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Program Synthesis

St. John's University- Center for Educational Leadership and Accountability, Ed. D. Program

An orientation for the Educational Administration and Leadership Doctoral Program at St. John's University in Oakdale, New York, is where the unforeseen challenges into analysis and self-determination first began. Encouragement and support was the foundation of this orientation, and it was here that I first reflected on how to explore deeper understandings about school leadership in our country. There was no clear path, or exact curriculum formula for what was to come. A few weeks later, the Cohort 11 members of St. John's newest class then assembled for our first class in this educational exploration.

Dr. Taylor-Dunlop introduced concepts like the five chapter dissertation format which would soon become familiar language to me. *Educational Planning* also presented the concept of sustainable leadership, and how distributive leadership is critical for success in educational reform. Dr. Jonathan Hughes continued the fall semester of 2010 with *School Based Data Analysis*. He taught how to utilize various databases, such as Budget Pulse, Data Points, Geo-Tracks, MapInfo Geographic, and Vital Signs to frame problems school districts face. It was in this course that I first learned about the 5 C's: content, compare, contrast, context, and construct (Hughes, 2010). This was the framework applied by the cohort to gain a deeper understanding of data and its impact on the districts studied. *Politics in Education* is where I knew this program was going to test perseverance and stamina. The rigor of textual analysis and application of concepts almost pushed the limits of many in the cohort. Dr. Frank Smith's presentation of Deborah Stone's work provided a model to approach research questions in terms of goals,

problems, and solutions. The spring of 2011 wrapped up with a focus on research in Dr. Taylor-Dunlop taught us the values of qualitative research. We gathered data to uncover patterns, themes and discrepancies. We learned to conduct individual interviews to begin the synthesis process of comparing data to draw reasonable conclusions and make recommendations. I spent my first summer in the program with Dr. Francesco Ianni, learning to create a website for the digital portfolio. The portfolio would later become an authentic assessment in lieu of a comprehensive exam. Our first summer ended with Research and Development in Instructional Strategies with Dr. Smith. I learned to work and collaborate with my colleagues in on-line worksites on the Moodle. Ultimately the engagement and collaboration with colleagues in the development of the lesson plan and then allowing colleagues to critique one another led to our understanding of the Japanese lesson study model of education in that country.

At the start of the second full year, the rigor of life as a doctoral student was clear. *Data Analysis* introduced me to the tedious work of data driven instruction from an administrative perspective. Dr. Hughes presented practical simulations and scenarios to support our effective analysis of school data by using the statistical software, *SPSS*. The experience in this course was both valuable and practical because, as a school administrator, one of my priorities is data analysis and using data to drive instruction. This course was followed by *Data Analysis II-Statistics*. Dr. Ianni used practical strategies to teach us statistics. The application of descriptive and inferential statistics, distribution analysis, correlations, and regression analysis were part of the culminating project. I was amazed at my own ability to support use the research findings with descriptive and inferential statistics to present practical analysis for a school district.

*Advanced Research Design* brought a refreshed look at dissertation topics. Dr. Dunlop provided practical information in order to enhance our understanding of the research process and

to hone our ability to design a quantitative or qualitative study. The true benefit of a cohort model was maximized throughout this course as we presented possible dissertation topics, research questions, and methodologies. We moved along in understanding the dissertation and were able to plan, design, rethink, and further develop our research topic. By the end of this course, I felt prepared to outline the conceptual framework for my dissertation topic. *Collective Bargaining* with the late Dr. Joan Hughes, we participated in the negotiation process conducted by the Board of Education with bargaining units of a school district. Both parties were inspired to engage in purposeful dialogue with the intention of progressing towards a reasonable settlement. The final group project was a report to the Board of Education outlining the bargaining settlement related to initial goals and objectives. Dr. Hughes provided insight based on her personal negotiations for major school districts in Connecticut, and her life experiences proved to be a wealth of knowledge.

Summer of 2012 was spent completing the summer courses for the last time in my collegiate career. It began by revisiting Dr. Smith's classroom for lessons in *Advanced Leadership in Schools*. We learned the essential question for educational leaders is: "What types of leadership roles do these competing systems prescribe for principals? (Class notes, 2012)." We examined the sources of leadership theory from Stanford University's panel of current leaders, the Cremin and Dewey perspective, Smith's ADC Model, Bryk's study of relational trust in Chicago, Sergiovanni's construct for moral leadership, Stone's model for civic capacity, and a study of the DNA of leadership in Toyota. In the end, I conducted qualitative research by analyzing the aforementioned perspectives of leadership theory. *Multicultural Social Organization* with Dr. Cynthia Douglas reminded us all that the world is not color blind. As an

African-American I know what it means to feel discriminated against, but this course forced me to analyze some of the ways to create a culture of diversity in public schools.

In the fall of 2012, the coursework was in the final stages. *Economics/Finance of Education* with Dr. Anthony Annunziata, provided meaningful insight in to the budget process. He is a standing superintendent who also reflected on his time at Roslyn before the business office of a district was as transparent. We were challenged with a simulated process to complete the budget analysis of our employer district. As a result of this experience, we learned that there are degrees of distinction involved in the budget process. *Advanced Study in Organizational Theory* required cohort members to analyze the embedded culture of schools. We evaluated short readings, and various school websites in New York. We also analyzed two high schools: North East High School in Philadelphia in 1968 and Central Park East High School in Harlem in 1994 by means of viewing two documentaries by Frederic Wiseman. Our task was to capture the hidden curriculum of the schools and to express the hidden curriculum evident. The metaphors summarized the theory of practice expressed in the life of both high schools. Dr. Smith advised us to observe the films carefully and closely in order to analyze the critical incidents that capture the schools' cultures. Finally, *Educational Governance and Policy* was our final course. This course combined the practical and theoretical underpinnings of educational administration. The clarity provided by Dr. D'Ambrosio in terms of policy development, boards of education, and educational law will serve all of us as me well as I continue both in my doctoral studies and more importantly my career.

When Hurricane Sandy hit on October 29, 2012, I was faced with a challenge I was not prepared to take on at the time. The first floor of my home was flooded with sea water, and I had to adjust priorities. My wife and I were able to find temporary housing in the basement of a

house, so we took the kids and the dog and relocated. Most important was the fact that I was able to salvage the external hard drive, laptop, and all literature from the doctoral program. Dr. Hughes once advised us to “back up everything, even if you store it in the garage,” and this was advice I followed. For that reason, the challenges of the insurmountable loss, permanent housing uncertainty, and struggle to survive the Hurricane Sandy ordeal was one priority, the other was to finish what I started at St. John’s.

In all, this was a journey worth taking for so many reasons. The special comradery borne from collegial analysis and collaboration with my Cohort 11 colleagues is one that I will continue to nurture for years to come. My work throughout this quest to complete my doctoral studies has culminated into a respect and admiration for my professors, colleagues, and for my work that will resonate long after the work is completed. There are intellectual and personal bonds that have developed with Dr. Taylor-Dunlop, Dr. Hughes, Dr. Ianni, Dr. D’Ambrosio, Dr. Douglas, , and Dr. Smith as a result of my experience in St. John’s University Doctoral Studies. Those bonds have been forged and are special ones that I will work to maintain throughout my personal and professional life.