

Love Is in the Air at Manhattanville's Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

It's "all in the family" for six couples who are in or have completed the Manhattanville College School of Education's doctoral program. We sat down with them to learn more about their academic and professional lives and how the doctoral program has been part of their relationships.

Jennifer and Brian Doherty

Jennifer and Brian Doherty were "meant to be," as they say. Having started out as neighbors in their Bronxville apartment building, they both chose Manhattanville's doctoral program due to its academic rigor, in-class learning medium, and cohort model. Despite being in the same cohort, Jenn and Brian are researching vastly different topics for their dissertations: *Teachers Perceptions to Barriers to Play-Based Instruction in the Kindergarten Classroom*, and *The Role of Content, Pedagogical, and Technological Knowledge in Explaining Music Teacher Self-Efficacy*, respectively. Brian recently completed his degree and received his hood in the May 2019 graduate commencement ceremony, and he sees his future self as a cultural arts director for a school district or teaching at the college level. Similarly, Jenn is hoping to teach at the college level after she finishes her dissertation.

Both currently work for the Yonkers Public Schools, with Jenn as the Director of Early Childhood Education and Brian as a general/vocal music teacher. Additionally, Brian is an accomplished professional drummer, having previously been part of the band "They Might Be Giants" and currently playing in the pit orchestra of the Broadway show, *Waitress*. Further, the two are super busy with a household of three children and a dog, and they are constantly striving to be role models for, and provide unique experiences to, their children.



Dulce and Jeremy Barker

Similar to the Dohertys, Dulce and Jeremy Barker were together in the same cohort during their studies in the doctoral program. Dulce and Jeremy met in high school and, many years later, both proceeded on to Manhattanville, where Dulce completed the School Building Leader/School District Leader certificate program and Jeremy completed the School District Leader certificate program. Their positive experiences in these programs encouraged them both to pursue the Ed.D. degree. The couple remarks that "it was exciting to re-enter school together 30 years after meeting in our junior year of high school. It was amazing to share this journey in the doctoral program together and we will always look back fondly on all of those hours of work at opposite ends of the dining room table!"

During their first two semesters in the program, Dulce and Jeremy crossed paths with two extraordinary professors. According to the couple, Dr. Kenneth Mitchell and Dr. Joanne Marien helped set the tone of excellence that resonated throughout the program. Dr. Mitchell was a great role model with his wide breadth of knowledge and experience, as well as his pragmatic advice on how to navigate the dissertation process. Dr. Marien brought out the best in both Dulce and Jeremy through high academic expectations and a personal connection. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of Dulce, Jeremy, and all professors involved in the doctoral program, Dulce defended her dissertation on bilingual education programs in February 2019, and Jeremy defended his dissertation on elementary teacher aide training in May 2019. Dulce is currently a middle school assistant principal in the Ossining Central School District and Jeremy recently took a new position as Assistant Superintendent for Personnel & Administration in the Mamaroneck Union Free School District. *(Read more about Dr. Jeremy Barker's accomplishments on page 14.)*



Jackie and Alex Levine

Sparks flew when Jackie and Alex Levine met through mutual friends at a gathering in 2003, but they didn't begin dating until a year later when Jackie had graduated from the University of Miami and had moved back to northern Westchester County in New York. Careers in teaching and education administration followed for both, and they were married in 2016. Alex is currently the principal of the Garrison School in Philipstown, NY and Jackie is the Coordinator of School Leadership and Marketing Services for Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES.

Alex entered the Manhattanville doctoral program first, after attending an information session led by Renee Gargano, Assistant Director for the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. With classes offered close to home at the Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES and with an attractive program structure, Alex joined Cohort 4 and his research is focused on the impact of middle school principals' use of social media on students. Jackie followed along in Cohort 9 and is studying executive function skills as a primary component of highly effective teachers. They are looking forward to celebrating both Alex's 40th birthday and his dissertation defense in 2019.



Jackie tells us, "We do a lot of our work on the weekends in separate quarters so we do not distract each other. However, we take breaks and come together, especially when we have *Eureka!* moments about research, or moments we learned about ourselves as writers/learners. Those are fun to share and laugh about. Sometimes we look at each other when discovering something that seems so basic or easy that we may have been overthinking, and we just shake our heads!"

David Jacobs and Peter Vecchio

In contrast to the Levines, David Jacobs and Peter Vecchio started their doctoral program together from day one as members of Cohort 6 in Fall 2014. In their first semester they had to rush their marriage ceremony, which was officiated by a radical ex-nun who happens to be David's aunt, in order to get to one of their evening classes.

With both working in education, they decided to pursue their doctor of education degrees at the same time so that they could spend more time together working on something that they felt passionate about. Currently, while continuing their studies, Peter is the Chair of the Department of Marine Transportation at SUNY Maritime College and David is the Curriculum Coordinator of the Science 21 Program at Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES.

David and Peter say they specifically chose Manhattanville's doctoral program because it is not online. That being said, the pair actually originally met each other online through American Online (AOL). They are both from New Jersey but now live in the Stamford, Connecticut area.



Lori and Kevin Roberts

Lori and Kevin Roberts first met when they worked in the same group home for individuals with disabilities in Brooklyn. They married 15 months after, and thirty plus years later became the "Doctors Roberts" through the Manhattanville doctoral program. After a suggestion from friend and colleague Renee Gargano, Lori applied for the program. Kevin soon followed, as the couple agreed that going through the program together would allow them to more effectively support and encourage each other.

Lori and Kevin sat beside each other in almost every course they took and they used Sundays as "writing days" in their home. The Roberts emphasize that building a strong relationship with one's dissertation chairperson is critical to succeeding in a doctoral program. With the guidance of Dr. Bob Monson, who was Lori's dissertation chair, and Dr. Stephen Caldas, who served the same role for Kevin, the Roberts' earned their Ed.D.s in May 2017 and January 2018, respectively.

The Roberts are proud to be the first married couple to graduate from the School of Education's doctoral program! Kevin is now the Director of Field Placement and Certification for the School of Education at Manhattanville, and Lori is the principal of Crompond Elementary School in the Yorktown Central School District. The couple's many years of love and support have not only earned each of them the title of Doctor, but also that of loving grandparent.



Melissa Gill and Kyle Grogan

Melissa and Kyle Grogan knew of the Manhattanville doctoral program through alumni emails, as Kyle had received his master of professional studies degree through Manhattanville’s Jump Start accelerated teacher training program. With both working as teachers and neither having held administrative positions, they entered the doctoral program with the thought of changing the trajectory of their careers. Together with Kyle’s best friend Roy, the couple was accepted into the program and have begun this “wonderful, daunting, and self-revealing journey.”

On undertaking this journey together, Kyle emphasizes he is grateful to be going through it with Melissa, saying “it’s hard to understand the amount of time and work it involves unless you’re in it.” Melissa agrees, describing that they work together, but in different workstations, on the weekend. These workstations reflect their optimal working settings: Melissa studies with classical music at the kitchen table, while Kyle works in the living room with The Beatles playing in the background. They frequently check in on each other, sharing words of encouragement and well knowing the worthwhile yet difficult tasks they are each accomplishing.

Recently married, Kyle teaches 5th grade at P.S. 96 in the Bronx, New York, and Melissa is a special education teacher at Katonah Elementary School in Katonah, NY.

