

Fall 2020 Reflection

The fall semester was similar the spring and summer, as the covid precautions continued and my cohort met only virtually once a month for classes. Honestly, even with the travel to Southern, I prefer the in-person meetings with my cohort once a month, but I also appreciate that the department is wanting to be cautious. Each semester that passes, we get closer to the fact that we will no longer have classes together as a cohort and will be working independently on our dissertations. I found myself considering this more in the fall semester and becoming a bit anxious about not having my cohort's support on a regular basis. This semester's classes were two I have been most excited about since starting the program. Overall, one of the classes this semester exceeded my expectations and the other was not what I thought it would be when I began the semester. Transformative Practice II with Dr. Cain had a focus on social justice and diversity, which I enjoyed. The second course, Qualitative Research in Education, was different than I thought but I did learn more about the process for this type of research.

When I opened the syllabus for Transformative Practice II, I was pleasantly surprised to see the focus would be on social justice in education. This course was one of the best, if not the best course I have taken through Southern or any school even. Not only was Dr. Cain prepared and enthusiastic, but the content was exactly in my area of interest. We began the course readings, which were a bit heavy in early on, with core concepts regarding social justice education. Each week, we built on the topics by exploring context and voice chapters related to specific "isms" and injustices. For example, the first section we discussed was racism; we moved through many groups, some of which I was unfamiliar regarding their application of social justice. The context and voices concluded with ableism, a topic I am especially passionate about because of my previous work in disability services. Once we completed the context and voices chapters, the end of the semester reflected steps being taken to fight the injustices, which was welcome reprieve from the heavy but necessary content we studied earlier. Assignments for the class were relevant and interesting, as Dr. Cain allowed flexibility with them so that we could make each relevant to our work. For example, I was able to read and create a presentation on a book I have wanted to read for a while, *How to be an Antiracist*. Others chose documentaries that interested them or related directly to their dissertation. The course ended with a theoretical framework paper, which we were encouraged to develop from our prospectus. This assignment alone really helped me grasp my framework section better and improved it for future dissertation work. Again, this class was valuable to me not only as a future educational leader, but also as a human and an ally wanting to be better informed.

The second course I took this fall semester was Qualitative Research in Education, something I assumed I would use for my dissertation. When I entered this doctoral program, I thought I would be conducting a qualitative study. However, after taking several classes in research methodologies I think my path is quantitative research. Regardless, I went into this Qual class with an open mind. I struggled with some of the assignments and the open nature of the course. Dr. Williams-Johnson was kind and knowledgeable about the topic, but I craved a bit more structure in the class. I recognize that each student has their own learning styles and mine happens to be very traditional in nature, with readings, note taking, and written assignments. The class had us rethink what content can be considered research. We ended the class by completing a group project in which we each approached qualitative research from an alternative method, my group's being visual art. Earlier in the semester, we practiced transcribing and analyzing that transcription through two additional assignments. I think I preferred these assignments over the later artistic one. After finishing the course, I had a grasp on the process for

qualitative research, but also with a clearer awareness of where my own dissertation study would fall in terms of methodology. Fall 2020 semester proved once again to be unique because of the covid pandemic, but also because of the newer directions my methodology and research is moving.