

Reflective Essay

The research project I am submitting for consideration is the dissertation I completed and defended on December 18th, 2023 under Dr. Lauren Casella's guidance during the Fall 2023 Dissertation Seminar II. The title of my dissertation was, "Middle Schoolers are Just this Special Type of Human Being": Middle school teacher perspectives on creating hope in their classrooms and for themselves. This dissertation required extensive research as I examined hope in middle school classrooms and the ways humanities teachers created conditions for such hope in the classroom and for themselves. I was particularly interested in the topic of hope during and after the pandemic when rates of depression and other mental health challenges exacerbated for adolescents throughout the United States. I wanted to make this research accessible to middle school teachers and was intentional about researching best practices that teachers could implement within their classrooms.

William H. Hannon Library provided me with several highly useful resources. One of the most invaluable resources that began my entire research journey at Loyola Marymount was my meeting with Elisa Slater Acosta on July 20th, 2021. We were told at our orientation that if we had any questions about the library, that we could make a research consultation appointment with a LMU librarian. I had never done a literature review before and needed to learn best practices in doing so. Elisa provided me with specific information and tips on how to search for articles and research based on a class project. The information, tools, and tips she provided me are what I continued to use to support me in writing my final dissertation.

For my dissertation, I ended up using several online databases. I included over 150 references and I attribute many of my findings to being able to utilize ERIC, OneSearch, and

JSTOR. As time progressed, my ability to use critical key search terms helped me to find articles that were greatly aligned to my research. Additionally, reading the references of excellent research helped me to find additional research that helped to make my literature review that much more robust. For example, because of my research through the ERIC database, I discovered the article about humanizing student-teacher relationships for black children by Legette et al. (2020). In reviewing the references at the end, I discovered the research of Jagers et al. (2019) who focused on transformative social-emotional learning. These researchers, in addition to others I discovered, contributed deeply to both my literature review on the inner work of teachers and the recommendations I shared in chapter 5 of my dissertation.

In addition to using online content, I consulted with my chair, committee members, and mentor on other research I should consider. When my mentor shared that I should look into the work of Jeannie Oakes, I went to the online search field on the William H. Hannon Library Home page and discovered the article on creating middle schools (Oakes et al., 1993). This article ended up contributing to a conceptual framework I created for middle school teachers. The nuance that the research by Oakes et al. (1993) provided me helped me to provide specific ways teachers could operationalize hope in their classrooms and for themselves.

My research on my dissertation all began at the William H. Hannon Library. Because of this research process, I was able to read articles, books, editorials, magazine articles, and reports that contributed to my understanding of what it takes to create conditions for hope in the classroom and in oneself. The research continued to guide me throughout my interviews with my participants, my findings, my recommendations, and what ultimately led to my final dissertation that I hope will ultimately be a contribution to the field of education.