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EDU 5650 School Based Data Analysis

Fall 2014

Dr. Izzet Mergen

REFLECTION

I can't deny that it was with much trepidation that I began my doctoral journey with this course. Digging mentally through 57 years of life, I found no leanings toward or experience with quantitative thought and reasoning.

At least that was my initial perception.

In EDU 5650, Dr. Mergen gently led our cohort into and through the processes needed to understand how data can be effectively and efficiently gathered, analyzed, evaluated, and applied towards the goal of instructional support and improvement.

Through collecting and manipulating of data from our home districts, Dr. Mergen introduced us to the power and potential of database development and, in many cases, showed us when and how we were already using these skills in our lives and careers.

Through article analysis, class discussions and action assignments, and a culminating project in which we researched, gathered, and analyzed a school district's accountability plan, I left EDU 5650 with not only the required knowledge of school-based data analysis necessary to pass the course, but more importantly, with a level of comfort with quantitative processes that I could not have anticipated beforehand.

Course Description

"A school district's effective use of data can enable the successful identification and implementation of appropriate strategies that ultimately lead to the attainment of standards and increases in student learning. However, many schools do not use data to promote increased student learning or for standards implementation. The reasons for this are varied. The data may not be easy to access, they may not be in forms that are easy to understand, no one may be available who understands and can work with data, or there may be no knowledge that the data exist. For some, there may be so much data that knowing where to begin an analysis of the data is the challenge. Each of these situations (as well as many others) actively discourages school districts from learning about the phenomena they are attempting to understand. By supporting the creation, access, and subsequent analysis of school district databases, efforts by school leaders to create and sustain professional learning communities that are focused on the success of all students can be realized."

This course provided me with tremendous insight into the qualitative research methods that I will use to research my dissertation topic. Essentially we focused on how to "mine for data" to "tell the story" of a school district. The class was structured as an independent practice course with an emphasis on interpreting and analyzing data to complete a culminating individual project.

I initially found difficulty with the class due to the fact that I was a novice at gathering and organizing data in this manner. My initial apprehension eased throughout the lecture portion of the course. Dr. Hughes instructed us on how to create matrixes and introduced

us to the sources of the data collection for the culminating project (NYS

Educational Data Bases and BOCES Data Points). To complete the culminating project, were instructed on how to utilize the key software we would be utilizing to complete the project (Excel and Snagit). To supplement the instruction we were provided an exemplar of a report conducted by Dr. Hughes to use as a framework for our own individual projects.

The more I gathered and compared the information after being given the framework for the project, the more clearly the overall picture of the course became. Through the creation of the matrixes we were telling the story of a school district and comparing it to other districts. This culminating report was our first step in building our research methodology knowledgebase.

I considered this course to be a "breakthrough" course both professionally and educationally. The methods utilized in this class provided tremendous insight on how to present clear and concise data comparisons in my dissertation and professionally. I plan on using these matrix methods and data sources when conducting the research for my dissertation.