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### **Program Synthesis**

On a warm August afternoon in 2010, I walked into the Bourne Mansion on the grounds of the Oakdale campus of St. John's University overlooking the Great South Bay. That afternoon I entered a new era in my life as I introduced myself to several professors and staff members as well as the other members of "Cohort 11". Professor Hughes greeted us with his smile and soft voice and announced, "Welcome. This program is not about what you know, or what you don't know, it's about what you don't know you don't know". It was that simple.....the things that I don't know, I don't know.

Each of the courses introduced a different aspect of leadership from data to politics. Each professor had their own style but all of them were challenging, intelligent, patient and interesting.

The week following our welcome gathering, a warm, congenial professor, Dr. Korynne Taylor-Dunlop, greeted Cohort 11 who quickly eased the apprehension, worries, and fears of all present in our corner classroom. Dr. Dunlop outlined the goals, expectations, and challenges that lied ahead with steadfast assurance that each one of us could attain what only 10% of the population has ever accomplished. In no time at all, Dr. Taylor-Dunlop had us analyzing the different matrices, models, and theoretical frameworks to evaluate planned change in educational settings. These theoretical frameworks were used as a springboard for many classes to follow. The cohort extensively studied the framework of the Popekewitz model of education through the lenses of technical, illusory, and constructivist schools. The class also introduced the works of Wehlage, Resnick, Bolman and Deal, and Stone. We gained an

understanding of applying a theoretical framework as a lens in which to look through when identifying problems, proposing solutions, and perpetuating change initiatives within school settings.

From theory to data we shift as Dr. Jonathan Hughes introduced us to the first course of many involving the collection of data. The objective of School Based Data Analysis was to effectively synthesize a target school district's data, compare the data to similar schools and successfully identify and implement appropriate strategies that will ultimately lead increased student achievement. In analyzing and sifting through a surplus of data from Budget Pulse, Data Points, Geo-Tracks, MapInfo Geographic, and Vital Signs we were able to use data to frame the problem.

It was during this course that I was introduced to Dr. Hughes' theoretical framework, the 5-C's: content, compare, contrast, context, and construct, which will be the framework that I will use in my dissertation. Additionally in this class I read *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, by Diane Ravitch, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, by Edgar Schein, and *Good to Great* by Jim Collins all of which were informative and instrumental in furthering my own personal leadership style.

Spring brought a thaw to the snow and Deborah Stone! Possibly one of the most complex reads of my life, Dr. Frank Smith extracted information out of me piece by piece and just when I thought I understood Stone, he prodded some more. Dr. Smith brought us to a new height intellectually. He tried to smooth over the shock and in an effort to further our understanding of Stone's framework, the cohort worked on thematic analyses of several other works which included, *Whatever it Takes*, by Paul Tough, *Between Public and Private*, by Katrina Bulkley, et.al. , and a case study on civic capacity by Clarence Stone. The rigorous

content and coursework proved to be beneficial and enabled the cohort to gain a greater depth and understanding of the intersection of politics and education. Dr. Smith introduced his Advocacy Design Center (ADC) model. Throughout the course, Dr. Smith discussed the importance of community building while explaining the ADC model.

Dr. Taylor-Dunlop shifted gears with our cohort, as the next class was an introduction to Qualitative Research, the first of several similar courses taught by Dr. Taylor-Dunlop. She explained that qualitative research should be “rich, thick and deep.” We learned how to find patterns, themes, and discrepancies within sample research. *Advanced Research and Design* took us on the journey from the outside to the inside. Prof. Taylor-Dunlop helped us to utilize the tools we had gathered in prior coursework and apply it to our own dissertation outlines. In our prior courses, we applied theorists to the research questions of others. This course enabled us to take the monumental step of developing our own research questions and adopting a theoretical framework to help navigate our own questions. We began the course by reviewing the essential parts of the first three chapters of a dissertation outline. The next part of the journey was to adopt a theoretical framework within which we could research our problem statements. In the end, we learned how to complete a three-chapter dissertation outline. The true value of a cohort model came through in this course as we all presented our topics and research questions, and our colleagues gave invaluable feedback. This feedback helped us plan, design and develop our potential research topic.

When we were not learning the nuts and bolts of research, we were learning technology. *Research and Development in Instructional Strategies* was a wonderful opportunity to learn about teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century using Web 2.0 tools. Dr. Smith began the course by introducing us to a “Moodle” site. All of our assignments and references were found there. By

introducing us to Moodle, Dr. Smith started toward his goal of exposing us to the various Web 2.0 tools that are present in classrooms today. We watched a Japanese lesson study video and compared it to a video of an American classroom's counterpart. Having the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the development of the lesson plan achieved exactly what we predicted, which is that teachers must have time for collaboration and reflection in order to improve teaching and learning. The course heightened our awareness and exposed us to the technology that surrounds us and is being used by our students in ways we have yet to discover. Dr. Smith provided our class with the time and opportunity to study, reflect, and interpret current research as it relates to teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Continuing with the technical aspect of the program, Dr. Francesco Ianni taught the Digital Portfolio course. The purpose of the portfolio is to show the progress throughout our time in the doctoral program. It was during this course that I chose my metaphor as a butterfly. I chose a butterfly as I felt it paralleled the metamorphosis of my personal growth as an educational leader and the cycles of the doctoral program.

Data and finance courses continued with the *Data Analysis* course where we were introduced to the computer software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This course highlighted how to effectively analyze data by using SPSS. *Data Analysis II* was an opportunity to learn more about statistical theory; the statistics program entitled SPSS and the relationship between the two. Perhaps the biggest benefit of this course was that it confirmed my inclination to gear my dissertation research towards a quantitative study. It allowed me to test the correlation between the variables I wished to study. One of these variables was Catholic elementary school enrollment over time. Through the use of scatter plots, Pearson correlations, lines of best fit and regression analysis, I was able to clearly understand ways in which to frame

my research problem in a more precise manner.

*Collective Bargaining in Education* afforded Cohort 11 the opportunity to understand the details of examining a collective bargaining agreement as well as the nuances of actual negotiations. One of the clear advantages of this course was that it was team taught by Dr. Jonathan Hughes, an accomplished educational administrator, and Dr. Joan Hughes, an accomplished professional negotiator/mediator. This dual perspective approach became most interesting when the cohort was broken down into two groups, administrators and union leadership.

*Advanced Leadership in Schools* was an extremely beneficial course. The sources of leadership theory included 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. We conducted qualitative research by analyzing the aforementioned perspectives of leadership theory. The final project, a five-chapter research paper, examined and presented procedures used in order to answer the research question. Dr. Smith implemented Moodle to post our individual and group assignments. Throughout the coursework, we examined conceptual frameworks and how we apply them to research on leadership. The information shared and presented by Dr. Smith was timely and relevant to the issues that as 21<sup>st</sup> century educational leaders, we are able to utilize.

Throughout *Finance in Education*, Dr. Annunziato shared his extensive knowledge with the Cohort. His willingness to share first hand experiences brought this course to a different level. We were very fortunate to have a Professor share with us a broad range of first hand experiences.

*Advanced Study in Organizational Theory* continued to challenge Cohort 11 to develop its own theory on leadership in organizations known as schools. As with previous courses taught by Professor Smith, there were three areas of study. This was the cohort's fourth course with Prof. Smith. It became clear how far we had come in our abilities to utilize the skill in close reading in order to create matrices that binned related ideas.

Finally - *Educational Governance and Policy*. Dr. D'Ambrosio exposed us to the various aspects of policy as it pertains to school boards. As the governing body of the Diocese of Rockville Centre is vastly different from the public school model, this course allowed the cohort to gain insight as to the Catholic governance model as Dr. D'Ambrosio allowed for true collaboration within the cohort.

After three years, countless hours of reading and writing with new friends and colleagues, I now **do** know some of those things that I didn't know, I didn't know and I am eternally grateful to the outstanding professors who have guided and challenged me at St. John's.