Knowledge Discussion Essay

It has been said, in life, the one thing that is constant, is change. I believe as we mature, we half-heartedly accept this notion of change. We try to anticipate it in order to ready ourselves for what is often times uncomfortable. We begin to develop strategies to combat change. This action alone traps us in our own paradigm and becomes the foundation of how we react to scenarios out of our control. This paradigm becomes our reality and we begin to live in our reality as the absolute truth, not recognizing that we have a choice in how we view scenarios, including change and more importantly how we not react, but respond to these scenarios.

When I entered the PhD program at George Mason University, I was required to take a course titled Ways of Knowing (EDUC-800), which is considered a foundational course. This course forced me to stop and evaluate my current paradigm and consider my thinking process and how it affects me as a human being. In EDUC-800, the one concept that I immediately took hold of was, “Why do we do what we do?” I related this concepts to my work experience. As a previous administrator, I never thought of my responses or my actions in certain situations. I just pulled from my past experiences and made a decisions. I never realized that I was making decisions from the paradigm that I lived in. My paradigm gave me my rationale and my reality so any decision that I made, I thought was the best decision to be made. I rarely took the time to think about why I made the decision. Before this course, I didn't realize I was living in a paradigm. I had heard the word being used before, but lacked the knowledge to interpret a true understanding of it. This class gave me a deeper understanding of paradigms and how it effects individual people’s ways of knowing. It gave me the ability to have a heightened sense of the people working around me and their thinking. My EDUC-800 paper was an exploratory paper on [reflective inquiry](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\Desktop\Phd%20folder\EDUC%20800,%20Reflective%20Inquiry%20Jason.doc). This paper forced me to reflect on the decisions I was making, what connections I was having with my experiences, the thinking behind the decisions, and to identify my biases This course forced me to question the path I was on and to think about what was my path, my passion. I still needed a deeper understanding of what to do with actual data.

I received my introduction into the world of data when I began taking research-based courses (EDRS-810, EDRS-811, EDRS-812), which gave me a deeper understanding of the concepts of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The research courses gave me a framework to collect relevant data. It helped me to understand that relevance was defined by the researcher. It provided me with a systematic structure to disaggregate data. EDRS-810 was a great introductory course that introduced the practical concepts of both qualitative and quantitative methods. I was able to gain a general understanding of each field and how each method was used. This class was an opportunity for me to explore some areas of interest and think about how I would develop my research and report my findings. This gave me an understanding of how each method can strengthen the validity of your research. In this course, I was introduce to the IRB application process and received relevant exposure to the process of appropriately reviewing scholarly journal articles. Within EDRS-810, I had my first experience with a quantitative proposal that was focused on [teacher empowerment in public schools.](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\Downloads\810_paper_jasonfinal.doc) I quickly discovered that the structure needed to design a worthy study was detailed and had to be aligned to your research question(s). At the time, my study was aligned to my program of studies. In EDRS 811, I focused on learning the foundational concepts of quantitative studies. I was exposed to the connections and relationships with variables in a study and how to understand their connections. I became familiar with various database systems and how they can be used to strengthen your argument or understanding pertaining to your research. I also was required to critique [quantitative journals.](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\OneDrive\811F\Guided%20Critique%202%20Spr%2015.docx) This exercise assisted me in developing the skills to read and interpret scholarly journals with a critical eye that enabled me to interpret the trustworthiness of the articles. With a greater knowledge base of data collection and interpretation, I still lacked the understanding of actually working with participants in developing my research.

In EDRS-812, I focused on qualitative methods. I found the course intriguing. Our professor stressed the importance of discovering the story of our participants. My assignment for the course was a study on the perception of conflict in a middle school setting through the eyes of a teacher, counselor, and an [administrator.](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\OneDrive\812\Feedback%20Jason's%20paper_F_v2%20(1).doc) In this course, I had an opportunity to interview participants and gain deeper understanding of their thinking on student conflict by posing reflective questions. In the interviews, I made note of the interviewees’ body language, facial expressions, and voice tones. This process benefited me to understand my participants and my study. While researching student conflict, I gained a better understanding of student conflict through the eyes of adults and I began to understand the affects conflict has on adults in a public school setting. In regards to the aforementioned courses discussed, I have begun to expand my basic foundation of issues relating to public education as a leader and how it would affect my leadership.

With my original program of study, Education Leadership, I had the opportunity to enroll in EDLE-770, EDLE-801, and EDLE-895. In EDLE-770, the program was focused on educational leadership. There were [two papers](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\Desktop\Phd%20folder\Book%20review%201.EDLE%20770F.doc) that I felt were important to my [leadership development](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\Downloads\Assignment3-urban%20leader..Jason%20S.docx). This course permitted me to explore the roots of leadership. It was a great course that provided instruction on how to effectively develop into a better leader. EDLE-801 was a course where I discovered the history of organizations and how they developed over time. I was able to compare past organizational practices and how they had a direct correlation to today's practices in business and public schools. I compared various business models and how they actually influence public education. This course required us to read numerous articles and submit critiques of the [articles.](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\OneDrive\801\Article%20SB.pdf) We had open discussions during class with every article. This course improved my focus on critical thinking and my analyses skills by the written assignments and course discussions. EDLE-895 was an introduction to emerging issues in administration and supervision. This course allowed me to step back from my professional experiences and knowledge and try to explore various aspects and issues in education where I lacked previous knowledge. For example, my experiences have always been in high-need schools. In this class, I looked at student achievement in suburban schools. The format of this course was especially helpful because my professor believed in open-dialogue and course presentations. The format of the course sharpened my public speaking skills. This course also strengthened my capacity with presenting information on personal and professional topics. Furthermore, I was required to read numerous text. I did a [book review](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\OneDrive\895\Book%20review895-2.docx) on suburban education that opened my awareness to issues in this setting that I've never been exposed to or even considered. In the class, I developed an AERA proposal to submit for [review](file:///C:\Users\Jsutton1\OneDrive\895\AERA%202016_Sutton.cc.docx). Our professor systematically walked us through the process and gave me a confident understanding of how to submit a proposal. This course fostered my growth as a researcher. It was after this course, which I decided to change my program of studies and focus in the field of special education.

The courses I have taken in each semester is molding and expanding my thinking to shape my critical thinking skills with working with students with disabilities. I have learned something new in every course, which has been a needed skill in the next course. As I take each course, it helps me pinpoint my interest, while at the same time broadening my knowledge base as a researcher. I know that I am moving in the right direction.