense of accomplishment and personal growth which only serves to underscore who I am as an individual and as a leader.

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