A STUDY UTILIZING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO PURSUE RETAINED TWO-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AS THE BASIS FOR ACTION AND CHANGE

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OSU-OKC's students inspired.
My committee enlightened.
My family believed.

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Abstract; Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City's (OSU-OKC) student retention rate mirrors the two-year system's national retention metric in that fewer than half of all first-time students return to the campus for their second fall semester (OSU-OKC, 2014; AACC, 2012). OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of retention persists, as it does on similar campuses, despite administrative access to the results of nationally-normed student engagement surveys, and two-year college best practices; and access to new knowledge added, annually, to the body of retention literature (Fike & Fike, 2008). In an effort to improve OSU-OKC's rate of student retention, I, as a campus administrator, utilized the participatory action research (AR) methodology to engage OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, in work to collect and help analyze peer experiences to develop recommendations to improve students' retention. I did not find any example in the research literature in which a researcher, also serving as a campus administrator, deployed AR methodology to explore retained students' college-going lived realities in an explicit effort to improve student retention on a two-year campus.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

America's community college system is a network of two-year institutions of higher education that is governed by an open-access admission policy purposed to assure all segments of society equal and affordable access to post-secondary education (AACC, 2014). Despite the system's purpose, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reports that fewer than half of all first-time students (no prior academic history) enrolled at full-time status (minimum of 12 credit hours) who enter one of its campuses each fall semester return to the campus for the second fall term (AACC, 2012; ACT 2010). Indeed, students may transfer to another institution to pursue their educational goals or they may leave for periods of time and return later to the same institution, or another, to complete their degree. However, campus administrators identify numerous characteristics, both student and institutional, that influence the number of first-time students who return to the campus for their second fall semester (ACT, 2010). Administrators identify characteristics that include students' preparedness for college-level work, study habits, financial resources, commitment to program completion, and motivation to succeed (2010). Campus administrators also reference students' family and employment responsibilities (2010).

The community college system's low rate of student retention is examined through an alternate perspective when the unit of study shifts from student and institutional characteristics to student interaction with the campus learning environment (CCSSE, 2014). In 2014, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) reported that administrators of 684 community colleges utilized its annual survey, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), to assess five benchmarks of campus practice highly correlated with student retention (2014). The CCSSE survey solicited student input related to campus practices that pertained to active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction and campus support for learners (CCSSE, 2014). The survey's scoring method used student responses in three of five benchmark areas (active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and campus support for learners) to calculate a campus-specific retention index that provided administrators with a baseline from which to measure and improve student engagement practices linked to higher rates of retention (Marti, 2004; Roman, Taylor & Hahs-Vahn, 2010). Despite institutions' use of the survey that generates context-specific student information that informs retention strategies, the stagnant rate of retention persists.

The body of knowledge associated with student retention on a two-year campus draws from quantitative and qualitative studies that investigate a broad range of student characteristics and varied campus-based variables. In fact, Andreau (2010) suggests that during the student admission process an institution's student record system captures over twenty data elements that are available for retention-centered analysis. Andreau argues that the data elements align with

the explanations for student attrition that are presented in contemporary student retention theories (Andreau, 2010; Astin, 1989; Tinto, 1975). However, while Andreau's list of variables are grouped efficiently into categories such as student demographic factors, student academic factors, and institutional factors (Craig & White, 2008), this efficiency fails to acknowledge students' family and employment responsibilities, thus, failing to consider the full range of factors influencing student retention (ACT, 2010; Doherty, 2006). Furthermore, the variables contained within the campus record system do not account for students' psychosocial factors such as commitment to the institution, or commitment to academic and career goals (Napoli & Wortman, 1998). Despite administrative awareness of the student and institutional characteristics that can shape students' academic performance and progress, OSU-OKC continues to register a stagnant rate of student retention (ACT, 2010; CCSSE, 2014). The institution's response is, thus, critical given its commitment to provide the public with equal and affordable access to higher education and the public's right to personal and societal benefits associated with degree completion (DeBard & Rice, 2009).

Statement of problem

Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC) is a two-year college governed by an open access admission policy purposed to assure all segments of society equal and affordable access to post-secondary education (OSU-OKC, 2014; AACC, 2014). The campus' rate of student retention mirrors the two-year college system's national retention index in that fewer than half of all first-time students return to the campus for the second fall semester (OSU-OKC, 2014, AACC, 2012). OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of retention persists despite

administrative awareness of student characteristics that shape their return to college; access to retention best practices; and access to new knowledge added, annually, to the body of academic research that examines student retention on a two-year and four-year campus (Fike & Fike, 2008; ACT, 2012; AACC, 2012; CCSE, 2012). Despite practitioner awareness of and access to new knowledge regarding student retention, awareness and knowledge does not trigger, mechanically, the organizational action and change necessary to improve student retention. Accordingly, I chose a collaborative methodology that engaged retained students, as a source of local knowledge, in activities to help me explore and better understand students' college-going lived realities and to, then, help generate context-specific recommendations that could, perhaps, improve the retention experience. Indeed, action research methodologists prescribe a framework and quality criteria to help practitioners, like me, craft an exemplary study design and responsive set of data collection, analysis and reporting procedures and protocols (Herr & Anderson, 2015). However, I could not anticipate *a priori* the challenges of achieving an ideal form of democratic collaboration in enacting the study design and procedures. As the study proceeded, I comprehended, simultaneously, that the differing status of the roles I and the participants held in the institution and the study and my efforts to control the project's messiness made true democratic collaboration unattainable.

Study purpose

This qualitative, participatory action research study engaged Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City's retained students as research collaborators. As collaborators, students' participated in an iterative cycle of activities in which they collected, helped analyze, and acted

upon their peers' retention experiences to develop recommendations to improve students' retention experience.

Research questions

As the basis for campus action and change:

What incidents helped support retained students' return to campus?

What incidents hindered retained students' return to campus?

What campus supports did not exist but could have improved the experience?

Secondary research question

What were the experiences of retained students who served as collaborators in the study?

Definition of terms

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC): The AACC represents and advocates for "nearly 1,200 associate-degree granting institutions enrolling more than 13 million students – almost half of all U.S. undergraduates" (AACC, 2013).

Community of practice: A body of people having a distinct identity that is governed by parameters of professional practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Completer: "A student who receives a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award. In order to be considered a completer, the degree/award must actually be conferred" (IPEDS, 2013).

Completers within 150% of normal time: "Students who completed their program within 150% of the normal (or expected) time for completion" (IPEDS, 2013).

Degree/certificate-seeking student: "Students enrolled in courses for credit and recognized by the institution as seeking a degree, certificate, or other formal award" (IPEDS, 2013).

First-time student: A student who has "no prior postsecondary experience and is attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level" (IPEDS, 2013).

Full-time student: "A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits" (IPEDS, 2013).

OSU-OKC: Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

Independent reviewer: The participatory action research methodology suggests that practitioners utilize an independent reviewer to provide alternate explanations and interpretations of the data. I identified a faculty member trained in qualitative researcher to serve in this capacity.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): "A form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162).

Prospective research collaborator: I solicited 244 retained students with in invitation to participate as a research collaborator. Ten students responded with interest to participate in an interview.

Research collaborator: I interviewed ten retained students and invited each to participate as a research collaborator. Four students volunteered to participate in this role.

Retention rate: "A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage" (IPEDS, 2013). For community colleges, "this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall" (IPEDS, 2013).

Study design

Creswell (2009) suggests that a proper research design makes explicit its methods guiding data collection, analysis and interpretation. This study's qualitative design established a path of inquiry that helped me explore OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities to better understand, as the basis for action and change, what helped and hindered students' return to campus and their ideas for improving the experience. I engaged OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, to help collect and analyze data. The collaborators acted with me as the study's primary instruments of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). While the methodology's validity criteria establishes quality parameters that denote good research, early in the study I accepted the fact that my role in the institution, as well as students' commitments to school, work and family were forces that surfaced, intermittently, to prevent full collaboration and a genuine sense of shared project ownership (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Epistemology

Constructionism suggests that an individual constructs truth or meaning as he or she is engaging with the world (Crotty, 1998). This epistemology suggests, too, that individuals co-create meaning, socially, with others who are also engaging in the world in which they are

interpreting (Jha, 2012; Crotty 1998). Crotty posits that singular or social constructions of truth manifest as a culture of meaning as individuals' access, inhabit, and become embedded within public and conventional frameworks of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Fish, 1990). However, Crotty clarifies that despite the existence and accessibility of such public and conventional frameworks of meaning it remains possible for individuals who are similarly situated to "construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, p 9).

This project proceeded from my epistemological understanding that OSU-OKC's retained students' inhabit, and are embedded within the campus learning environment, in addition to their respective communities and homes, as a framework of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Fish, 1990). This project also proceeded from an understanding that OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities contribute to the campus' framework of meaning and, perhaps, challenges the institution's historical character in ways that test the relevance of modern student retention programs. Accordingly, I sought to explore students' singular and social constructions of meaning, via their descriptions of experience, to surface context-specific incidents to inform actions to improve retention.

Theoretical framework

In his book *Traditional and Critical Theory,* Horkheimer (1937) argued that knowledge is nested within social and historical process and that, "The facts which our sense present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ" (p. 233). Horkheimer (1937) argues that

critical theory can challenge the status quo, destabilize established knowledge, and explain a social problem, and present solutions that can improve human existence (Horkheimer 1937, p. 233). Critical theory informed this study's approach that considered retained students' college-going lived realities as the realities are nested within social and institutional processes that manifest as its public and conventional framework of meaning. Within this theoretical perspective, I, as a perceiving organ, engaged the perspectives of retained students, also perceiving organs, to examine retained students' college experience at OSU-OKC, as the object perceived. The study's approach to generating knowledge challenged the status quo and the practice by which campus administrators, as organizational agents, are the primary bearers and producers of knowledge pertaining to the campus' purpose as an institution of higher education. I found no examples in the academic literature whereby 1) a practitioner engaged retained students, as collaborators, in a process that 2) explored peers' college-going lived realities within the context of a two-year campus in order to 3) identify incidents that students' perceived helped and hindered their retention experience, and ideas for improvements in order to 4) develop context-specific actions and changes to improve the retention experience.

Site description

Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC) is this study's setting. OSU-OKC was established in 1961 as Oklahoma State University Technical Institute, a branch campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma (APPENDIX A). The campus was purposed to provide job-training skills to transition its students into the workforce (OSU,

2015). In 1990, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education approved a proposal to change the campus name to Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City (2015). Campus academic programs evolved beyond technical training to include general education courses similar to those offered at nearby community colleges.

The OSU-OKC campus has instructors that include 85 full-time faculty and 345 part-time faculty who deliver programming in support of a bachelor of technology degree, 32 associate in applied science degree options, nine associate in science degrees options and eight technical certificate programs (OSU-OKC, 2015). The range of academic programs reflects a blend of technical and general education degrees. However, OSU-OKC's student completion report reveals that the majority of OSU-OKC students who complete a degree within the three-year time period register a general studies transfer degree rather than a degree associated with technical training (OSU-OKC, 2015).

OSU-OKC's fall 2014 campus census report notes a campus enrollment of nearly 7,000 students with 32% of students enrolled full-time (12 or more credit hours) and 68% of students enrolled part-time (fewer than 12 credit hours). The fall census report reveals that 14% of students are first-time freshman with no prior course credit attempted (2015). Regarding the campus demographic profile, the census report represents the student population as 40% male and 60% female, and student ethnicity as African-American, 16%; Asian, 3%; Caucasian, 58%; Hispanic, 9%; Native American, 4%; Non-resident alien, 3%; and Multi-racial, 7%.

The 110-acre campus is located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma at 10th street and Portland Avenue (Appendix B). The campus is composed of ten classroom buildings, a five-hole golf

course that students in the turf management program maintain, a precision-driving training course that offers driver safety courses to business and industry, and a child development lab school that has a capacity for holding 40 children and serves both staff and students. The campus also hosts of the state's premier horticulture programs in the John E. Kirkpatrick Horticulture Center. The program's influence on the campus is apparent when observing campus garden construction and landscaping selection. The campus location also serves as a metro-area location for OSU-Stillwater programming for local graduate courses and an Aerospace Administration and Logistics program that services civilian employees employed at Tinker Air Force Base in Midwest City, Oklahoma, about 20 miles away from campus.

P**articipant description and solicitation**

This study's participants included several different groups and individuals. First, four of OSU-OKC's retained students acted as research collaborators and peer interviewers. Second, OSU-OKC's retained students were the pool from which eight students were interviewed. Third, an OSU-OKC faculty member served as an independent reviewer who reviewed the product of my analysis, and that of the collaborators' to challenge assumptions and provide alternate explanations of the analysis.

Research collaborator description

The purposive and homogeneous sampling techniques (Patton, 2002) informed the solicitation process. Study collaborators were all first-time students who entered OSU-OKC for the fall 2014 academic term and returned for the fall 2015 academic term.

C**ollaborator solicitation process**

I secured from OSU-OKC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness a dataset of first-time, full-time, degree seeking students who were members of the fall 2014 entering cohort who had returned for the fall 2015 academic term (Appendix C). I disseminated the study's approved solicitation, via email, to 244 retained students (Appendix D).

Peer interviewee description

OSU-OKC's retained students are the unit of study. Accordingly, I utilized the same dataset described in the co-researcher description and solicitation.

Peer interviewee solicitation process

I worked to engage OSU-OKC's retained students in all study activities. Although I designed the study and completed all of the necessary institutional review board documents and instruments, the four collaborators reviewed and revised the peer solicitation message to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Students reported that my initial solicitation was too long with dense wording that made it difficult to read. Moreover, collaborators' stated that the solicitation lacked an incentive to attract participants. The OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the revisions which were, then, disseminated via a collaborator's email account, under all four collaborators' signatures, to 234 retained students who were not interviewed as prospective collaborators (APPENDIX F).

Researcher description

In participatory action research, the researcher undertakes a research role in addition to his or her organizational role. I served as a researcher and practitioner as I worked alongside retained students who served as collaborators. I, as the study's primary researcher, sourced the

strengths of my professional and educational experiences to design, enact, and direct study procedures. My position as an insider, collaborating with other insiders (Herr & Anders, 2005), was asset and a resource that others, outsiders, would not have possessed. My position as an insider reinforced the study's hierarchical underpinnings and, perhaps, nurtured the impression of collaboration as my work punctuated the study's timeline as it entailed preparing meetings, completing tasks, reflecting on procedures. I detail these ideas further in my subjectivity statement presented in Chapter three.

Independent reviewer description and solicitation

This study's methodology contained a dialogic validity criterion that encouraged me to identify and task an independent reviewer to review the product of the research team's data analysis activities, and provide alternate explanations (Herr & Anderson, 2005). An OSU-OKC faculty member served in this role.

Research Methodology

I used the participatory action research methodology because it has implications for practice; engaged retained students who were nested within the study's setting and context; and permitted an exploration of students' college-going lived realities from which to draw context-specific recommendations that could, perhaps, improve students' retention experience (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). On Herr & Anderson's (2015) continuum of positionality, this study represents an insider collaborating with other insiders. Herr & Anderson (2015) suggest that insiders collaborating with other insiders can enhance a study's democratic nature. However, the degree of collaboration and my ability to achieve democratic validity was at the mercy of

collaborators' preparation, roles in the setting, schedules, commitments, and investments. Accordingly, I placed no *a priori* constraints upon data collection and analysis procedures to permit the methodology's flexible and emergent properties to facilitate, from students' perspectives, the exploration of students' college-going lived realities (McTaggart, 1991; Patton, 2002). I introduce the three cycles of activities below and present details in Chapter three.

Cycles of activity

Cycle 1: Seating the research team

Cycle one activities occurred between September 19, 2015 and November 2, 2015. In this cycle, I solicited OSU-OKC's retained students to participate in a one hour, on-campus interview. The six students I interviewed who did not volunteer to serve as collaborators included a 28 year-old Marine Corps veteran, a 19 year-old single mother, two undocumented students who were 19 and 20 years of age, a 19 year-old who commutes one hour to campus, and a 31 year-old whose job transferred him from Minnesota to Oklahoma. The remaining four students were those who volunteered to serve as study collaborators and are introduced, via vignettes, in Chapter three. Collaborators received no financial incentive or course credit incentive to participate. However, they did voice at the study's conclusion that the work required did warrant some type of compensation.

Cycle 2: Training workshop and data collection

On November 9, 2015, I assembled the four collaborators (Mary, Ruth, Rachel, and Esther; all pseudonyms) for a training and implementation workshop that had been approved through Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The workshop

introduced the research collaborators to the study's purpose, qualitative research practices and procedures, interviewing protocols and techniques, the participatory action research methodology's collaborative framework, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and research ethics (Appendix E). Between February 2, 2016 and February 19, 2016, the four collaborators explored the life experiences of their peers as they interviewed eight retained students who had responded to their peer solicitation. The time lapse between the training and implementation workshop and the peer interviews was due to the collaborators' availability given the cycle's temporal proximity to holidays, semester finals and the winter intercession. The two-month delay disrupted the study's timeline and highlighted the unpredictable terms of collaborative work. The study's disrupted timeline was complicated, further, as Rachel withdrew from the study due to the weight of her commitments outside the institution.

Cycle 3: Data analysis and presentation

Between April 4, 2016 and April 25, 2016, I, along with the three remaining collaborators, interacted during four data analysis meetings. Given this cycle's proximity to the end of the spring term, Chapter three details the process in which I prepared, void of collaboration, the collected data for team review and analysis. The team's data analysis explored OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities to better understand the incidents that helped and hindered their return to campus for the second fall term, and to discover ideas. On the morning of May 2, 2016, the research team presented the study's initial findings and context-specific retention considerations to OSU-OKC's executive team, and leaders of Oklahoma's state workforce development system. The students' lived realities surfaced as Ruth

struggled with her decision to attend the presentation rather than attend a class session in which her instructor was scheduled to review the final exam. While I encouraged the student to attend the meeting to ensure all participants were present and her voice was represented, the campus president reminded me of the student's priority to do well in school. This example demonstrated, again, the challenges in undertaking truly 'collaborative' work. In the afternoon of May 2, 2016, I assembled the collaborators for a focus group session to explore their experiences across the study.

Research Methods

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) informed the development of an interview guide and the performance of semi-structured interviews across the study (Flanagan, 1954). I conducted ten semi-structured interviews to identify a team of four collaborators. In turn, the collaborators conducted eight semi-structured peer interviews. In addition, I conducted eight informal conversational interviews (Patton, 2002) with each collaborator immediately before and following their respective peer interviews. I also conducted one informal conversational interview (2009) with a peer-interviewee who wanted to share his story with me. I presented the conversation, via vignette, in Chapter four. I also participated with collaborators to present the study's initial findings to OSU-OKC's campus' administrators. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Despite the study's collaborative design, I

spent considerable time and effort to facilitate the interactions above which signals the study's inherent sense of hierarchy that was necessary to advance its purpose and intent.

Focus Group Interviewing Technique

On May 2, 2016, I conducted a focus group session with collaborators to explore their experiences across the study. The focus group meeting provided an additional point of data collection in support of the study's second research question that examined how collaborators' participation shaped their self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination (Lather, 1986). Students' college-going lived realities surfaced during the group discussion as Ruth sat quietly in her chair and then slept, momentarily, while sitting upright. Indeed, the group shared a laugh at Ruth's expense, once her eyes opened, but in that moment of Ruth's silence I realized that the countless hours of effort to explore students' college-going lived realities, in order to improve it, was summed up in Ruth's silent space of stillness that I could relate to, absolutely, based on my own weariness as a doctoral student pursuing this project while balancing school, family and work (Tolle, 2010). Meaning exists in the silence (Mazzei, 2007) and Ruth's moment spoke, loudly, as it suggested the presence of a significant, but unspoken, structural element that OSU-OKC's retained students' face: exhaustion.

Data analysis

The qualitative design and collaborative methodology positioned me and research collaborators as primary instruments of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). This study contained 32 documented interactions with OSU-OKC's retained students. Each point of data collection was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Due to time constraints, I prepared

the data in advance for the stage of collaborator analysis. While considered a time saving measure, my decision omitted collaborators from a step in the qualitative process. Accordingly, the decision altered our collaborative experience with qualitative processes. I open coded each interview transcription to determine consistencies of meaning, or patterns, among descriptive findings (2002). The patterns identified across transcripts were, then, grouped into categories, or themes, with data units inspiring emic labels (2002). The collaborators' reflected on their own retention experiences and their engagement with peer interviewees as they reviewed, helped analyze, and discussed the content of the eight peer interview transcriptions. While collaborators worked from data that I had prepared, the analysis process benefitted from the collaborators' insight, experience and judgment that elevated the study's trustworthiness and rigor that is detailed in Chapter three (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Data representation

I placed no *a priori* constraints upon the study's data collection and analysis procedures to permit the methodology's emergent and flexible properties to facilitate the exploration of retained students' experience (McTaggart, 1991; Patton, 2002). The methodology's emergent and flexible properties were also used to guide the data's analytic representation. Numerous methodologists underscore the value of linking representational form to study purpose, topic, and analysis (Lather & Smithies, 1997; Richardson, 2000). Accordingly, the study contains multiple representations of findings for multiple audiences. The collaborators' college-going lived realities permeated the process of developing the representation of findings as collaborators' expressed, first, a desire to create an electronic presentation. Collaborators, then, discussed their

busy schedules and decided to generate a poster board presentation that used different colored markers to represent different themes that emerged from the data. Finally, and for the actual presentation, the collaborators used a Venn diagram that Ruth and Esther admitted to crafting the night before in response to my email reminder that, again, denotes my work to advance the study's activities. While the study's initial findings were presented, initially, to OSU-OKC's campus administrators, the study's ultimate findings are presented in Chapter five and presented, later, for publication targeting individuals who seek to engage stakeholders in formal processes to disrupt work patterns and routines as the means by which to improve local practices (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Data validity and trustworthiness

In participatory action research, the knowledge generated in the context of study provides the foundation for action and change within that context (Herr & Anderson, 2005). To ensure rigor, and deeper reflection on study data, I relied on the triangulation of data from multiple sources of information that included prospect interviews, peer interviews, data analysis meetings, the presentation to campus administrators, the focus group session, the review of related literature, and my field journal; notations in my field journal offered critical, continuous reflections on the study's premise, process and practices (Dick, 1999; Mezirow, 1995; Mezirow, 1991). Herr & Anderson (2005) suggest five validity criteria that apply to action research. The criteria are outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity (2005) which I detail in Chapter three.

Study significance

This study's significance is multi-dimensional. First, this study's content contributes to three distinct areas of academic literature that include the body of knowledge associated with student retention; knowledge associated with the participatory action research methodology that seeks change as part of the research process; and knowledge associated with engaging undergraduate students in research conducted on a two-year campus. Second, the study's mechanisms achieved a social justice mission as the study facilitated the engagement of OSU-OKC's underrepresented student population in a study to improve the student experience. Four Hispanic females, average age of 19 and all first-in-family to attend college, emerged from a pool of 244 retained prospects to participate, as undergraduate research collaborators. Students, thus, served as the key sources of knowledge regarding the incidents that helped and hindered college persistence. Finally, the study is rare in that it is the first dissertation of its type to examine retained students' college-going lived realities within the OSU-OKC campus context. Furthermore, based on the extensive literature review I conducted, the study also appears to be the first of its kind to use the collaborative action research methodology to engage the student voice, and perspective, in a process that explored students' context-specific experiences as the means by which to improve student retention.

Research

The Manifesto on the Transformation of Knowledge Creation submits that action research's value stems from its concern for action within a context of practice; the practitioner's role as an agent of change; its reliance on partnership and participation; and its meaning beyond the immediate context (*AR Journal*, 2014). Regarding action within a context of practice, this

study's research significance is based on the context-specific action and change that emerged from data collection and analysis activities, and the potential for study data to inspire further change. Actions and changes generated from data analysis activities were associated with OSU-OKC's student orientation program, initiatives that celebrate student success, initiatives to help supportive others understand the high school-to-college transition, and campus-based messaging that establishes academic performance expectations while promoting student success strategies and encouragement.

Regarding the practitioner as an agent of change, the study demonstrated that my position within the study was a source of local and authentic knowledge capable of contributing to and generating action (Huang, 2010). Regarding the study's reliance on partnership and participation, the research collaborators represented the retained students' voice, and perspective, as they discovered a range of context-specific incidents that helped and hindered students' return to campus for the second fall semester. Given the study's context-centered nature, I found no formal examples in the academic literature whereby a campus administrator, as a practitioner, deployed the participatory action research methodology on a two-year, open-access college campus. Accordingly, this study's research significance is associated with its potential to encourage future researchers to consider the potential of action research as an option within the body of approaches used to investigate, in an effort to address, pressing questions on college campuses. Moreover, future applications of the methodology can elevate its position within the body of approaches.

This study's research significance also involved its practice that engaged students in an undergraduate research opportunity that was conducted on a two-year campus. The majority of scholarship on undergraduate research is seated at four year institutions and in areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) (Tuthill & Berestecky, 2017). Both quantitative and qualitative research studies document the relationship between student participation in research opportunities and the student college experience, including retention (2017). This study contributes to knowledge about the value of undergraduate research on a two-year campus.

Theory

This study transitioned from broad retention considerations, as the literature details, to context-specific findings that generated action and change. This study explored OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities via a theoretical perspective in which I, as a perceiving organ, considered the perspectives of research collaborators, also perceiving organs, in examining students' college-going lived realities and experience with the campus context, the object perceived. The study unearthed, inductively, students' college-going lived realities and incident that I then linked with contemporary student retention theories (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993); Markus and Nurius' theory of possible selves (1986); Prince's theory of possible selves and the role of place (2014); Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital (2001); college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); and the dynamics of supportive others (Fruiht, 2015).

Practice

Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is self-reflective and geared to help practitioners improve practice, the understanding of practice, and the situations in which practices are deployed. While all action research, including this study, is context-specific, its processes are instructive to practitioners in search of ways to improve practices, and situations, within the context of their respective campus environments. The study's data collection and analysis activities increased my understanding of students' experience and generated a range of actions that led to changes to augment and improve campus practices.

The study achieved its action and change agenda as findings surfaced a need to further enhance orientation week activities to help first-time students navigate the campus, and locate sources of help during the first week of classes. Study findings inspired the development of campus events to celebrate student academic success, and ways to involve parents in related events. Study findings led to the production of a video series labeled *The Language of Success* that featured Hispanic students and parents discussing their college experience and family strategies to support student success in college. The video series was made available on OSU-OKC's digital media formats and, as of this writing, two of the videos have received nearly 4,000 individual views. Study findings also led to the review of the campus' scholarships award criteria in an effort to encourage certain recipients to engage in orientation activities, mentorship programs, and retention outreach initiatives designed to help fellow students.

Collaborators who engaged in the study declared that participating encouraged them to reflect more deeply on their own reasons for attending college which strengthened, ultimately,

their resolve to complete a college degree and achieve life goals. The students also acknowledged that their involvement in data analysis process exposed their tendency to judge peer behaviors without knowing or considering the range of factors that may shape a peer's college persistence. Regarding the retention of research collaborators and peer interviewees, as of this writing Mary, Ruth and Rachel (all pseudonyms) completed their two-year degree at OSU-OKC and are now attending a four-year university. Esther has been accepted in to OSU-OKC's nursing program. Of the eight peer interviewees, two graduated from OSU-OKC, five are enrolled at OSU-OKC for the spring 2017 term, and one student did not return for the fall 2017 semester but remains in good standing with the institution. The possible benefits for students attending a two-year college who participate in undergraduate research projects is an element of study significance detailed in chapter five.

Chapter summary

The chapter presents, among other things, the participatory action research methodology, the study's methods of data collection and analysis, and a description of study implications on research, theory and practice. Study findings demonstrate that retention strategies are hidden in plain sight in the sense that OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities are a source of knowledge that can help practitioners improve campus' retention strategies and related practices. Furthermore, findings suggest that practitioners' who engage retained students as collaborators can deepen the practitioners' understanding of students' college-going lived realities while sourcing the students' perspective for ways to improve the retention experience.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City's (OSU-OKC) student retention rate mirrors the two-year system's national retention metric in that fewer than half of all first-time students return to the campus for their second fall semester (OSU-OKC, 2014; AACC, 2012). OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of retention persists, as it does on like campuses, despite administrative access to the results of nationally-normed student engagement surveys, two-year college best practices, and access to new knowledge added, annually, to the body of retention literature (Fike & Fike, 2008). In an effort to counter OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of student retention, this participatory action research study engaged OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, in an iterative cycle of activities that collected, helped analyze, and act upon the retention experiences of their peers. This study's collaborative methodology generated three distinct cycles of activity. Each cycle informed a progressive literature review that unfolded across the study (Dick, 2009).

Community college system history and evolution

America's community college system is a network of two-year institutions of higher education that is governed by an open-access admission policy that assures all segments of society equal access to post-secondary education (AACC, 2014). The system offered general education courses from its beginning in 1901 until the 1930s when it integrated skills training programs that were responsive to the nation's economic downturn of the Great Depression era (2015). The system evolved, again, following World War II when the Truman Commission established a network of public, two-year colleges designed to serve the labor demands of the local community (2015). At present, the system educates more than half of the country's undergraduate students at over 1,600 sites across the United States (2015). The system's open-access admission policy ensures public access to secondary education. However, the policy yields a student population that possesses a range of characteristics and experiences that manifest, often and in interaction with institutional factors, as barriers to retention and degree completion (Nakajima, 2012).

Possible selves and the role of place

Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that one's *possible self* is the product of self-relevant cognitions of who one might become, who one wants to become, and who one is afraid of becoming. The cognitions represent one's individually significant hopes, goals and aspirations, fantasies, fears and threats (1986). Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that one's *possible self* acts as a type of cognitive bridge that links an individual's *current self* to a *possible self*. The authors add that the cognitive bridge is constructed from two different self-schemas, procedural and conceptual, that contain sets of behaviors needed to attain or avoid a *possible self*. Ozaki (2016)

argues that one's prior experience, across time, informs one's construction of self-schemas that scaffold knowledge of his or her domain-specific ability. Ozaki (2016) suggests that the scaffold provides direction, form and meaning to inform one's assessment of his or her present abilities in order to attain or avoid a *possible self.* Regarding procedural and conceptual self-schemas, Ozaki (2016) describes one's procedural self-schema as the plans, procedures, and behavior strategies enacted to achieve goals. Conceptual self-schemas are described as the frameworks, models and ideas developed to represent and organize information (2016). In this study, I explored OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities and reviewed interview transcriptions for examples that made visible the cognitive bridge and associated self-schemas that link students' *current self* to their *possible self.* In doing so, I examined how students' self-relevant cognitions (who one might become, who one wants to become, and who one is afraid of becoming) perhaps influence their return to college for the second fall semester (2016).

Prince suggests that one's visioning of their possible self (Who will I be?) is "inextricably bound with place" (Where will I be?) (2014, p. 697). Prince argues that "physical environments are not inert backdrops against which social life unfolds, but rather it is in the transactions between people and their everyday socio-physical environments that identity is created" (2014, p. 698). Prince adds that one's relationship to place incorporates place-related symbols, affects and beliefs that are "preconscious emotional landscapes and embodiments" (2014, p. 698). Dixon and Durrheim (2004) suggest that one's place identity is derived from "familiarity or insideedness" that results from operating within a physical environment. Place identity also involves one's sense of belonging within the physical environment derived from one's

development of a relationship with place, over time. Place identity also encompasses the ways in which the physical environment carries symbolic meaning as it relates to self (2004) and involves the physical environment's role in facilitating the achievement of identity-relevant projects (2004). Accordingly, place identity reflects the process of incorporating the physical environment of one's daily life into self, and *possible self* (Krupat, 1983; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). In this project, many of OSU-OKC's retained students still live at home, work part-time jobs, and are full-time students. Students possess different place identities that are the product of the respective environment's unique responsibilities, traditions and expectations that are negotiated and reconciled elements of the students' *possible self* (Tinto, 1987).

Prince suggests that social representations of place can be a source of tension between one's community identity, love of place, and place belonging (2014). Prince argues that the tension originates from entrenched social hierarchies that are structural and systemic (Furumoto-Dawson et al., 2007). Prince (2014) writes that examples of placed-based experiences are entrapment and restriction and that the experiences can become part of one's *current self* and may also be part of one's *possible self.* Prince (2014) argues that places are "always reflective of and constituted within, and by, relations of power" (p. 709) and that one's place identity can affirm and nourish, but also oppress (Kemp, 2010). OSU-OKC's retained students who still live at home may experience tension between their community identity, love of place, and place belonging; especially when faced with the potential for entrapment and restriction in the home environment and love of place, and place belonging in the college environment. The negotiation of place identity and associated tensions are, perhaps, touchstones as students negotiate the self-

relevant cognitions of who they might become, who they want to become, and who they are afraid of becoming (Ozaki, 2016).

Social and cultural capital

However, Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) posit that "The presence of high aspirations does not mean that all high aspiring students know how to translate their aspirations into realities" (p. 6). Elder (1998) suggests that "All life choices are contingent on the opportunities and constraints of social structure and culture" (p. 2). Regarding college persistence and retention, research studies have found that students who are first-in-family to enter college may not have access to social networks or cultural knowledge that is needed to acquire information necessary to succeed in college (Ceja, 2006; Gonzales et al., 2003; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Bourdieu (2001) describes social capital as a set of durable, deliberate, institutionalized relationships through which individuals can accrue benefits. Saunders (1997) suggests that an individual's social capital is determined according to the size of their network, the capital that individuals possess within the network, and one's ability to mobilize the network to facilitate action (Serna, 2004; Coleman, 1988). Social capital includes the unspoken obligations and expectations between community members, the associated information channels, and the norms and actions that are the community's mechanism to monitor, reward, or punish behaviors that shape the community's nature (Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu (1986) describes cultural capital as one's assets that are associated with family or social position. Bourdieu lists three forms of cultural capital that include the tangible (as

represented in books and pictures), institutionalized (as represented in credentials or awards), and habitus (dispositions of mind and body) (1986).

Students who are first-in-family to attend college may not possess sufficient social and cultural capital to succeed in college. In fact, students who are first-in-family may not have access to an educational memory, or a generational experience of higher education (Ball et al., 2002). Accordingly, students who are first-in-family to attend college may have an educational and work trajectory, *a possible self*, that is constrained by their family history and social stratification that manifests as structural forces beyond their control (2002). However, Reyes (2012) suggests that students without an education memory often channel their parent's work ethic and determination rather than the social and cultural capital that a parent is unable to provide. While students may channel their parent's work ethic and determination, O'Shea (2016) claims that students' without an educational memory possess a habitus, or disposition of the mind (Bourdieu, 1986), that can impact their ability to decode college's hidden curriculum. O'Shea (2016) found that first-in-family students reported a sense of disorientation during the initial weeks of the semester due to uncertainty with the language and timing of campus processes linked to enrollment and financial aid. First-in-family students also reported feelings of loneliness and isolation during the initial weeks of the semester that underscored a sense of lacking entitlement to college entry and the pursuit of a degree (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). Given this study's focus on OSU-OKC's retained students, students' social and cultural capital, and cognitive dispositions associated, inform self-relevant cognitions of the *possible self* and, consequently, the decision to return to campus for the second fall term.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework

Yosso (2005) referenced Bourdieu's notion of social and cultural capital as the basis for his work to offer an alternate concept of cultural capital. Yosso (2005) posits that his Community Cultural Wealth framework (CCW) uses, as a conceptual base, one's experiential knowledge, or agency, instead of Bourdieu's emphasis on culture that invokes structural forces that are beyond one's control (Pitman, 2013). Regarding agency, Bandura (2006) describes agentic behaviors, or agency, as one's act of causing change in their circumstances. Bandura (2006) submits that agentic behavior is a cognitive process that involves a plan of action; forethought to identify outcomes on which to base actions; self-regulation to prioritize and allocate resources to achieve outcomes; and self-examination to assess one's actions and abilities. Yosso's framework that uses one's agency as the conceptual base, presents six forms of cultural capital that are aspirational, resistance, linguistic, navigational, social and familial. Each of these forms of cultural capital may help explore retained students' cognitive bridge that links their *current self* to the *possible self*. For example, aspiration capital refers to one's ability to preserve hope and dreams despite obstacles that are real or perceived (2005). Resistance capital relates to one's disposition that informs behaviors that challenge the status quo (2005). Linguistic capital involves the strength of one's communication skills that include bilingualism and storytelling (2005). Navigational capital refers to one's navigation of social institutions, as premised upon individual agency and social networks (2005). Social capital refers to one's network that presents practical and embodied support (2005). Finally, familial capital includes family and friends and recognizes the family's collective knowledge (2005). Yosso's

Community Cultural Wealth framework may help explain OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities as students narrate the range of experiences that help and hinder their return to campus for the second fall semester.

Critical theory

Horkheimer (1937) argues that knowledge is nested within social and historical process and that, "The facts which our sense present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ" (p. 233). Horkheimer (1937) argues that critical theory can challenge the status quo, destabilize established knowledge, explain a social problem, and display relevant possibilities capable of improving human existence" (Horkheimer 1937, p. 233). In Rush's (2004) review of Horkheimer, he submits that critical theory is an "account of the social forces of domination that takes its theoretical activity to be practically connected to the object of its study (p. 9). Rush adds, "The theory is not merely descriptive, it is a way to instigate social change by providing knowledge of the forces of social inequality that can, in turn, inform political action aimed at emancipation" (p. 9). This study's application of Critical theory seeks contradictions in the status quo and solutions to resolve such contradictions (Rush, 2004).

Contemporary student retention theories

Tinto's Interactionalist model

Bensimon (2007) suggests that Tinto's Interactionalist model is one of the most examined and critiqued models in the retention literature. Reyes (2012) adds that Tinto's theory has been so widely used that its central ideas have become common knowledge in higher education.

Tinto's model suggests that students' enter college with a variety of characteristics (race, gender, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and parent educational levels that impact their commitment to an institution and their completion of a degree (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). The model suggests that students, while in college, progress through three stages; separation, transition and integration. The model's separation phase occurs when a student disassociates themselves from the norms, values and behaviors representing "membership in the communities of the past" such as family, high school, and formal residence (1987, p. 95). As many two-year colleges are not residential campuses, traditional age students may still live at home and non-traditional students may have a family and home of their own. A student enters the model's transition phase after completed the separation phase, but has yet to adopt, fully, the behavioral patterns and norms of the new environment (Tinto, 1987). As stated, traditional age students who still live at home report an inability to engage, fully, into the campus environment due to family and employment responsibilities that compete for time. Accordingly, the context of the two-year campus demands retention practices that are responsive to this student dynamic.
The integration phase is marked as an individual replaces prior behavioral patterns and norms with those appropriate to the campus' intellectual and social system (Tinto, 1987). The interactionalist model argues that student integration contains two elements; academic and social (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) suggests that academic integration occurs when students attach to the intellectual elements of the college and that social integration occurs when students' develop relationships outside of class (1993). Tinto's model acknowledges that the campus' intellectual and social systems are nested within the external environment that operates according to its own

patterns and values (1987). Accordingly, students' operate as a member of the campus community and its external environment, and students' consider each environment when reconciling commitments, goals, and interactions (1987).

Karp, Hughes & O'Gara (2010) suggest that Tinto's model is applicable to the two-year college environment. Karp, Hughes & O'Gara (2010) argue that students' attending a two-year college report participation in information networks described as "social ties that facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge and procedures" (p. 76). The study found that the information networks helped students "navigate the campus environment, access knowledge about the college, create a sense of social belonging, and feel that there are people who care about their academic welfare" (p. 84). However, Wild & Ebbers (2002) submit that contemporary theories of student retention are derived from research studies involving traditional age students attending a four-year campus, and residing in university housing. Consequently, the authors argue that such studies may yield theories that do not readily apply to the dynamic context of the two-year college campus that serves a non-traditional student population (Mohammadi 1996). Deil-Amen (2011) argues the need for an alternate model to fill in gaps Tinto's presentation of academic and social integration do not address. Deil-Amen (2011) argues that, on a two-year campus, the constructs of academic integration and social integration do not function in isolation but can be fused to create socio-academic integrative moments that blend academic and social integration elements into a single encounter that occurs within the campus learning environment.

Astin's involvement theory

Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) describes involvement in terms of the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student invests in his or her academic experience. Astin's theory presents five categories of student involvement that include academic, faculty, peers, work, and activities outside of school (1984). Astin suggests that involvement is assessed in general or specific terms as one's expenditure of physical and psychological energy occurs along a continuum with varying energy levels assigned to different objects at different times (1984). Astin's theory fails to reference the absence of energy or how students determine how much energy to expend, and at what times and how students' knowledge and experience informs the expenditure of energy and the measurement of expected outcomes. Wirt & Jaeger (2014) applied Astin's involvement theory on a two-year campus when they examined faculty student interaction. The authors acknowledged that Tinto's academic and social integration elements informed their study as students' investment of energy into the academic experience aligns with Tinto's academic integration element. The quantitative study found that student grade point average (GPA), participation in an orientation program, and participation in a learning community were significant predictors of faculty student interactions and, thus, potential activities that college administrators should consider incentivizing as a means by which to increase faculty student interactions inside and outside the classroom, and in online course formats.

College choice model

The college choice model consists of three phases that involve the development of aspirations, college search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). In the first phase, students'

embrace college aspirations and prepare for the application process. In the college search phase, students' gather information about colleges and develop a list of possible colleges to apply (Roberts & Lattin, 1997). The third phase is choice and represents the list of colleges that have granted admission, and involves the student's choice to attend one of the colleges (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Reyes (2012) argues that one's access to social and cultural capital can limit his or her familiarity with educational options, norms, and processes which can, perhaps, influence which college they attend and the type of academic program in which they enroll.

Bui (2002) found that that first-generation students' reported being from low socioeconomic backgrounds; spoke a language other than English; and were pursuing degrees to help their families. In addition they reported being more likely to attend a two-year college because they were not prepared, academically, for a four-year university; they were concerned with college affordability; and they required a flexible schedule to accommodate their life. Reyes (2012) suggested that students' financial situation and personal responsibilities are prime factors in the choice of college to pursue a degree. Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, and Yeung (2007) expand the factors suggesting that a student may enroll in a college that is close to home as a means by which to avoid costs associated with campus residency.

Cox (2016) applied the college choice model in her longitudinal study exploring high school students' postsecondary educational plan and interruptions to the students' plans. Cox (2016) labeled the interruptions as complicating conditions and developed three categories; residential mobility (moving), complicated family configurations (guardianship), and financial exigencies (transportation, work obligations, pressure to contribute to the household income).

Cox (2016) challenged the disconnect between research centered on postsecondary access, and research centered on postsecondary success that would involve students' navigation of complicating conditions.

Constellations of support

This study explores the college-going lived realities of OSU-OKC's retained students to understand the incidents that help and hinder student retention and to discover their ideas to improve the experience. This study's purpose does not contribute to the narrative that blames students for an achievement gap, but suggests that students can succeed with appropriate, context-specific support. O'Shea (2016) suggests that higher education institutions provide students with a legitimate form of cultural capital as a means by which to expedite their academic and social integration into the campus. However, Bejarano and Valverde suggest that universities that embrace this practice set about manufacturing sameness in the first year in an effort to acculturate students to the campus environment that, as a result, removes students from familial and social contexts. OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of student retention highlights its need to examine students' networks of support that foster college persistence.

Fruiht (2015) argues that the majority of academic research has centered on formal mentoring programs while Liang (et al., 2008) broadened the mentor definition to include supportive others such as parents, relatives and friends. Fruiht's study (2015) incorporated Liang's broadened mentor definition and found that students' named their parents as a primary source of support and received guidance from parents in areas that include goal setting, value exploration and problem solving. Fruiht's finding positions parents as important touchstone

within contemporary models of student retention that emphasize students' need to set goals, identify a support network, and connect to the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Fruiht's study (2015) also introduced *hope* as a two-part construct made up of *agency* and *pathways* (Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder et al. (1991) describes agency as one's drive to accomplish a goal, and describes pathways as one's ability to identify ways to complete the goal. The authors suggest that hopeful students are better prepared to establish and achieve goals and, therefore, are more likely to persist in college (Snyder et al., 2002, 1991). Fruiht (2015) posits that mentors can help students develop and maintain hope as the cultivation process relies on modeling and support for hopeful thinking (Elliott & Sherwin, 1997). However, parents of first-generation college students may lack a perspective to help set goals, identify a support network, or connect to the institution which, in turn, limits parents' ability to cultivate hope as the product of agency and pathways. Fruiht (2015) argues that institutions should identify ways to resource parents with information that helps them mentor, more effectively, their student.

Undergraduate Research Experience

Tuthill and Berestecky (2017) suggest that while nearly half of all college students in the U.S. are enrolled in two-year colleges, the colleges are often omitted from discussions of topical and advanced research, grant opportunities, conferences and innovative research platforms. The authors cite studies in which undergraduate research conducted on a four-year campus has led to improved retention and program completion rates in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas (2017). The improved rates were based on undergraduate research as a mechanism that facilitated student academic and social integration as the agendas are linked to

improved student retention (Gregerman, et al., 1998; Tinto, 1993). Hensel & Cejda (2015) point to a partnership between the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA) that works to increase undergraduate research in community colleges. The partnership's objective is to provide community colleges with support to develop an undergraduate research program that embeds research projects into academic courses in order to engage the greatest number of students (2017). The two-year campus is, perhaps, an environment that is conducive to the embrace of a research plan due to smaller class sizes and flexible course structures that can incorporate undergraduate research opportunities (Labov, 2012; Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Given that students' participation in undergraduate research improves their problem solving skills, links academic experiences to the world of work, and improve student retention, undergraduate research opportunities on a two-year college campus is one of many ways to the retention experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City (OSU-OKC) is a two-year college that is governed by an open access admission policy that assures all segments of society equal and affordable access to post-secondary education (OSU-OKC, 2014; AACC, 2014). The institution's student retention rate mirrors the two-year system's national retention metric as fewer than half of all its first-time students return to campus for their second fall semester (OSU-OKC, 2014, AACC, 2012). OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of retention persists, as it does on like-campuses across the country, despite administrative access to best practices; access to student responses to nationally normed engagement surveys; and access to new knowledge generated from academic research (Fike & Fike, 2008). In an effort to counter OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of student retention, I initiated this participatory action research study. The study disrupted my traditional work routines and patterns as I engaged OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, in activities to collect, analyze, and act upon findings so as to improve students' retention experience. In this study, I also examined the experiences of the retained students who served alongside me as research collaborators.

Research Design

This study was based on the philosophical tenets of constructionism which suggest that an individual constructs truth or meaning as he or she is engaging with the world (Crotty, 1998). This epistemology suggests, too, that individuals co-create meaning, socially, with others who are also engaging in the world in which they are interpreting (Jha, 2012; Crotty 1998). Crotty suggests that singular or social constructions of truth manifest as a culture of meaning as individuals' access, inhabit, and are embedded within public and conventional frameworks of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Fish, 1990). Crotty clarifies that despite the existence and accessibility of such public and conventional frameworks individuals who are similarly situated can "construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, p 9). This study's purpose examined the college-going lived realities of OSU-OKC's retained students in an effort to understand how they construct meaning associated with their retention experience.

Theoretical Framework

The study's is embedded within a critical perspective and a critical framework. In his book *Traditional and Critical Theory*, Horkheimer (1937) argued that knowledge is nested within social and historical process and that, "The facts which our sense present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ" (p. 233). Horkheimer (1937) argues that critical theory has potential to challenge the status quo, destabilize established knowledge, explain a social problem, and present solutions that have the potential of improving human existence (Horkheimer 1937, p. 233). Critical Theory is appropriate to this study's purpose to explore

students' college-going lived realities as the basis for action and change. The study's findings, which emerged from student interactions with the history, traditions, and realities of the campus environment made it possible to identify and consider retention strategies capable of disrupting the status quo in an effort to improve students' experience.

Qualitative Approach

This study's qualitative design established a path of inquiry to investigate the college-going lived realities of OSU-OKC's retained students. The qualitative design positioned me as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (2009); however, this study's action research methodology permitted me to engage OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, in activities to collect and analyze data – tasks traditionally the purview of the trained researcher. My use of Critical Theory as a guide for disrupting the history and tradition of OSU-OKC's student retention strategies had implications beyond the study. That I was out of step with tradition became evident in my proposal meeting with my faculty committee. The informal and collaborative nature of action research, while a strong match with my research problem and study purpose was at odds with traditional research practices and, as a student new to participatory action research, I found that it was difficult, initially, for me to adequately and confidently explain to others my intended role and the roles of the students. However, approval was granted and I proceeded with a study that taught me that, in addition to collaborating with students as the study's instruments of data collection and analysis, I was also positioned as chief coordinator, teacher, coach, and cheerleader for my co-researchers and, in some occasions, my committee.

Despite the lack of formal, extended training for my co-researchers, my engagement of students led, ultimately, to a messy but ultimately productive research process that was uniquely suited to achieve this study's purpose. The study's integration of students, as collaborators, and the data they generated, reflected Patton's argument that the "quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (2002, p. 341). In this case, the potential issue of my co-researchers limited training was somewhat juxtaposed with their unique positionality as students themselves – students with unique insights, an interest in disrupting tradition as a means by which to improve experience, and access to fellow students that I, likely, could not have otherwise achieved.

Action Research Methodology

This study's purpose was focused on the college-going lived realities of OSU-OKC's retained students to understand their constructions of truth within the campus context. Students' constructions of truth were revealed as they offered examples of incidents that that helped and hindered their returns to campus. The study's purpose also explored students' ideas to improve the retention experience. Accordingly, the study's application of the participatory action research methodology was responsive to the study's purpose as it acknowledged my concern for practicality, engaged retained students as actors located within the local context, and collected students' college-going lived realities. These factors made it possible to consider disruptive, context-specific retention strategies that were responsive to students' realities (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe participatory action research as a "form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162). Dick (2014) suggests that participatory action research may take on several forms as a study's design may emphasize action with research as the byproduct, or action research may emphasize research with action as the byproduct. In this study, the latter (research with action as the byproduct) was the focus.

My choice of participatory action research as a methodology positioned me, as a Vice President of the institution, alongside study participants to carry out iterative cycles of activity that involved elements of planning, action, and reflection in the form of group discussion during team meetings and in my reflexive journal maintained throughout the study. Hilser (2006) argues that making explicit my unique positionality within a study is positive and necessary in action research. Moreover, my collaboration with study participants presents an opportunity to explore OSU-OKC's context, relationships, and history in a unique way given that each party's knowledge and perspectives contribute to the inquiry. In addition to the benefits accrued to the organization and to the students who were the focus of the study, Patton (2002) posits that action research is also capable of changing the lives of collaborating participants. Patton's supposition is the basis for this study's second research question that examined the experiences of students who served as collaborators.

The participatory action research methodology is often referred to as a messy approach to investigating a phenomenon because it relies on non-linear, collaborative work that is necessary

in order to progress through iterative cycles of activity to disrupt the status quo (Davis, 2004). I discovered that it was, in part, the cyclical and emergent nature of action research that created unique space for discussing and disturbing traditional organizational thinking, in this case about student retention at a two-year college campus (Cook, 2009; Cornwall, 1995). Throughout the study, I reviewed a number of action research projects for guidance and, at times, comfort. However, no completed project that I reviewed either captured or conveyed the degree of stress and anxiety associated with the methodology's use and effort to establish and sustain collaboration. I have documented my experience with the methodology in this study's statement of researcher subjectivity.

This study placed no *a priori* constraints upon data collection and data analysis procedures. This approach granted me, and the collaborators, the freedom to explore retained students' experiences unconstrained by previous theoretical perspectives (McTaggart, 1991; Patton, 2002). However, researchers must articulate purpose and make explicit their approach in order to establish a framework of design that includes processes and representation (Avison et. al., 1999). Accordingly, I planned three distinct cycles of activities, outlined in the following paragraphs, with each cycle containing elements of planning, action, literature review, and reflection. I incorporated a progressive literature review that unfolded with each cycle of activity (2009). The literature review was structured, initially, in a linear fashion that aligned literature with the cycle and activity that inspired its review. However, the approach produced a rigid and, at times, confusing system of headings and subheadings that emphasized the methodology's iterative cycles and activities rather than articulating and emphasizing, first and foremost, the

body of knowledge that supported the study's purpose and findings. I did not believe that the product of this approach was reflective of the fluid and emergent nature of action research. Consequently, the initial structure was substituted for a more traditional and overarching format that grounded the study's work.

Subjectivity/Researcher Statement

As a student services practitioner working at a two-year, open admission campus I am concerned with my institution's stagnant rate of student retention as student access does not translate, directly, to student success. I reviewed, thoroughly, the body of literature pertaining to student retention and selected the participatory action research methodology to disrupt my professional reality in an effort to identify and attempt to explain the context-specific forces beneath OSU-OKC's stagnant rate. Bergold and Thomas (2012) submit that the participatory action research methodology facilitates the suspension of familiar routines, interactions and power dynamics as the methodology invites its practitioners to release "unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology" (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998; Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 192). Chipchase (2013) cites this type of work as, "scratching beneath the surface to find realities in bits and pieces and to use those bits and pieces to see the world in a richer, more textured way" (p. 3).

I never attended a two-year college but I have a college degree and, therefore, I have my own set of experiences that helped and hindered my educational journey. The social and cultural capital that I possess is derived from my identity as a Native American male with dominant Caucasian features; a native English speaker; an individual with multiple degrees and, now,

completing the requirements of a doctoral program; a professional earning a professional salary; and as an administrator employed at a two-year college. I am invested, both personally and professionally, in the study's purpose, its setting, and its outcomes. I am responsible for directing campus programs and services associated with marketing academic programs, student recruitment, admissions, advisement, career services, veterans' services, financial aid, campus life, the testing center, and the office of the registrar. I am also responsible for co-directing the office of institutional effectiveness to ensure the accurate and timely submission of campus data to state and federal reporting agencies. Finally, I am responsible for supervising three federally funded TRIO grant programs that include Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services.

My position within the study, as researcher and practitioner, afforded me an opportunity to insert a degree of authenticity into the process of identifying and exploring context-specific incidents pertaining to student retention. I reviewed a number of published action research studies while preparing this body of work. Based on the review, I believed that my project's strength and ultimate actions to improve students' retention experience would inspire and sustain student engagement throughout the study. I also believed that I could achieve a true sense of collaboration whereby retained students would share ownership and power over the project to help guide its trajectory toward an unexpected end. However, my beliefs were based on a series of incorrect assumptions. I now realize that the studies I reviewed either demonstrate, completely, the perfect application of action research or some omissions in research reports of instances of operational messiness that disrupted the study's progress and completion.

In retrospect, I submit that my failure to source documented evidence of a study's operational messiness prolonged my naivety and belief that my project's strength would inspire and sustain student collaboration across multiple academic terms. Moreover, my failure to source documented evidence of complexity prolonged my frustration with the study given my unsuccessful attempts to share power toward the achievement of genuine collaboration. In the end, I realized that students' busy schedules and newness to the research process drove them to rely on me to direct the study. In contrast, my project's success hinged, entirely, on retained students' willingness to volunteer and participate in a range of activities across the study's duration. Despite my questioning my work routines, daily interactions and observations, and my interpretations of situations in search for new insights capable of helping improve students' retention experience, no published study or action research book reviewed prepared me for the reality of conducting an action research study. In contrast, this study strives to achieve total transparency, to help other researchers, as it documents the complexity manifesting as operational twists and turns that influenced the study's progress.

Four Hispanic females at the average of 19 agreed to serve as study collaborators. I was familiar with the students' presence on campus but did not know them personally. Initially, I considered revising the study's purpose to emphasize the role of Hispanic females within the study. I believed it appropriate, rather, to credit the methodology's mechanics responsible for facilitating the voluntary assembly of Hispanic females who were willing to participate in the study's data collection and analysis activities. I also believed it appropriate to permit the collaborators and peer interviews to determine how prominent the race and biological sex

characteristics would be within the study. I believed, initially, that the students were attracted to the opportunity to participate in an undergraduate research project but found, later, that they recognized my institutional positional authority and wanted to help or a peer encouraged them to participate. In fact, the students voiced concern at the length and weight of the solicitation email they had received but agreed to participate because they believed I needed help.

Study collaborators and peer interviewees had unique and complicated routines which made it difficult for me to plan study activities around students' school, work, and family responsibilities. My understanding and observation of these routines made it difficult for me to engage collaborators in study activities also influenced how the collaborators, in turn, worked to engage interviewees. For example, at one point in the study the collaborators wanted to meet and discuss the data collected. The audio-recorded discussion produced two, full pages of transcription as student comments melded into a blur of comments such as I'm here at this time, not then, I have work, I pick up my brother, could you bring your brother, what if we did it later, I have class, etc. In these instances of negotiating research logistics, I was forced to make decisions to progress the study while adjusting my expectations of collaborators (such as preparing the data for discussion) that troubled my intent to achieve full collaboration.

My greatest source of anxiety during the study was a realization that students' busy schedules could overpower their interest in the study and my attempt to share power toward full collaboration. However, the source of my anxiety evolved over the course of the study as I later questioned my ability to adequately represent, in written form, participants' complex lives, their hopes and dreams, and their relentless commitment to college completion. I maintained a

reflexive journal throughout the study to capture my decision making processes and evolution of personal thoughts.

This study is a story of students whose lived realities unfolded before me as I observed instances of student resilience, grit, and commitment that were, at times, beyond my immediate comprehension. The study is exemplary of the presence of multiple layers of complex and interacting student characteristics can be neither defined by a single data point, nor assessed for value in isolation from the whole. This study presents empirical evidence of the benefits of student and practitioner partnership to improve the student experience and, ultimately, student retention. It is quite possible that had the composition of collaborators differed, so too, would the data and the final product of co-researcher analysis. While this study's elements surfaced the influence of my positional authority and students' race, these students and I, together, inhabit the same time and context that is the OSU-OKC campus environment. Accordingly, together we interacted and constructed joint truths within a defined context.

Data Collection

In this study, I used a variety of forms of interviews, both one-on-one and group, to carry out data collection. I implemented the various interview methods across three cycles, detailed later in this chapter in a section titled, Iterative Cycles of Study Activity. This section presents a general overview of my data collection activities.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews

Through various one-on-one interview activities across the study's three cycles, I used the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) to inform and guide collecting and analysis of

incidents that retained students cited as helping or hindering their returns for the second fall semester, and to discover their ideas to improve the experience. Flanagan (1954) describes ECIT as a "Set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p. 327).

The types and timing of all interview activities constituting the three cycles are summarized as follows: I conducted ten semi-structured, individual interviews to identify a team of four collaborators. In turn, the collaborators conducted eight peer interviews. I conducted eight informal de-briefing conversations with each co-researcher following their peer interviews. I also conducted one informal conversation with a student who wanted to share his story with me, and whose vignette is presented in chapter four. In sum, this study's contains 32 documented interview-based interactions with OSU-OKC's retained students, each of which was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Group and Focus Group

The research team presented its initial findings to OSU-OKC campus administrators and guests in an exchange that was recorded and transcribed. The team's presentation occurred in May 2016 prior to the start of the summer break. Additionally, I conducted a one-hour focus group with the collaborators following their presentation to campus administrators and guests. The session collected co-researcher reflections and descriptions of their range of experiences across the duration of the collaborative project. The focus group session offered additional insights as to the collaborators' experience in the study. . The session was also dialogue related

to the study's catalytic validity criterion that considered participants' understanding of and impact on the phenomenon (APPENDIX G).

Iterative Cycles of Study Activity

Cycle 1

Recruitment strategy: Identify and seat a team of collaborators

This study enlisted the help of OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, to capture and help analyze the retention experiences of their peers. I used purposive sampling technique to ensure that participant contributions aligned with and supported the examination of OSU-OKC's student retention experiences (Patton, 2002). The study also subscribed to the homogeneous sampling technique to assure that all participants met the classification of (a) first-time students having attempted no prior credit hours, (b) enrolled at full-time status in a minimum of twelve credit hours, (c) registered as a member of OSU-OKC's formal census count for the fall 2014 term, and (d) registered as a member of OSU-OKC's formal census count for the fall 2015 academic term.

In September 2015, I secured Institution Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study. I, then, secured a dataset from OSU-OKC's office of institutional effectiveness that included the names and contact information for 244 retained students who met the study's eligibility criteria. I solicited, via campus email and using my IRB invitation (Appendix D), retained students to participate in a one hour, on-campus interview. I concluded each interview with an invitation to join the study as a collaborator to help me collect and explore student retention experiences as the basis for action and change. While I sought to attract a pool of

potential collaborators that represented the demographic profile of OSU-OKC's student body, I interviewed the first ten students who were able to commit to a scheduled interview time (Table 1.1).

Prospect interview transcription and analysis

I used an interview guide to conduct ten, semi-structured interviews in a vacant staff office on the Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City campus. The office had a desk and two guest chairs but was otherwise void of decorations. The ten interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed each interview and conducted a line-by-line review to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Themes that emerged from the data informed the study's literature review that I conducted across the study's activities and present, formally, in Chapter two. I invited all ten interviewees to join me as a research collaborator and all ten students indicated they were interested in participating. After numerous reminders, four students, all of whom knew me or knew each other, agreed to serve as collaborators. Essentially, the collaborators made the decision to participate as a team – arriving at the decision as a group rather than joining one by one. The four students agreed to participate in a training and implementation workshop, to conducting peer interviews (which included a total of eight additional students), and to engage in data analysis and representation activities (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

	2015 retained students (n=244)		Prospects (n=10)			Collaborators (n=5)			Peer interviews (n=8)	
Age (average)	23		21			19			20	
Ethnicity	Caucasian	37%	Hispanic	6	60%	Hispanic	5	100%	Hispanic	5 62.5%
	Hispanic	28%	Caucasian	3	30%	Caucasian	0	0%	Caucasian	2 25%
	Multi-Racial	17%	Asian	1	10%	Asian	0	0%	African Amer.	1 12.5%
	African Amer.	8%								
	Asian	3%								
	Native American	3%								
	Other	3%								
Gender	M	43%	F	8	80%	F	4	100%	F	6 75%
	F	57%	M	2	20%	M	0	0%	M	2 25%

Despite the literature's broad reference to the methodology's messy and labor intensive approach (Davis, 2004), and despite the early signs that things would not go as neatly as planned, neither I nor the student collaborators understood, fully, the time and effort required until the study was well underway. After the co-researcher workshop and after completing one peer interview, one collaborator withdrew from the study due to an overwhelming family situation; this reduced the number of co-researchers to three.

Collaborators received no financial incentive or course credit incentive to participate in the study. However, as an informal form of reciprocity at the study's end, I helped each collaborator translate their research experiences for use on resumes and scholarship applications. At the study's end, I also offered to write letters of recommendation in future, as needed. As of this writing, three collaborators are attending a four-year university and one collaborator has been accepted into the OSU-OKC nursing program.

Introduction of collaborators

Each collaborator possesses a unique set of life experiences that informed how they construct meaning and co-create meaning with others. The following section introduces each

collaborator via a brief vignette. Each vignette contains the collaborator's demographic description, reference to high school activities, and accounts of school, family, and work responsibilities. Each vignette also includes statements that detail motives for attending college and incidents that helped or hindered college persistence. The vignettes are data points that are responsive to the second research question that explores collaborator experience across the study.

Mary

I am a 20 year old Hispanic female who graduated from a local high school with a 3.9 grade point average. I was the student council secretary, on the year book staff, and played tennis and golf. I also took advanced placement (AP) classes. I've been a very quiet student my whole life so my involvement in extra-curricular activities pushed me to be more outgoing. During high school, I worked between ten and twenty-five hours a week at a themed restaurant that caters to families, specifically kids. The restaurant requires its patrons to register at the point of entry, and receive a wrist band. Patrons must pass a security checkpoint prior to exiting. Because of this checkpoint system, a lot of people use the restaurant to facilitate Department of Human Services (DHS) child custody visitations. While working, I saw how a lot of children were treated by the foster parent and by the real parent. It scared me because I saw some pretty bad things.

I live with my mom and my twelve year old brother. My mom works hard and I have learned a lot by watching her. She didn't go to college so she pushed me to get an education. Since I'm the oldest, I have to be an example for my brother. I tell my brother that he has to go to school but he may need, instead, the structure that comes from serving in the military. I

wanted to go to college in Stillwater but I chose OSU-OKC because the campus is smaller, closer to my home, and it is less expensive. If I could do it over again then I would probably go to Stillwater so I could start to distance myself from my mom. While my mom is my biggest support, she is also my biggest crutch. It is just my mom and my brother at home and I don't want to leave them.

I now work at Target and I need a degree if I want to become a team leader. I could work there for twenty years and never move up if I did not have a degree. I don't want my lack of having a degree to be a rock in my road. I have heard a lot of people say that they don't want to go to school, or that they had a husband to pay the bills. I have even heard some students say that they go to school because they want to make their parents happy. I think that people need goals and something to work toward. I do not want to be working at Target. I do not want to be dependent. I want to make it on my own. I know my goals.

This semester has been better for me because now I know what I actually want to do. My current job is close to a major hospital so I get to talk to a lot of doctors and nurses. It's nice to interact with them because it's not like they are a guest but like a person that you meet. They are why I want to do something to help people. I'm majoring in public service and will get a certificate in non-profit management. I will then transfer to a four-year university to complete a bachelor's degree and master's degree so that I can be a counselor. I want to work with children served through the state's child welfare agency. Currently, I volunteer at a non-profit that helps Hispanic people and I want to help families who are in trouble with the child welfare agency to the point that they may get their children taken away.

Ruth

I am a 19 year old Hispanic female who graduated from a local charter school with a 3.5 grade point average. I was the honor society president. I am the first in my family to go to college. I have figured out how to balance family, school, and work as those are the three things that are the most important to me. I work about twenty to twenty-five hours per week. I'm pretty stable with my job so I don't move around much. I love doing what I do. I love being here at school, too.

My mom is my other half. She's the right arm of the house and the one who does everything. She's the one who has been telling me to go to college; to not be like my brothers. I have a brother who is 28 and a brother who is 26. They are good people but they just made bad choices. They have really influenced me in a lot of ways and their decisions had a negative effect on me. I do not want to be where they are. Everyone makes mistakes, but I want to be the improvement in the family and I want to be that pride and joy to my parents. My oldest brother has kids. I want to show my nieces that they can do it. It's hard, but I want them to see that they can push through it. I'm the example.

I knew that I had to go to college but I did not have a reason for doing it; like the why. It takes time to find your reason. I think that life experiences led me to a realization that the things that happened to me, happened to me for a reason and college is where I need to be. I mentioned my brothers making bad choices, at first I thought that I just needed to work and help my mom work through the problems they were going through. But I realized that if I quit school then I would be throwing away everything that I had worked for. I had a President's Leadership

Class scholarship to attend school here, and I worked hard to get it. I had been turned down by other colleges and after getting this scholarship I knew that I had to keep going. I now know my reason for going to college. All that is behind me is my reason. I am going to college to get my dream degree and to do it for my family.

I think that a lot of first generation students are just trying to make it through each day. They are trying to finish out the semester because they have parents who have told them to go to school. They don't see that reason yet for why they're going to school. We don't have anybody who has been the first doctor in the family or anything like that. I think that makes it harder because, for me, I'm the only one who is going through it. I know from seeing others that having an education is worth it. I see the big office buildings downtown and the people who work there dressed in their suits and ties. It motivates me and I want what they have.

I have always gone to a small school so I had wanted to go to a big college. But, at the same time, I knew that I was not ready. I was not ready to move out of my parent's house and leave them. That is what holds me back. That's what holds a lot of students back. It is a cultural thing. I am Hispanic and my family is really family orientated. It is hard for our parents to let go, especially me being the only girl and the youngest one. After graduation, I'm transferring to a large university. I dream about the large university and want to join a sorority when I get there. However, I have seen college life presented in the movies. I am scared that once I get there the people might be mean and life will not be what I expected. At this school I know everybody, but at the large university I am going to be lost and on my own.

Rachel

I am a 19 year old female who graduated from a local high school with a 3.2 grade point average. I moved from California to Oklahoma during my 7th grade year. I am still living with my parents and my two younger siblings, one of which is a newborn. I work twenty hours a week and I volunteer at a local pregnancy center. Neither of my parents went to college but they push education because they wanted me to take advantage of that opportunity. They tell me to be thankful because there are a lot of people who want to be in my shoes.

In high school, I ran track and played soccer. I ran the 200 hurdles, the 100 hurdles and the 100 meter dash. I'm a sprinter. I was involved in high school and was always in the administrative office talking to the principal and the counselors. If the teachers needed a student to talk to other students, because most of the students didn't go to the office, then I was the advocate. The teachers would tell me what was going on and ask me to relay the information to my friends and classmates. I like being the teacher's pet because I knew they would help me out in the future.

Regarding college, I think that everybody has great potential. People just have to push themselves the way they pushed themselves through high school. Most people don't like school but after ten or twenty years they regret not going to school. The people that have regrets are the ones that, then, tell their kids to not take life for granted. They tell their kids to get an education. For me, I am double majoring in health care administration and general studies. I think that I've had difficult roadblocks while in school. The spring semester was really difficult for me due to personal issues outside of school and I was at a point where I just wanted to drop out. I was done, and done with everything. I think that people don't ask for help because of

personal pride. I don't ask for help because I like knowing that I can do it myself. However, there was a time, just recently, that I realized I couldn't handle something on my own and I had to ask for help from people on campus. Things got better because I talked to people and they talked to me about how to face obstacles and how to work through issues. I have realized that I can't fix everything. I have realized that I can't do everything. I think that knowing how to ask for help made me stronger as the outcome was better than what I expected. I'm majoring in health care administration and want to be a CEO of a hospital, and maybe own a hospital or open up a clinic with Esther so that we can provide health care to Hispanics who don't have health insurance.

Esther

I am a 19 year old Hispanic female who graduated from a local high school with a 3.0 grade point average. I was born a couple of days after my dad graduated from high school. He was enrolled in college and didn't really start or finish the semester. My mom went to a technical school in Mexico and then she came here and she never went back. I still live at home with my mom, brother and sister. In high school, I had a teacher who helped me get into OSU-OKC's Upward Bound program. I was in the program from my sophomore to senior year. Since Upward Bound has a summer bridge program that pays for six hours of college, I took classes for college credit and learned how to go to college.

I'm majoring in nursing, but I haven't gotten into the program yet. I'm also taking classes toward a technical Spanish degree. Education is one of my biggest values because I know that I can't go anywhere in life without an education. After graduating from here, I want to go

to a large university and get a master's degree in nursing. I want to be a nurse. I want to get a doctorate. I want to open up a clinic with Rachel. I want to open up a clinic that serves Hispanics who don't have health insurance. I know that there are clinics that help people who don't have health insurance but it still costs a lot. I want to give people a place to go.

I'm really proud that I'm still in college; that I am getting it done. I just feel like I can do so much more than what I'm capable of. I can do something bigger. I don't feel like I have barriers that keep me from succeeding in college, but I do feel like I create my own. A person can usually find a way to get around a barrier so I think that barriers have to do more with a person's mindset, or the way that they're taught, or the influence of other people who convey an experience that they've had.

I'm really friendly and I'm very open. I like to help people. I'm a helper. I don't see helping as a responsibility, I just see it as an opportunity to give an extra hand because I know that a lot of people didn't have the opportunities I had. I look for people to help so maybe somewhere in the back of my mind it's like my mission is to help others. When I help someone it's like I make a little check mark in my mind.

Cycle one activities occurred between September 19, 2015 and November 2, 2015.

Cycle 2

Research collaborator training and peer interviews

On November 9, 2015, I convened the collaborators for a training and implementation workshop that had been approved during my proposal meeting and later approved through Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The workshop, held in the

administration building at the OSU-OKC campus, was the first time that the collaborators and I gathered to discuss the project and their roles. The meeting room contained a large conference table and set of chairs. A flat-screen television, and video conference equipment, was mounted on the room's north wall. A large dry-erase board spanned the room's entire east wall and suggested the room's capability for hosting strategy-orientated meetings. The room's south wall contained a built-in storage cabinet used for storing campus marketing materials and dry-erase markers. The room's west wall consisted of floor-to-ceiling windows that allowed the room to fill with natural sunlight.

I welcomed each collaborator as they entered the meeting room. Once the collaborators were seated, I disseminated the workshop's information packet. The packet contained study-related documents that included the workshop agenda, a collaborator consent form, an overview of the study's design, description of study's purpose and research questions, an overview of the participatory action research methodology, an introduction of the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique, and an interview guide (Appendix E). Given that the study's second research question focuses on collaborator experiences while participating in the study, the two-hour workshop was audio recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis.

Revising the peer solicitation and requesting IRB approval

During the workshop, Rachel suggested that the group revise the peer solicitation communique. Rachel wanted to simplify the message and to convey a peer-to-peer invitation that would be disseminated from a collaborators' student email account. Esther and Mary suggested the inclusion of a food incentive to increase the likelihood of peer response. I worked

with the collaborators to revise the peer solicitation, and submitted the revised message for IRB approval.

The collaborators also argued that my positional authority, and presence during peer interviews, may limit the collaborators' success in collecting students' genuine retention experience. Accordingly, I adjusted my design plan so that I was available but not present during the co-researchers' peer interviews. I met with each collaborators before their respective peer interviews; remained in close proximity as a resource during the interviews; and conducted a post-interview informal conversational debrief to manage any issues, questions, or concerns that arose during the interview.

Recruitment strategy: Retained students for peer interviews

The collaborators disseminated the revised, IRB approved email solicitation to the study's prospect pool of 244 retained students. The solicitation generated interest from fifteen students who agreed to be interviewed. Due to scheduling issues and the onset of the fall academic break schedule, the first interview did not occur until February. Scheduling issues were in large part due to students cancelling or not showing up for the interview time. Through these repeated efforts and schedule failures, I developed a greater appreciation for the demands of school, family, and work on this set of community college students. While the collaborators and I sought to identify peer interviewees that represented OSU-OKC's student demographics, we accepted the first eight respondents who were willing and able to commit to a scheduled interview date and time. Between February 2, 2016 and February 19, 2016, the three remaining collaborators interviewed seven students in an open area of the OSU-OKC student center.

Collaborators conducted peer interviews

In addition to the training and implementation workshop, I met with each collaborator prior to each interview in order to review the interview guide, reiterate protocols for completing the participant consent form, practice using the audio recording device, and address any issues or co-researcher anxieties associated with conducting an interview. Each peer interview was conducted in the OSU-OKC campus dining area known as the HUB. The HUB is located on the second floor of the student center on the OSU-OKC campus. The dining area experiences heavy dining traffic during the noon hour but traffic is light-to-moderate in the hours leading up to noon and the afternoon hours. I selected the public dining area as the interview space as it was a setting that is familiar to students. The setting also facilitated access to food that constituted the participation incentive. Furthermore, the setting was a public environment in which the collaborators could conduct an interview, and the setting was in close proximity to my office which allowed me to monitor the interview without being noticed. The setting's layout afforded collaborators the ability to survey the room and select a table location distanced from other dining guests to ensure privacy and minimize distractions.

Following each peer interview, I met with each collaborator to retrieve the interview guide, retrieve the interviewee's signed consent form, and to retrieve the recording device that contained the interview's audio recording. During this post-interview informal conversational visit, I gathered collaborator perspectives and insights associated with the interview. Each post-interview conversation was recorded and transcribed. This act permitted me to analyze

transcripts as data points to support the study's second research question that examined the experiences of retained students serving as research collaborators.

Peer interviewee introduction

The team of collaborators completed eight peer interviews during the time period of February 2, 2016 to February 22, 2016. The eight peer interviewees are introduced below via a brief vignette that I constructed from his or her interview transcripts. Each vignette contains the interviewee's demographic description, motive for attending college, and accounts of school, family and work responsibilities. Each vignette provides insight into each peer interviewee's unique perspective that is the basis for their college-going lived realities and retention experience within the context of OSU-OKC's campus learning environment and.

Amy

I am a 19 year old Caucasian female. My mom got her associate's degree but my dad didn't finish high school as he dropped out to take care of his brothers and sisters. My dad always wanted me to go to school and not be like him. That's a big part of why I'm here. I want to be a veterinarian because I was raised around animals. I live with my boyfriend and our house is about an hour away because we own a farm. I also work, part-time, at a clothing store.

Sofia

I am a 20 year old Hispanic female. I was born in the United States but my parents came from other countries. I want them to see that they came here for something, even though it doesn't pay off to them, directly. My parents told me to get good grades because school is the easiest way out. They also told me that once I know something, nobody can take that from me.

I'm majoring in engineering and will go to Stillwater to finish my bachelor's degree. I help my younger siblings with their school work because my parents don't know how because they don't have the background. I work, part-time, at an Asian restaurant.

Holly

I am a 19 year old Caucasian female. I moved around a lot while I was growing up. I was homeschooled for a while then I attended a private school. I also attended a public school. I don't care for school but I'm going for my mom and the degree that she wants me to have. My mom wants me to get an associate's degree and be prepared to take care of myself, independently, and not rely on the man of the house to bring in all the income. I attend this school because I can live at home and not stress about a job, living expenses, or school work.

Carlos

I'm a 19 year old Hispanic male. My parents struggled to come to the United States and they want me to go to college. I have the opportunity to go to school. I am a police science major then will transfer to a forensic science program at a four-year college. I know that I am going to pass every class because I am not going to let myself fail. I have to work and do other stuff outside of school which is a barrier. But, once I found the right mix with my schedule there are no barriers. I work at an indoor soccer arena.

Isabella

I'm a 19 year old Hispanic female. I live with my mom and dad. I came to college because it was expected of me but now that I'm here, I'm glad that I'm here. I just want to finish. I'm glad that my high school counselor and parents encouraged me to attend college. A

lot of people aren't motivated to attend college. They have the tools to make it but they choose not to. The biggest thing that I'm proud of is the fact that I have stayed in school. I want to be an English teacher but right now I cut hair, part-time.

Luis

I'm a 24 year old Hispanic male. I didn't graduate from high school but got my GED. My mom has an associate's degree and always told me that education is first. I live an hour from campus and rely on others for transportation. Most nights I get between 2-3 hours of sleep because I have to manage my commute, school, homework, and work. I have a plan for everything that I want to do so I'm just making it happen. I'm not going to give up. I'm always going to overcome. I'm a police science major and want to be a police officer. I work part-time, loading packages in trucks at a warehouse near campus.

I didn't have a father figure so I lived with my older brother and hung around with his friends. They were members of a gang but they took care of me, and fed me. I grew up seeing what happened to people if they didn't follow gang rules and norms. I also saw drug trafficking and the interactions between the superiors and the front line street runners. My brother protected me from some of that because he didn't want me to be taken from my mother. I got in some real trouble when I was 18. The police raided my house looking for stolen property. That same year over twenty of my friends were arrested in a police raid. That situation was a big eye opener for me because I knew every one of those guys who went to jail. I moved to Oklahoma to enter a program that would allow me to finish high school. I'm now pursuing a degree in law enforcement because I want to help young people avoid the life that I lived. As a police officer,

my mom says she worries about my safety, but my cousins say that I'll be like all the other cops. I really wish that I could take it all back, all the things that I've done. But, I wouldn't be the man that I am today. You're only going to be as good as the people you surround yourself with. I've surrounded myself with good people.

Maria

I am a 20 year old Hispanic female. My parents didn't have the opportunity to further their education so I wanted to be that one to make them proud and continue my education for them. My parents are one of my main reasons for why I attend college. I have two siblings and we're all in college. I want to get an education, to graduate, get a better job and better myself.

Destiny

I am a 20 year old African American female. My mom went to college for one semester and dropped out when she got pregnant with me. My dad didn't attend college. My high school teachers told us that only a few of us would go to college and even fewer would finish. My goal is to prove them wrong. I've realized, over time, that I was always looking for recognition from everybody and I never felt like I was good enough. The things I do now, I do for me. I just worry about me. I work, part-time, as a waitress in a restaurant at a horse racing track.

Cycle 3

Data analysis and presentation

Cycle three contained four data analysis meetings. As this cycle opened, I observed that the collaborators' participation in the study, coupled with their other commitments, was making the process of convening meetings difficult. Accordingly, I adjusted the study's plans and

prepared the data for analysis, myself, rather than collaborating with students to accomplish the task.

Researcher prepared the transcribed peer interview data

Patton posits that the first step of content analysis is organizing the data, conceptually, toward the development of a coding scheme (Patton, 2002). I printed and read each of the eight peer interview transcriptions, individually, to become familiar with each participant's data. I read through each peer interview transcript, individually, a second time making comments in the margins and using colored pens to note relational statements or "initial hunches about how concepts relate" (Patton, p. 490). I read through each peer interview transcript, individually, a third time to open code the data in a process to identify the properties and dimensions of concepts identified (Patton, 2002). During the open coding process, I linked, via an informal numeric code, each collaborator to their respective peer interview transcripts, and to each coded data unit contained within their respective transcripts. This process permitted me to track the origin of each data unit as unit was grouped or transferred into other documents for further content analysis.

I open coded the eight interview transcripts and determined consistencies of meaning, or patterns, among descriptive findings (Patton, 2002). The patterns identified across the eight interview transcripts were then group into categories, or themes, with data units inspiring each categorical label (Patton, 2002). I reviewed the collection of data units to determine, for fit, the consistency of patterns placed beneath the categorical labels.

Recruitment strategy: Independent reviewer

In this study, I utilized the enhanced critical incident technique to inform data collection and analysis practices. The methodology and data collection technique suggested using an independent reviewer to strengthen data trustworthiness. Herr and Anderson (2005) suggest that in participatory action research, dialogic validity is a form of peer review that charges a researcher with identifying a "critical friend" who is familiar with the study setting and is willing to serve in a capacity to challenge researcher assumptions and provide alternative explanations of study data (2005, p. 57).

I identified an independent reviewer who is a faculty member at OSU-OKC, and recent graduate of an OSU higher education leadership doctoral program. I prepared for dissemination to the reviewer a communique requesting participation; describing the study's purpose and methodology; data collection methods; the voluntary nature of participation and risks associated with participation; researcher expectations, and an activity schedule (Patton, 2002). On March 28, 2016, I provided the reviewer with a packet of documents that included a consent form noting the terms and tasks of reviewer participation, interview transcriptions for two peer interviews, and the master document containing the themes, categories and data units derived from the eight peer interviews. I tasked the reviewer with reading portions of the two interview transcripts and to, then, assess my registry of categories and headings. The reviewer made a single edit regarding the placement of a data unit beneath a categorical heading. While the use of an independent reviewer is intended to deepen the researcher's understanding and, thus, an opportunity to strengthen validity, the particular execution of this process did not accomplish its intent given the reviewer's limited response.

Team meetings: Digging our way through the data analysis

In a discussion with study collaborators, we established a standing meeting to discuss the data. The meetings occurred each Monday beginning April 4, 2016 and ending April 25, 2016. Data analysis meetings lasted approximately two hours, however, meetings were, at times, slow to focus on the task at hand as collaborators were tired and sometimes distracted. At no time did I conclude that the collaborators were uncommitted to their roles in the study; they were simply in positions of navigating the multiple demands on their time as best they could.

April 4: I brought some fancy highlighters

When the team assembled for our first data analysis meeting, I informed each of them that that Rachel was unable to conduct a second interview and continue with the study due to family and work commitments. I reminded each collaborator of their signed consent form that permitted them leave the study at any time, without consequence.

The meeting agenda outlined the activities that constituted the data analysis process. The study's design called for collaborative analysis of interview transcripts. However, the study's time demands, collaborators' inexperience with research processes, and students positioning countered my attempt to achieve democratic collaboration. The analysis process began with the team of collaborators reviewing each page of my document that contained the prepared data to verify each data unit's alignment with a category and heading. The team marked each page as AGREED if they believed all the data elements aligned with the category and heading. The team marked specific data units they believed did not align with its respective category and heading until the point that the page was marked AGREED. During the two-hour meeting, the team

reviewed and verified 55 of 102 pages of document that contained the prepared data. Due to time constraints, I asked each collaborator to review the remainder of the document, prior to the subsequent meeting, using the same review considerations of fit.

April 11: Do you still have your highlighters?

Our second meeting's agenda was a continuance of the April 4, 2016, meeting agenda given that time did not permit the completion of all agenda items. The team resumed its review of data beginning on page 55 of the 102 page document that contained the prepared data. I assured each collaborator that their input would be incorporated into a revised document that I would present at the subsequent meeting. The team used its remaining time to talk through the next agenda item, and the next meeting's activity, that was to review the revised document and place data units beneath headings of incidents that helped student retention, incidents that hindered student retention, and ideas to improve the experience.

April 18: Is that a jar of peanut butter in your purse?

In our third meeting, I tasked the team with numbering each data unit, in ascending order, on each page of the revised document that contained the collaborator verified data. The group then worked through each numbered data unit and assigned each unit, as warranted, to the heading of help, hinder, or wish list. Once this task was complete, I confirmed with the team that they agreed with their placement of data units into the help and hinder, and ideas to improve the experience (Attachment X). The team, then, advanced to the next agenda item that pertained to presenting data to the OSU-OKC administrative team.

I proposed to the collaborators that I would introduce the study processes then ask each collaborator to introduce themselves and their peer interviewees. The team suggested that they then present the document detailing campus incidents that helped student retention, hindered student retention, and also introduce wish list items. The team agreed that the document containing the incidents would serve as the basis for the team's discussion with OSU-OKC administrators. I proposed to conclude the presentation with a question and answer period.

April 25: What are we going to wear when we present?

Our final data analysis meeting agenda included a review of the presentation to the campus executive team, its format, and items needed. The agenda contained a reminder that the study's final team activity was a focus group meeting to discuss the collaborators' experience across the study's processes. I presented the team with documents that we would offer to audience members who attended the executive team presentation. The documents included information that I prepared that included a study summary, an information graphic depicting the iterative cycles of activity and Table 1.1. The packet of documents also included a Venn diagram that the collaborators prepared the night before and that visually presented the intersection of incidents that helped and hindered student retention. The diagram contained a list of student generated ideas to improve the retention experience.

May 2: I did the diagram the night before our meeting!

On Monday, May 2, 2016 the remaining team of three collaborators, the fourth having withdrawn during the data collection process, met in my office prior to the presentation to OSU-OKC's executive team. We discussed any stress and anxieties associated with the presentation,

talked through the presentation room's arrangement as the collaborators were unfamiliar with the space, reviewed the collaborator produced Venn diagram that represented initial findings, and discussed the presentation's flow. The three collaborators noted casual interactions with the campus president but that the presentation was the first formal meeting in which they owned the agenda. We then transitioned to the OSU-OKC president's office for the 9:30am executive team meeting.

The president's office was a large office suite with floor-to-ceiling windows constituting the south wall and affording an overlook to the campus fountain and pond. Inside the office door was a seating area consisting of three oversized chairs and a coffee table that created a space for informal meetings. The president's formal desk was near the seating area and covered with stacks of documents and file folders, a computer keyboard, and double computer monitors. The credenza behind the president's desk held a computer printer and photos of the president's family. The office suite also contained a large conference table and chairs. The walls near the conference table were painted in the school's color of orange. A waist-high storage cabinet ran the length of the conference table and was adorned with photos of the president's family, campus landscape renderings, and three ring binders containing documents. A video conference telephone rested upon the conference table along with a jar of candy.

The meeting began at 9:30 am with introductions of those present. Meeting participants included the campus president and her assistant, the campus vice president for operations; vice president for academic affairs; vice president for budget and finance; me, serving as the researcher and as the vice president for student services; the vice president for business and

industry training and economic development; the senior director of marketing and communications; the executive director of Oklahoma's office of workforce development; an associate professor of higher education and student affairs at OSU who also serves as my doctoral advisor; and study collaborators: Mary, Ruth, Rachel and Esther. I explained the study's consent form and asked each audience member to sign a form as the interview was audio recorded for transcription and analysis.

I opened the meeting with an introduction of the study's purpose and methodology that positioned me alongside student collaborators. I disseminated to each audience member a packet of study-related information that included a graphic representation of the study's iterative cycles and the planning, action and reflection constituting each cycle; an overview of the enhanced critical incident technique (ECIT) used to inform the capture and analysis of student experiences that help and hinder student retention, and to identify wish list items. I transitioned the discussion to the collaborators and asked each to introduce themselves and their peer interviewees. Each co-researcher was attentive and composed in her comments. The presentation lasted approximately two hours and concluded with a question and answer exchange between collaborators and the executive team.

May 2: It was like we were on the same level

After the presentation to campus administrators and guests, I assembled the collaborators to participate in a final meeting that was a focus group session to explore, formally, collaborators' experience across the study's processes. I did not develop a question set for the focus group session, but permitted the discussion to flow, openly. However, given that my

academic advisor attended the presentation to campus administrators, I asked her to reflect on her observations from the meeting and send me suggested questions. In the focus group meeting, the collaborators needed direction so I used these questions and others to facilitate the meeting. The session was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The meeting concluded as I thanked the team for their participation and role within the study.

Recording and storing information

A digital recording device was used to capture all data. All recordings were stored on a home computer that was password protected. Interview transcripts were printed for analysis and stored in a three-ring binder that was locked in a closet within my home. The names of the collaborator prospect pool, identified collaborators, peer interviewees, and the independent reviewer were stored in a location different from transcript documents to further protect the identity of study participants, at all levels. Study data that was stored, temporarily, in my office at OSU-OKC was stored on a removable drive and locked in a storage cabinet. Upon formal completion of the study the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed in a timely manner.

Regarding data confidentiality, I assigned a numeric identity to each collaborator and peer interviewee, and noted the numeric identities on the interview guide and interview transcriptions. This act provided me with a means by which to maintain collaborator and peer interviewee confidentiality. The numeric identity of the collaborators and interviewees was known to me and the collaborators as the numeric identifiers were attached to each data unit. The actual identity of collaborators and interviewees was stored in a locked cabinet that was separate from the storage location of the interview audio recordings and transcripts.

Data Analysis

Butterfield (2009) states that the enhanced critical incident technique is a technique used to examine incidents, psychological constructs and other factors that "help promote or detract from effective performance of some activity or the experience of a specific situation or event" (Butterfield, 2009; Flanagan, 1954). The ECIT provided guidance for gathering and analyzing the meaning of student experiences that pertained to OSU-OKC's stagnant student retention rate in that belief that understanding student experiences was the basis to counteract the stagnant rate. The ECIT prescribed a process to identify incidents that retained students indicated helped or hindered their retention experience, and identified campus supports that did not exist but could have enhanced the experience. The ECIT prescribed the study's process for classifying incidents into the help, hinder and wish list categories and the use of an independent reviewer to review transcribed interview data to verifying the appropriateness of categories and sub headings as they emerged from the data and interactions (Butterfield, 2009). The ECIT processes informed the study's data collection and analysis activities.

Data validity and trustworthiness

This study engaged collaborators in activities to help collect and analyze data. The qualitative design and methodology positioned me and the research collaborators as primary instrument of data collection and analysis (2009). To strengthen this study's rigor and data trustworthiness, the study invoked the practice of triangulation that incorporated multiple perspectives to guard against simplistic views and interpretations of study data. This study references five validity criteria that are associated with participatory action research as a means

by which to strengthen data validity and trustworthiness. The criteria are outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic and dialogic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The criteria are described as follows.

Outcome validity

Outcome validity is described as the extent to which study activities prompt action and change (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Study participants frame, or reframe, critical incidents and wish list items that are the foundation for OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities and perspectives that encompass the retention experience. This study's outcome validity was assessed according to the collaborators' authentic interaction with the study and their collaborative work in pursuit of new knowledge as the basis for action and change. This study's action and change are presented, formally, in chapter five.

Process validity

Process validity involves the appropriate application of the study's methodology in support of individual or system learning (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Herr and Anderson (2005) argues that process validity aligns with the practice of triangulation in that the incorporation of multiple perspectives guard against simplistic views and interpretations of study data. This study's collaborative structure and processes invited multiple perspectives throughout all phases of the study and included retained students as collaborators, retained students as peer interviewees, the attempted but failed use of an independent reviewer, and OSU-OKC's executive team (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Patton, 2002). As the study's design, alone, does not ensure validity I was this project's driving force. I sourced my bureaucratic power, as an insider,

to nest the project within the campus (Galuppo, 2010). I sourced my technocratic, strategic, charismatic and cooperative power to progress the study across time and context, and group relationships and dynamics (2010).

Democratic validity

Democratic validity is described as the extent to which my collaboration with stakeholders permeates the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Cunningham (1983) describes local validity as a version of democratic validity in which "problems emerge from a particular context and in which solutions are appropriate to that context." This study examined OSU-OKC's retained students' experience as the basis for action and change to improve the experience. Study findings reflect a number of ways in which students' experience informed action and change. Accordingly, this study actualized its democratic validity via the linkage of student interview transcripts and collaborators' data analysis activities to actual changes practices that are detailed in Chapter five.

Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity is "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing realities in order to transform it" (Lather, 1986, p. 272). In this study, the researcher presented OSU-OKC's stagnant student retention rate, and the interest to counteract it, in the participant solicitation email, initial interviews, training workshop, data analysis meetings, and the final focus group meeting. In fact, collaborators' also prefaced their peer interviewees with a statement regarding the study's purpose to improve OSU-OKC's retention experience. Collaborators understood the nature and scope of the study's work that

was evidenced as Ruth stated, “Sometimes we’re so quick to judge people and you never know what their life is like behind closed doors until you talk to them.” She concluded, “I’m now less quick to judge and I ask more questions.” Ruth’s statement indicates her knowledge that a multitude of reasons may shape students’ behavior and that examining the reasons can lead to the ability to understand and resolve issues.

Dialogic validity

Dialogic validity is a form of peer review in which I identified an independent reviewer to provide alternative explanations of data findings (2005). I was unable to actualize dialogic validity as expressed in the study’s design. However, on multiple occasions I presented progress updates to my dissertation committee chair, and to the OSU-OKC president. I also maintained a reflexive audio journal through the study that documented my struggle to advance the project while struggling to identify projects, for reference, that were similar in nature.

The ethical and power considerations of researcher positionality

Participatory action research positioned me in a dual role – that of researcher alongside my professional role as a practitioner within the organization (Holian & Coghlan, 2012). My role duality presented unavoidable ethical and power considerations as knowledge and action are inseparable elements of an organization’s context, relationships and history (Hilser, 2006; Coghlan & Shani, 2005). In a critical theoretical perspective, one takes action to challenge the status quo and destabilize established knowledge (Horkheimer 1937, p. 233). Accordingly, this study’s use of participatory action research empowered participants and, therefore, required me to monitor how students’ participation affected their lives (Hilson, 2006). My responsibility to

monitor students reflected the hierarchy within the study. My response to the study's ethical considerations was demonstrated in ways that included my work to schedule the peer interviews and my repeated interactions with collaborators to monitor how participation affected their lives.

Regarding my interactions with collaborators, I conducted informal conversation interviews (Patton, 2002) with each collaborator before and after each peer they conducted. While the informal conversation interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis, my conversation interviews afforded real-time feedback regarding how collaborators' participation affected their lives. This study's data analysis processes included a series of data analysis meetings at which students reviewed the content of peer interview transcripts. While the series of meetings were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis, the meetings are peppered with my inquiries to determine if the group needed a biological break, or if the interview content was a source of emotional stress. In a different example, the week prior to the collaborators' presentation to the executive team I talked my peer administrators through the collaborators' work and the upcoming presentation. Much like the collaborators newness to the research process required a training workshop, I believed it necessary to establish for administrators, prior to the collaborators' presentation, the study's context and range of activities, and a respect for collaborators' balance of school, work, and study responsibilities. In another example, I met with collaborators prior to their presentation to the campus executive team. In the meeting, the collaborators and I talked through the meeting's flow, the room's setting, and potential questions from administrators and guests. The collaborators' focus group meeting that followed the presentation afforded collaborators' an opportunity to voice any

tensions resulting from their participation in the study. Despite collaborators voicing that study participation transformed them in a positive way, the collaborators referenced their time requirement and lack of compensation as the negative elements that accompanied participation.

Galuppo (2010) argues that the methodology's power dynamic is not to be minimized but, rather, is a force needed for this study to pursue its reform agenda. Galuppo (2010) suggests that five sources of power exist within the participatory action research methodology; bureaucratic, technocratic, strategic, charismatic and cooperative power. In this study, I utilized my bureaucratic power to nest the study's purpose and intent within the operational unit for which I am responsible. I used my technocratic power to access the technical, intellectual and social resources needed to support the action process (2010). Examples of technocratic power include my knowledge of students' interfaces with campus' processes, my understanding of how best to position the study within my operational unit and my network of campus relationships that helped me expedite processes such as securing meeting rooms or managing the execution of the student participation incentive. While I had prepared, somewhat, collaborators and administrators, separately, in advance of the presentation, I utilized strategic, charismatic and cooperative power as I facilitated the collaborators' interaction with the campus' administration team and leaders of Oklahoma's workforce development system. The presentation disrupted the executive team's routine and challenged each individual present to engage in discussion regarding the study's initial findings (2010).

Chapter Summary

Chapter three presented the study design, participatory action research methodology, an overview of the methodology's iterative cycles of activity, and the activities constituting each cycle. I also discussed participant recruitment strategies and participant narratives drawn from individual interviews. The chapter concluded with a presentation of the methodology's elements that enhance data validity and trustworthiness, as well as the ethical and power considerations of my positionality.

CHAPTER IV

"STAYING HUNGRY? GOT TO EAT?"

This qualitative, participatory action research study contained two research questions; 1) to identify and explore, as the basis for action and change, the incidents that helped and hindered students' retention, and ideas to improve the experience; and 2) to explore the research collaborators' experience across the study. This study's processes unearthed students' context-specific lived realities that are the culmination of students' daily acts of courage and resilience shaped by the presence and, in some cases, the absence of a supportive other and their associated forms of expectation and support. This study also revealed students' context-specific pursuit of a college degree as they navigated unique, layered structural barriers. OSU-OKC's retained students' fortitude and determination was, perhaps, represented best in Ruth's exchange with Luis as she questioned the source of his resolve to graduate from college. Luis stated, "I didn't have the worst life, but it was a constant struggle; and still is." Luis added, "But I have great ambition and that keeps me going." Ruth seemed to identify with Luis as she questioned, "You're staying hungry?" Luis declared, "Got to eat!"

Table 1.1 contains a brief demographic profile for OSU-OKC's 244 first-time, full-time students who returned for the 2015 academic semester; the ten retained students interviewed as

prospective collaborators; the study's four research collaborators; and the collaborators' eight peer interviewees. The information presented in this chapter is a synthesis of my interviews with prospective research collaborators, collaborators' peer interviewees, the research team's data analysis meetings, the team's presentation to campus administrators, the collaborators' focus group session at the study's conclusion, and my reflexive audio journal and field notes that were collected throughout the study. The study contained 32 documented interactions that involved OSU-OKC's retained students. Despite the collaborative goals of the participatory action research methodology, peer interviewing is both a strength and limitation of this study. Regarding its strength, it is possible that the collaborators' revised peer solicitation email generated response from a segment of campus that my message would not have inspired. It is also possible that collaborators' energy and peer positioning may have evoked topics and connections that I could not have teased out during interviews due to my inability to grasp nuance associated with students' demographic variables. Finally, it is possible that collaborators' were also able to expedite the process of building rapport with interviewees in a way that I could not.

Regarding its limitation, students' limited proficiency with interviewing techniques such as probing for clarification, asking fully open-ended questions, and learning the art of active listening and waiting for full expression. This supposition is evidenced in data drawn from the focus group meeting at the study's conclusion as Mary said, "I wish Amy would have told me how many hours she works." In a different example, Esther noted that she wished that she could, "Schedule a follow-up" with Holly because, "I just want to know what she is going to do for

herself." The following sections are organized according to emic phrases drawn from data collected.

Getting started

"Let me quit right now."

Mary, Ruth, Rachel and Esther were conduits for data collection and analysis and, therefore, were introduced in chapter three as primary instruments of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). Given that I hold a position of authority on campus, I interact with OSU-OKC's student population as part of my daily routine. While I was aware of each collaborator's presence at OSU-OKC, I had no formal professional or social connection to them prior to their interview as part of this study.

On November 9, 2015 at 2:30pm, I assembled the research collaborators for a training and implementation workshop that launched, formally, the collaborators' engagement in data collection and analysis procedures. Mary, Ruth, Rachel and Esther arrived, together, and I welcomed them to the meeting that was held in the marketing and communications conference room located on the second floor of OSU-OKC's administration building. The workshop was the first time that I met with the collaborators, as a group, to discuss the study's purpose, my expectations, and their roles. Once the students were seated, I disseminated the workshop's information folder that contained the study's support documents (APPENDIX E). Rachel shuffled through the folder's contents and questioned, "We're going through all of this today? Let me quit right now!" Rachel's comment generated a nervous laugh from the group but the other students also identified with her sentiment as evidenced in data drawn from the study's

focus group session at the study's conclusion when Esther reported that, early in the study, she said to Ruth, "What did we get into?"

I estimate that each collaborator invested nearly fifteen hours in a range of study activities that occurred over seven months. While Rachel was the only collaborator to withdraw from the study, Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) may help explain the reason behind her departure. Astin's theory (1984) posits that student expenditures of physical and psychological energy occur along a continuum with varying energy levels assigned to different objects at different times (1984). It is possible that Rachel's initial reason for participating, and perception of potential benefits associated with participation, was not sufficient to sustain her engagement given the likelihood that more pressing issues, like family, competed for her physical and psychological energy.

"We all do everything"

The workshop's agenda contained an opening activity that facilitated self-introductions and team building. Given that the students arrived at the meeting space, together, I omitted the introductory activities and, instead, asked if the students knew each other prior to entering OSU-OKC. Each student responded "no." I then asked how they came to know each another at OSU-OKC. Rachel said, "I met Esther at the Orange Crush new student orientation and ever since then we've been together. We have each other in class every single semester." Rachel and Esther noted that they talked, frequently, about their hopes and dreams to open a health clinic to serve Latinos who do not have health insurance. The students' hopes and dreams align with Markus and Nurius (1986) description of the possible self and the suggestion that students have

self-relevant cognitions regarding whom they might become, and who they want to become. Rachel and Esther's reference to their hopes and dreams also offers insight into the students' sense of agency as their academic plans and pursuits are pathways to healthcare professions that are sources of social and cultural capital that can be mobilized to support the achievement of their hopes and dreams to open a health clinic to serve Latinos (Bourdieu, 2001; 1986; Fruiht, 2015).

The discussion continued as Rachel stated, "I met Ruth as we're both in a student success program." Esther gestured to Mary and said, "We've been together in organizations and I've had her in two classes." Ruth pointed to Mary and said "We had English together, and did Orange Crush." Rachel declared, "We all do everything." The group's rapid exchange offered insights into the group's dynamics, and revealed the nature of the students' social and academic integration into the campus environment via new student orientation activities, and shared enrollments in academic courses (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987). The group's exchange also surfaced the students' linkage to campus-sponsored informational networks such as student organizations (Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2010).

We volunteered for different reasons

Each collaborator described why they responded to my email solicitation to participate in the study. Esther stated, "I knew it was from you. This is important. I've got to read it because he wants my help." She added, "I've never had the opportunity for my voice to be heard. It's an opportunity to be part of something and a chance to help students." Esther smiled as she recalled her mother's encouragement to find ways to "do more" or "stand out." Esther stated, "When you

asked for my help I thought that I might mean something, or that I stood out for some reason." In data drawn from the focus group session held at the study's conclusion, Esther expressed her disappointment when she realized, early in the study, that hundreds of other retained students had received the same invitation to participate.

Mary stated that she wanted to participate in the study because, "It sounded interesting." Mary's embraced her role as a collaborator and appeared to understand the nature of her participation, as evidenced in her comment, "We're doing the study. We're not just reading about it, or observing another school's problems. We're seeing our own problems, and seeing how people are alike and how they're different." Rachel and Ruth's reason for participating differed from their fellow collaborators'. Rachel said that when she saw the email invitation she thought, "He works here. I have to do it." Ruth added, "Whenever I saw the email I thought that it sounded interesting, but I had a lot on my plate." Ruth, then, pointed to Rachel and claimed, "But then Rachel told me to answer your email. So, I did."

The collaborators expressed different reasons for volunteering to participate in the study. Esther's opportunity for a, "Chance to help other students" aligned, perhaps, with her place identity and familiarity with navigating OSU-OKC's campus space. Esther's place identity and familiarity was derived from her pre-college participation in a federally-sponsored college preparation program, Upward Bound, which is housed on the OSU-OKC campus (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). Esther noted, "A lot of people didn't have a lot of opportunity like I had being in Upward Bound and learning all these things." Mary expressed what appeared to be a genuine interest in the study's social justice underpinnings which, perhaps, aligned with her academic

and career trajectory as she works toward an associate's degree in public service, and plans to pursue a master's degree in counseling that would permit her to help at-risk children and families. Rachel, however, noted that my position of authority influenced her decision to participate. In Rachel's prospect interview, she disclosed that when she was in high school she, "Liked being the teacher's pet because I knew that they would help me out in the future." Rachel's high school experience as a "teacher's pet," and the social and cultural capital she realized from that role, might have informed her decision to participate in this study (Bourdieu, 2001). As stated, Rachel encouraged Ruth to participate as a research collaborator. Indeed, Ruth did not volunteer, initially, as she stated, "I had a lot on my plate." However, Ruth's hesitation to participate may also have been linked to her own struggle to make sense of her college experience. Support for this supposition is evidenced in Ruth's admission that she had a moment of clarity during her prospect interview with me. Ruth stated, "I knew whenever I was talking to you, and you kept asking why are you going to college, and what does it mean. I realized, oh my god, this is why I'm doing it." She added, "I think you have to say it, you have to say it to yourself. This is why I'm here."

"Potato, Zero, One."

The workshop introduced the research collaborators to the study's purpose, qualitative research practices and procedures, interviewing protocols and techniques, the participatory action research methodology's collaborative framework, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Throughout the training and implementation workshop, I reinforced the importance of confidentiality associated with interview data, analysis discussions, and participant identities.

Ruth responded, “Right. Code names: Potato, Zero, One.” Esther added, “That’s from the Kid’s Next Door cartoon. They were little spies and they all had their little names.” Esther nodded to me and suggested, “I don’t think that was your generation.” While the exchange added a point of humor to the workshop’s discussion, the statements indicate the collaborators’ awareness that our age differences grant us access to different knowledge banks that, ultimately, shape our relationship to, interaction with, and interpretations of the data.

As the workshop concluded, I asked the collaborators if they had any concerns related to conducting peer interviews. Rachel reminded the group that, “We each just need to come across as positive people, and focus on the bigger outcome.” Esther said she was nervous about interview dynamics. This is evidenced in her reflection on her own positionality in the study as she noted, “We will be speaking to someone we are similar to. They may wonder why we’re asking these questions or what makes us the better person to ask these questions.” Mary’s concern referenced the need to develop trust and rapport with interviewees. She stated, “Maybe it’s a bad thing for us to interview because maybe they don’t want us to know their private life.” Esther replied in agreement, “We don’t want to make them feel inferior.” The collaborators’ statements are evidence that, from the onset of their involvement, the students’ were aware of the study’s purpose and their position and role in examining OSU-OKC’s retained students’ college-going lived realities as the basis for action and change to improve the retention experience (Horkheimer, 1937)

“We would like to visit with you.”

This study's methodology encouraged participant collaboration throughout the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Accordingly, Mary, Ruth, Rachel and Esther reviewed and revised my draft of the solicitation to attract peer interviewees. I submitted the revised solicitation verbiage to the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of the condensed wording that added a participation incentive. Once I received IRB approval, Esther disseminated the solicitation in November, 2015 from her student email account to the 234 retained students who did not participate in an initial prospect interview. While the initial solicitation was sent in November 2015, collaborators' reported that they might be unable to participate because of the approaching Thanksgiving holiday break and final exam schedule. Esther disseminated the solicitation in January, 2016 which generated eight student responses. Esther forwarded to me the names and contact information for eight of OSU-OKC's retained students who expressed interest in participating in a peer interview (Table 1.1). While I contacted the students to save Esther from the burden of scheduling interview session logistics, I believe that my interaction, and position of authority, added legitimacy to the collaborators' peer-to-peer solicitation.

"Runnin' through the 6 with my woes."

At the conclusion of the training and implementation workshop, Ruth quoted lyrics from the rapper Drake's *Know Yourself* album (2015) when she chanted, "Runnin' through the 6 with my woes." While I was unfamiliar with the lyrics, the internet's Urban Dictionary (2017) presents their meaning, in much less poetic terms, as "Going through your neighborhood carrying your problems and sorrows; yet, still surviving." I felt that Ruth's quote aligned with my research purpose. Moreover, Ruth's reference to Drake's lyrics appears to demonstrate, in

her own language, an awareness of the study's purpose. However, Ruth's chant may also reveal her early prediction of the study's findings as her reference would suggests that despite a range of "problems and sorrows," OSU-OKC's retained students persist in college (2015).

OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities is represented, as possible, below with content drawn from my prospect interviews with the collaborators, the collaborators' peer interviews, and from the series of data analysis meetings. As presented in chapter three, and reintroduced in chapter four, Rachel withdrew from the study after she completed her first peer interview so her perspective is absent from data analysis discussions. The content below is the basis for chapter four's discussion of OSU-OKC's retained students' college-going lived realities and the action and change born of the study's collaborative work.

Envisioning a Better Future

Don't be like, _____ (insert name)

During her prospect interview, Ruth said that her mother was her primary source of support and had, "Always been my other half. The one telling me to go to college." However, Ruth noted that her mother typically ended her statements of encouragement with the tag line, "And don't be like your brothers." Ruth did not elaborate on the nature of her brothers' issues but her mother's tag line suggested that Ruth's siblings are the family benchmark for what not to do, as opposed to the mother's belief that college is a path to something better; although no one in the family had completed college. In a similar example, Sophia's parents referenced her brother's struggle, as a high school dropout, as they encouraged her to attend and persist in college. Sophia claimed that her parents said that college was, "The easiest way out. Once you

know something, nobody can take that from you." Sophia compared herself to her brother and claimed, "I don't want to be in his position because I see how he struggles through life trying to find a job. I don't want to struggle like that. I want to make sure I have things right."

Amy shared a different perspective in referencing her father's educational past. Amy described her father as a kind man who, at a young age, sacrificed his own opportunities so that he could ensure the safety and well-being of his siblings. Amy recalled her father's encouragement to enter and complete college when she stated, "My dad always wanted me to go to school and not be like him." Amy concluded, "I just want to show him, or prove to him that I did it." Esther shared a similar experience as she reported that her mother had resigned to the fact that she was unable to pay for Esther to attend college. Esther recalled her mother's statement, "I didn't go to college so I can't get a good job and save money so that my kids can go to college." Esther referenced her mother's statement, "It's your turn to find out what you're going to do for the rest of your life."

OSU-OKC's retained students present their parents' perspective regarding the importance of attending and persisting in college. In the examples above, students' represent their parents' belief that their life's trajectory was constrained by their history, or social stratification that manifested as structural forces such as access to opportunity or that were beyond their control (Ball et al., 2002). Consequently, in families that do not have a generational experience of higher education (2002), children describe their parents imagine for their child a possible future that contrasts their own personal history and, perhaps, eclipses their ability to support their child during their educational pursuit. This supposition is evidenced in the statement from Esther's

mother as she informed Esther that it was her turn to find out what she was going to do for the rest of her life. Esther reports hearing her mother's phrase, "It's your turn" is a reference to Esther's future and, perhaps, signals the mother's transfer of responsibility to Esther. The phrase may also signal the mother's release of responsibility or guilt linked to her inability to finance Esther's education.

"I want to bring improvement to this family."

The retained students who participated in this study referred to their family's educational memory as they describe their individual pursuit of a college degree (O'Shea, 2016). Sophia said that her parents, who had immigrated to the United States, did not attend college and did not know how to speak English. She stated, "I know how much they had to struggle to raise a family. I want them to know that they didn't come here for nothing; that it's going to pay off even though it doesn't pay off directly to them." Esther stated that she was born just after her father graduated from high school and that her father enrolled in college but did not start the semester. Esther's story seems to imply that she views her birth as the reason that her father did not pursue a college degree. Destiny shared a similar story in that her mother attended college for a semester but then, "she got pregnant with me and she dropped out."

Carlos said that his mother, "Probably did like a year or two of elementary and my dad has a little bit of high school." While Carlos is aware of his parent's approximate level of education, he did not elaborate as evidenced in his statement that, "I really don't remember. They just don't really talk about it." Rachel stated that her parents did not go to college and, accordingly, she said that college was, "Something we don't take for granted because there are a

lot of people wanting to be in my shoes." Ruth's account reflects, again, her mother's repeated reference to her brothers' issues. Ruth stated, "I want to be that pride and joy to my parents. I want to bring improvement to this family." Ruth added, "We don't have anybody who's been the first doctor in our family or anything like that." The descriptions above vary, significantly, from Holly's account as she said, "My mom went and got a bachelor's in teaching and my dad's was an associate's in computer science and, then, a bachelor's degree in children's ministry." Holly concluded, "I don't care for school but I'm going, more or less, because of my mom."

OSU-OKC's retained students' educational trajectories are nested within their family's educational memory and contextual circumstance (O'Shea, 2016). In several cases, students' educational trajectory are made visible through their stories that include their family's experience with high school and college, the family's position within society's social stratification, and individual references to structural forces that manifest in the form of social and cultural capital (Ball et al., 2002). While parents' encourage their student to attend and persist in college via stories of their own personal descriptions and accounts, it appears that OSU-OKC's retained students' integrate their parent's descriptions and accounts into their own educational narrative which, in turn, establishes the foundation for students' trajectory. Markus & Nurius (1986) suggest that one's visualization of their possible self contains their significant hopes, goals and aspirations, fantasies, fears and threats.

Holly said what?

The prior section contained Holly's description of her family's educational past, and her reason for attending college. Holly indicated that she entered OSU-OKC at her mother's

direction that, “Set the requirement for all of us girls; that we have to get, at least, an associate’s degree in something.” Holly concluded, “I don’t care for school but I’m going more or less for my mom and the degree that she wants me to have.” Holly’s perspective generated a lengthy discussion among the research collaborators during a data analysis meeting.

In reference to Holly’s comment, Mary said, “I don’t know how I feel about this one. I wonder if it would have been different if her mom let her do what she wanted, and let her go to school later on.” Esther added, “I feel like if she’s spending all this time in classes, and trying to get the grades, but then it’s just for her mom?” Esther continued, “I also want to please my parents but this is me spending my life doing a job; not my parents.” The collaborators’ discussion transitioned to a focus on Holly’s statement regarding an associate’s degree. Esther explained, “I feel that the mother’s low expectation may hurt and not help Holly’s opportunities in the future.” Mary added, “My mother would never say just an associate’s degree. She would say do the most you can, don’t stop.”

OSU-OKC’s retained students describe attending college for a number of reasons. In the example above, Holly registered her mother’s directive as a reason for entering college based on her vision for Holly’s possible self. The collaborators’ empathized with Holly because of her desire to please her parent. However, the collaborators’ argued that the parent’s control of Holly’s future outweighs Holly’s interests, potential satisfaction with, or gratification from completing a college degree and future career opportunities.

We don’t have the same opportunity

Ruth remained silent during a large portion of the group's discussion about Holly's statement. However, she referenced her Hispanic culture when she suggested, "If you don't have that opportunity then you want it because you never had it. I've seen it more in girls who believe their moms will take care of them." Esther added, "Or daddy's girl." Ruth countered Esther's comment suggesting that, "Some of them aren't daddy's girls but they know their family is set so they don't have much of a purpose for themselves." Ruth declared, "We don't have that. We are, like, this is our mission; this is what we're here to do. We're going to be the first in our families. We are going to do it." Ruth's use of the word "We" seems to represent all Hispanics rather than only herself, the collaborators or interviewees. Ruth's statement also suggests that the college degree has inherent value beyond increasing economic opportunities.

Mary offered a personal observation from her experience attending, and later staffing, OSU-OKC's new student orientation, Orange Crush. Mary stated that Holly's comment made her think about the people she went to school with who were, "Coming here because they want to make their parents happy so that their parents can say that their kid is going to school." In fact, Carlos indicated that he entered college "Just because my parents wanted me to. They struggled enough for us to go to college." He concluded, "We're Hispanic so it's more of 'if you have the opportunity then do it.'" Maria, too, said that one of the main reasons that she attends college is because her parents did not have the opportunity and that she, "Wants to be the one to make them proud."

Esther, however, argued that, "The people I hang out with are here because they want to be. They want to do better." Luis stated during his interview that, "I had a plan for everything

that I wanted to do so I'm just making it happen and implementing everything that I've put into working toward and thinking about." However, Ruth provided one of the study's more insightful observations that was, perhaps, a reflection of her own educational experience. Ruth stated, "From what I see, I think new students are just trying to get by each and every day. They're just trying to make it and finish out the semester because it's what they've been told to do." She added, "A lot of students just graduated from high school, they're first-generation college, and they have parents who say you have to go to school. They don't see that reason yet of why they're going to school." Ruth referenced her brothers' issue and said that, in the beginning, she thought that she was going to need to work to earn money to help her mother pay for her brother's issues. However, Ruth claimed that she realized, "I can't just throw everything away that I've worked for. I had a scholarship and I worked hard for that. All that is behind me is my reason." She added, "I knew that I had to go to college. I have to keep going." Esther suggested, though, that "If my mom wasn't the one saying you've got to better yourself because I never did anything, and dad never did anything. Maybe I would have never come to college." Esther suggested, "Maybe I would be like all the numerous Hispanics who don't do anything." Ruth said, "Just housewives." To which Esther replied, "Just housewives."

The research collaborators seemed to have been offended by Holly statement that she entered and persisted in college at her mother's explicit direction. However, each collaborator and several of their retained peers noted that they, too, entered and persisted in college at the encouragement of a parent. The collaborators' disagreement with Holly's statement might be rooted in Ruth's perspective, first-in-family to attend college, and her statement that, "I want to

go to college because we've never had the opportunity." Ruth's statement represents her hopes and dreams to be a college graduate because, unlike Holly, her family has no generational experience with higher education. The collaborators' voiced fears associated with not completing a college degree. Ruth and Esther voiced their fears of becoming, "Like all the Hispanics who don't do anything." Ruth added, and Esther repeated, "Just housewives." Ruth and Esther's statement describes a possible self that represents, perhaps, the fears and threats that constitute who they are afraid of becoming, a housewife, despite the fact that each described their own mother as a housewife and not having a job (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

"I expected that people would be happier to be here."

In a data analysis meeting, I asked the collaborators what they expected to see in the peer interview transcripts, but did not see. Mary said, "I expected that people would be happier to be here. That they would be happy to have the chance to go to school when there's still a lot of people in the world who don't get the chance to get an education. We do have a chance but we don't all take it." Mary added, that "There's even people here that want to go to school but can't because they don't have papers. Mary concluded, "People are forced to go from pre-k to high school. I was forced to do it. I'm not being forced to do this."

OSU-OKC's retained students' present different reasons for entering, and persisting in college to the second fall semester. In the data presented above, reasons include a parent's explicit directive or expectation to attend college. For some students, reasons also include the desire to escape circumstance. Parental directives and expectations may not be sufficient to sustain a student in his or her return for the second fall semester. This possibility is evidenced in

Ruth's comment that students are "trying to get by each and every day." This is also evidenced through Esther's comment that for many students, "It's just trial and error. They're just hanging out here until they feel like they really don't want to be here. Or, they really don't want to be here and they're just going to drop out or figure out something else to do."

"They weren't able to communicate college."

In a data analysis meeting, Ruth cited Sophia's mention that her father attended school until the 6th grade. Ruth said, "I feel like the student's parents didn't have the knowledge or education to give their child, or they weren't able to communicate college." The collaborators discussed the idea that parents' knowledge of college can be a structural barrier for students. Esther claimed, "My mom can be the one who supported me, encouraged me, pushed me on, but then she's always like, look your uncles are here. Drop your homework and come in here, or let's go somewhere. Ruth said, "My mom is like that, too." Ruth added that when doing homework, "It has to be done at night because I don't have a desk. I do my homework in the dining room where my computer is set up." Ruth added, "My mom watches her soap operas at night from 9-10 so I have to wait until they're done so that I can really concentrate." Destiny provided a similar example as she said that her mother "Wants me not to go to school and just focus on getting a job that pays now. You need money now." Destiny indicated that while her mother did not attend college, she has her own business and stated, "So I can see why she says that, but."

Sophia also noted that her responsibilities at home can interfere with her focus on college. She said, "Obviously they don't want me to leave because when they need to run an

errand; they send me. When my mom's cooking and forgets to buy tomatoes she's, like, will you go to the store, or will you pick your sister up, or will you pick your brother up, will you help with this or that." Esther said that she mentors a student who stays with her grandparents and they live an hour away. Esther said that her mentee will say, "I'm not going to school today because my grandma's not feeling well so I'm going to watch over her."

OSU-OKC's retained students' indicate that supportive others have limited knowledge of college, or its academic expectations, which can distract students from achieving academic success. The concept of communication goes beyond the exchange of words, but includes the exchange of meaning that, consequently, invokes parents' understanding of students' investment of time and effort necessary to achieve success.

"We need a school for parents."

Mary suggested the need for a campus representative who is more than a role model, but someone students, and parents, can ask about things that are, perhaps, outside the immediate scope of school. Esther agreed saying, "There are many areas where I think parents need help. Not just Hispanics parents, but maybe others as well." Esther added, "Not only do they need help like in education but maybe just like the daily living. How do I support my child? How do I make them a better person?" Mary added, "Like emotionally and stuff like that. Not just providing a shelter for their children but how do you help them?" Esther expressed frustration saying, "Not knowing how to, but trying and still not being able to is very frustrating. I have seen that. I don't know if there is a school for parents as well?"

OSU-OKC's retained students cite a need for help to educate their parents about the college experience and how to help their child in school. Students' provided examples of their efforts to help their parents understand their college experience by involving them in school activities. Ruth stated that her mother is "a big housewife so, in a way, I try to involve her in the activities that I do here." Ruth indicated that her student organization was hosting a bake sale in support of breast cancer awareness. Ruth said, "My mom knows how to make pumpkin treats so I told her that I needed her help to make food and help with the delivery to campus." Ruth invoked the same strategy with her middle brother as she recalled, "I told him that I have this pumpkin and that I needed help taking it to the school. He said, 'definitely, why not?" Ruth noted that she strives to make her family part of her school experiences, "Instead of just saying 'school, school, and school.'"

"We're just thrown out here and have to figure it out for ourselves."

OSU-OKC's retained students indicate that they have a difficult time with the college transition because, as Esther says, "We're just thrown out here and we have to figure it out ourselves." Luis said that when he entered college that he was nervous because he didn't know anyone, and didn't have any family in the area. He said, "I didn't know anybody. I was trying to make friends. I was trying to get to know a new place. It was like I was a person in my own world." Ruth shared a similar sentiment as she referenced her mother's ability to help her understand the transition to college. Ruth stated, "I'm the only one that's going through it. It's not like I can relate to my mother." Sophia noted that she struggled with where to go for help. She said that her brother was a high school dropout so he never applied to a university. Sophia

added, “Nobody else that I was related to could help me.” Sophia concluded, “I had my parent’s right there with me all the time. But, I learn in English and my mom learned in Spanish. Sometimes I don’t understand the words she uses or she doesn’t understand what I try and explain to her.”

OSU-OKC’s retained students said that their family’s educational memory can impact their ability to decode the institution’s hidden curriculum (O’Shea, 2016). O’Shea (2016) found that first-in-family students reported a sense of disorientation during the initial weeks of the semester due to the uncertainty with campus processes related to enrollment and financial aid. O’Shea (2016) also found that students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation during the initial weeks of the semester which underscored a sense of lacking entitlement to the pursuit of a college degree (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). Tinto’s interactionalist model (1987) argues that students’ separation from their past, and integration into the campus academic and social environment can encourage student persistence in college. However, Wild & Ebbers (2002) note that Tinto’s theory of student retention was derived from research studies involving traditional age students attending a four-year campus, and residing in university housing. Consequently, the authors argue that such studies may yield theories that do not readily apply to the dynamic context of the two-year college campus.

“We have to find people to help us.”

OSU-OKC retained students cite faculty and staff as a positive campus attribute. Amy stated, “Everybody is helpful. My first day here I didn’t know where anything was. People helped me.” Some students noted help from specific faculty and staff members. While one

student referenced an English tutor and her help proofreading papers, another student referred to a staff member who has a friendly face and someone a student can always ask for help.

Esther noted that, "I feel that those who are no longer here probably didn't have the encouragement like we had." She added, "Like they weren't expected to do anything. Some students are here because this is what was expected from them and some are here because they were encouraged." While Esther had no evidence of why students no longer attended college, she imagined that their lack of persistence was due to a lack of encouragement. Ruth added to Esther's statement that, "We're Hispanics; we're really family orientated so kind of like a family night." Ruth suggested that a family night would contain activities that would introduce families to campus, and have games for kids. In Rachel's prospect interview, she indicated that her ability to "Talk to certain people helped me out." She added, "They've helped me out through this semester and they showed me, you know, there's going to be obstacles, as in not being able to organize or time management, you have life, you have school, you have work, if you have to turn in an essay that's due within a week and you have these other classes and it was just difficult in the spring because I was taking 6 classes and going to work."

"You'd better get stuff figured out."

OSU-OKC's retained student noted the difficulty of balancing their work and school schedules. Rachel noted her experience in trying to manage her schedules as she said, "There was a time in the spring that it was difficult for me. I just wanted to drop out. I'm done with everything." She added, "People helped me organize. You have life, you have school, you have work, and, my mom was pregnant." Rachel's statement offers insights into why, perhaps, she

withdrew from the study after she completed her first peer interview. Because Ruth lived at home she was expected to help manage the family while her mother managed her pregnancy. Ruth echoed Rachel's sentiment as she said that, "Knowing how to balance, school and family was really hard." She added, "I was happy that I made it through my first year while balancing the three things that are the most important to me; family, school and work." Carlos advised Rachel during their interview, "Once you find a way to fix your work schedule and have the right mix with your school schedule you don't have any barriers. You better get stuff figured out before you start your school stuff." Carlos' prioritization of his work schedule prior to school was found elsewhere in student data as Sophia said that she had worked at the same place for almost two years, "Because of how flexible they are with the schedule." Sophia added that she has always wanted to be more involved in school and says, "But I feel like I can't find the time for it. It doesn't fit with the schedule." Mary shared a similar experience as she said of her work that, "I have to tell them that I can't work a couple of days a week. It's fine because I only go to school 2-3 hours per day and I can work the rest." However, Destiny offered a different opinion as she stated, "The good jobs don't pay that well and they're not flexible." She added, "Jobs come and go but if I'm going to school I'm going to make this my priority. I'm not going to mess it up for $12 an hour or $13 an hour."

Maria said noted that, "Some people had other responsibilities like they started a family at an early age or because of their work schedules they couldn't come to school." Amy said that she gets stressed out, "Because everything is usually due on the same day. I have to work, I need nine hours of sleep or I hate humanity." She claimed that, "I'm neglecting this or I'm neglecting

that and it stresses me out because I want to be able to spend my time equally between everything." Maria noted that some people have problems with work and school schedules, and that they should have visited an advisor for help to figure out evening classes or online classes. Luis said, "I just try to make time for it. I've got to do this at this time and this at this time. I try to put it into just the estimated time so I can arrange it in my schedule so I can do other things that I need to do like work, get something to eat, work out, or stay up late." Luis indicated that he serves as a weekend volunteer at a local youth shelter. Luis' noted that the shelter allows him to use one of its vehicles during the week which eases barriers related to transportation. In Mary's interview with Sophia, Sophia stated that her high school teachers warned her about college. She said, "Everybody told me they don't play around. And they don't."

The lack of money is a problem

OSU-OKC's retained students indicate that their need for and management of money informs their decision to return to college for the second fall semester. Mary indicated that since she lived at home with her mother and brother that she was, "good at saving money since I don't have to pay anything except for my gas, insurance and my phone." Holly also referenced money as the root of her decision to not attend a four-year university. Holly stated, "I'm not going to throw away money if I can live at home and get an education at OSU-OKC and not stress about a job, living expenses, or school work." Holly said that she didn't have to rely on her mother or on her income because she had financial aid and that receiving aid helped her save for other things like, "random expenses that come out of nowhere like a car repair." Holly contrasted her experience to that of others as she suggested that she did know other people who stated that the

lack of money prevents them from returning to college. She claimed, "Getting an education past high school isn't an actual reality for them because they don't feel like they have the funds for it even if they received financial aid."

Esther claimed that she, too, knew people who had stopped attending college because, "They feel like they need to work a full-time job so they don't continue." In fact, Esther claimed that her cousin is not eligible for financial aid and noted that, "Sometimes she'll have to drop out of a class because she has to work. For her, it's either/or and she'll try to save." However, Esther indicated that some use their lack of money as an excuse to stop attending college. Esther said that for some, "They just wanted to stop going to college because they found it easier to make a couple of dollars and be working a full time job." Esther said, "People my age, I see that they're focused on money that is what they want right now." Luis echoed Esther's sentiment as he noted that some people he knows have dropped out because of money issues and patience. Luis said, "People want to be where they want to be. They don't want to wait on a degree. They are in a hurry to make money and think that a degree is slowing them down."

Second choice or last choice?

Prince writes that one's visioning of their possible self (Who will I be?) is "inextricably bound with place" (Where will I be?) (2014, p. 697). OSU-OKC's retained students who are first-in-family to attend college, and choose to attend OSU-OKC based on the economics of the college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) may find themselves in a reverse situation in which *Where will I be* establishes the foundation of *Who Will I be*. OSU-OKC's retained students submit that they returned to college because of the convenience of its location,

affordability, their familiarity with the campus and its processes, and the support received from faculty and staff. Both Ruth and Esther said they wanted to attend four-year universities and be involved on bigger campuses. However, Mary noted that her high school counselors and teachers "pushed us to go to the big school for the whole college experience." OSU-OKC's retained students' express an interest in attending a four year campus but changed their plans and entered OSU-OKC. Esther said, "I feel like, maybe it's just me, but I feel like we are sometimes the second choice, or the last choice. That people weren't really thinking of coming here." Ruth said, "I'm sorry, but that was me, too." Ruth shared that a friend from high school had considered, but not chosen, OSU-OKC because of its proximity to local high schools and that her friend thought that many students who were entering OSU-OKC would originate from his high school. Ruth said, "He wanted a different adventure."

It's close, it's inexpensive, and I see the same people

OSU-OKC's retained students' reference the campus location, the cost of attendance, and the campus size as reasons for returning to college. Sophia stated, "I live five minutes from here, like down the street." Amy said, "It's five minutes from my house so it's easier for me to come to campus whenever I need to." Holly and several other students also referenced the location's convenience. It is likely that OSU-OKC's campus location, and proximity to retained students' home, eases the tension that results from students' effort to physically manage the logistics of balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. Retained students also referenced OSU-OKC's affordability as an element that helped them return to campus. Amy suggested that OSU-OKC was, "Not as expensive" and that she is "getting just as good an education as she would at

other schools without having to pay as much." In Amy's case, she had not attended a different institution and had no reference point by which to measure her experience. Amy's imagined comparison differed from Holly's tangible comparison of price as Holly claimed that OSU-OKC was inexpensive when compared to other schools.

Retained students also reference the campus "feel." Luis said that when he toured OSU-OKC he liked the feel of being on campus and claimed that it felt more welcoming than other campus. Luis expanded his description as he said that the campus buildings are in one area and he did not get lost when trying to navigate the campus space. Ruth suggested that students' reference of the campus' size also included the number of students attending the college. Ruth claimed, "I see that students feel comfortable here because it is a smaller campus, but once they settle in they see the same people around them all the time." Holly clarified her familiarity with faculty and staff is also helpful. Holly stated, "Professors aren't rushing out the door and they don't have a bazillion people to talk to. You can actually talk to your professor when you don't understand something." She added, "And Ms. J. is a friendly face and helpful in different areas. She's the person to turn to, or fall back on if you don't know something."

Ruth added, "It's kind of like a family atmosphere where everyone knows each other." Ruth's observation was, perhaps, confirmed as Maria stated that she had graduated from a small high school and, "Needed to be somewhere small." Holly shared Maria's sentiment as she described the campus as "almost like high school" given that she only had thirty people in a class. Despite student reference to the size of the campus' physical space and student population, Sophia provided an additional insight. Sophia said that, "even if I come in on a

Sunday to the computer lab there is somebody else doing their homework, too. It makes me feel like I'm not the only one struggling. It makes me feel better." While OSU-OKC's retained students appreciate the campus proximity, affordability and familiarity, Sophia's comment adds an additional insight. Her statement suggests that comfort is derived from her observing fellow students in the campus computer lab on the weekends. The comfort represents, perhaps, the Sophia's sense of belonging rather than isolation that first-time students at time describe (O'Shea, 2016).

"Learning tips and tricks"

OSU-OKC retained students cite the new student orientation as a source of help that supports continued enrollment in college. Mary stated that while in high school she worked freshman orientation activities and she felt that if she attended a college orientation then she could learn some tricks about school like, "park in this parking lot" or "get here 10 or 15 minutes before; small things." Mary added, "I was scared when I came in. I saw a lot of people who had friends and I just had to get out of my comfort zone." For Holly, orientation "calmed some nerves before actually coming in and going to my classes." She added that it was helpful during the first week of school to, "see a familiar face from the orientation." Holly noted that "It helped with it not being such a serious and next step into life into college and it's a great integration of it all." Luis said that he attended the orientation and that, "I kind of liked it I was just nervous because I don't know anybody, I don't have any family or anything. It's just me." Luis also said that he saw a lot of familiar faces on campus after that." Isabella said that Orange Crush was "really helpful because it helped me meet people that I have a few classes with and I don't, like, I

don't really talk to them much but I know who they are like it was better than I just came on the first day and didn't have a clue of who anyone was. I get a little bit outside my comfort zone meeting new people."

Students who attend the Orange Crush orientation receive a t-shirt to commemorate their participation. Orientation leaders encourage attendees to wear the t-shirt the first week of school so that the students can identify one another. A student referred to this aspect of the orientation and claimed that, "we wore our shirt on the first week so that we could identify each other. You're a new person here, too! It's not as in intimidating." Holly said, "I was super shy when I first came in and Orange Crush kind of helped me open up a little bit." Ruth suggested that faculty and staff, too, could wear the Orange Crush t-shirts to identify who to ask for help.

OSU-OKC's retained students suggested that the campus should increase the number of times and dates that it offers orientation activities and consider broadening program content to include team building activities. Student comments acknowledge the value of the orientation program designed to help students meet others while deepening their understanding of the campus environment. Students also identify value in the use of t-shirts that act as a type of signal marker or touchstone to represent sources of help. Accordingly, the student insights indicate the campus need to schedule like activities across the semester to affirm students' decision to attend college, counter students' feelings of isolation, and establish a clear set of touchstones that sustain students across the academic term.

The scarceness of place references

OSU-OKC's retained students suggested, on multiple occasions, that they were first-in-family to attend college and that their goal was to complete a college degree. Retained students also described the complexity of their college-going lived realities that is shaped as they attempt to balance school, work and family. Accordingly, students describe campus aspects that supported their return for the second fall semester as the campus' proximity to their home and affordability, and students' familiarity with the campus and others. Students made few references to OSU-OKC's academic elements which may indicate that they view their retention issues as structural rather than relating to their intellectual capacity to achieve academic success.

Student data collected across study activities revealed few instances in which retained students' embody Prince's argument that one's visioning of their possible self (Who will I be) as inextricably bound with place (Where will I be) (2014). This study's data seems to suggest that college proximity, affordability and familiarity emphasizes the *Where will I be* over the *Who will I be*. Students' consideration of *who will I be* is, perhaps, reflected in Ruth's aforementioned observation that students who are first-in-family to attend college are, "just trying to make it and finish out the semester because it's what they've been told to do." Ruth continued, "First-generation college students have parents who tell them to go to school. The students don't have their own reason." Prince argues that "physical environments are not inert backdrops against which social life unfolds, but rather it is in the transactions between people and their everyday socio-physical environments that identity is created" (2014, p. 698). Accordingly, this study's data suggests that OSU-OKC's retained students have greater concern for *where will I be* than

who will I be, and that the campus environment, as an inert backdrop, is a convenient location to start college.

Collaborator experience

"We've made connections."

OSU-OKC's retained students' who served as this study's research collaborators indicated that they made friends during the study. Esther said, "We all knew each other. I feel like it made us closer." She added, "I knew Mary, but now I feel like I know her and we spend more time together." Mary stated that, "We're more comfortable around each other. Ruth noted how well the group worked together and said, "I noticed how each one of us had our own strategy and how we worked well with each other's strategy." Esther replied, "We found a way to work with each other." During the presentation to the executive team, the campus president also asked if the group made friends during the study. Ruth responded, "We say hi now, more." She added, "The guy I had interviewed, he said I'm not the first one to say hi unless I have to. I was, like, then I'll say hi, now." Ruth concluded, "We've made connections." The experience facilitated social integration on a two-year campus which, according to Tinto, is a foundational element of his student retention theory. The student's connection to others also grew their social capital network with one another.

"This experience changed my perspective."

In the focus group meeting, I asked the collaborators how their participation in the study's work changed their life and college journey. Esther said, "It has changed my perspective. I realize how many people are in the same boat as me, and how many people are

completely different. You realize the difference in stories." She continued, "I'm a people person and I often wish that I could trade places with other people to see how they're living their life. Or, I wonder what their life is when they go home." Ruth added, "I've learned that even the simple things, like saying hi or just a smile, can change a person's day." She added, "Sometimes we're so quick to judge people and you never know what their life is like behind closed doors until you talk to them." She concluded, "I'm now less quick to judge and I ask more questions. Sometimes it's good to ask questions because people may not have anyone that asks them, so they don't tell anybody." Mary said, "I have my mom's support. Knowing how much support that I have and, then, knowing how many different people don't have that support, or that things in their life are not really positive."

Ruth added that she felt the study helped her in the way she analyzes things. She stated, "It's going to help me more with my analysis skills; to raise further questions instead of just saying, oh, okay." Ruth comprehended the critical elements of a research project as evidenced in an exchange that related to her moving to a four-year university. Ruth said, "I'm graduating and will attend a four-year university but I will come back to see you." I warned her that she would return from her new school as a snooty sorority girl. Ruth said, "They need some regulation, that's what really hinders them. They need to do some research on them, too. Why are they snooty? Who knows, that might even turn into a research project of my own." Thoughts of the future also surfaced in Mary's remarks as she stated a change in perspective. Mary said, "I know that I want to work with kids, but this study helped me realize that I want to work with the Hispanic families. I want to help parents understand how to get their kids in school. My mom

doesn't know English that well so she couldn't help me so I want to be able to help those parents and, like, lessen that gap."

Student lives transformed

This study contained a second research question that examined co-researcher experience in the study's collaborative activities as the source of personal, or agency transformation. Bandura (2001) posits that one's agency "embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place." This study's collaborators registered individual, transformative changes in areas that included a change in their attitudes toward others and empathy toward their peers; greater appreciation for their personal support network; and an increase in active listening behaviors when engaged in conversations with others. While each area of personal transformation suggests a change in co-researchers' human agency, the personal transformations contribute, also, to the methodology's validity criteria in the areas of outcome validity, process and dialogic validity, and democratic and catalytic validity.

Collectively, the collaborators claimed that participating in the study was fun and that they enjoyed learning about others. Ruth stated, "I was nervous. I don't know why. I think it was just because I didn't know her and I'm asking her all these questions." However, the collaborators referenced, specifically, changes in themselves. In summarizing her experience, Esther said, "You realize how many people are in the same boat as you, and how many people are completely different." She continued stating, "You realize the stories." She wished

sometimes that she, "could trade places with that person and see how they're living their life, or what their life is when they go home." She added that when she conducted her interviews, "We were complete strangers but you really get to know that person and that person's life." Collaborators also noted a greater appreciation for their own support network. Mary noted, "I have my mom's support." She continued, "I don't feel like I have to do it for her, or I'm doing it just because of her." One student said that her experience was eye opening given that she could "see how much support that I have and seeing how many, how different people don't have that support." Esther referenced the interviewee who said that she was attending college at her mother's direction and said, "I don't want to be here." Esther said, "I will forever think about the student who said that she only attends college for her mother." Esther added, "I'm really glad that I'm doing something I want because I want it, not because someone else wants it."

Ruth noted that conducting the interviews caused her to be more observant when engaged in a conversation with others. She stated, "I learned that whenever they make a certain facial expression or stop talking then I'm, like, let's dig into that." Perhaps the most important transformation of agency came in the form of the co-researchers' empathy toward others. Ruth said that after interviewing a student who struggled with shyness she realized that, "even the simple things, like a simple hi, or a smile, or something like that can really change a person's day." Esther said, "It was funny to see that I'm not the only one in that boat, you know, kind of lost, not really knowing who to ask for help, and just being in your own bubble like, I'll figure it out." Despite the age similarities between the collaborators and their peer interviewees, Ruth empathized with an interviewee stating that, "He seems like this big tough guy but he's not, he's

such a good kid and he's just trying to make it, too." Ruth continued that because of her participation in the study she's less quick to judge. She said, "Sometimes we're so quick to judge people and now you're just like you never know what life is like behind closed doors until you talk to somebody." Ruth added, that she was less quick to judge and more apt to now ask questions. She said, "Some people don't want to tell you but sometimes it's good because they may not have anyone to ask them so they don't tell anybody."

We had just figured it out

When the collaborators reflected on their peer interviews, Esther said, "I was super nervous." Mary noted that she was, too. Esther added, "I was thinking how am I going to make this person tell me what I want them to tell me? We're basically the same age, who am I to ask them? Having that student-to-student did make it a little bit better." Ruth believed that she could have conducted a better interview had she been able to talk to one more students. She said, "I figured out some tactics to make her feel comfortable." She noted the importance of making the interviewee feel comfortable and not just, "hitting them with questions like 'who are you?'." Ruth also still pondered, "How do you know when enough is enough and what questions to ask?" Esther said that she wished that she could have dug deeper into Holly's story about her mother's directive to attend school. Esther suggested that she would have asked Holly, "What do you want for yourself?" Ruth said that she's learned to question people more in order to, "Find out the why." Ruth noted that she now has conversations with people and, in her head, thinks, "Hold on, what did you say about this; and why is that?" This suggests that my training, her experience, and feedback from others improved her experience of what.

"They don't know how to work with us. We don't know how to work with them."

The collaborators' struggled find the words to convey their thoughts as to why more colleges should conduct this type of work. Ruth said that colleges should "reach out to the students and ask for more feedback." Ruth added, "They should also see, I don't want to say class, but." Esther interrupted, "I know what you're saying, I'm thinking the same thing but I'm trying to think about how to say that without being rude." Ruth said, "The background?" Esther continued, "There are many universities that are used to having typical students, like middle or upper class students, and the colleges see everyone in the same way. They don't stop and think about the fact that minority groups are growing and they're going to college, and they're new to this." Esther concluded, "They don't know how to work with us, and we don't know how to work with them. We need to find a way to reach out to the minorities."

"Let's start with the negatives"

Esther said a negative of the study is that, "I think we need more diversity. Like if other campuses wanted to do this, or larger campuses, they would need more students to participate, and more diversity within those students, and add in some males. I'm pretty sure we'd get different results if there was a guy in here with us." Ruth added, "Guys are quiet, they observe more so maybe they would have seen something else." Ruth also thinks that people didn't respond, "Because of the time that was going to be put into it. I don't want to commit to it." Mary said, "Or intimidated. I don't want to tell some stranger my life, or why I'm here because it's emotional and stuff. A lot of people don't like sharing."

Ruth referenced the amount of work involved in the study as she said, “I don’t want to make this sound bad, but compensation. If we did this again then we’d need some credit. Maybe service learning. I mean, the overall experience is really rewarding itself, I think.” Esther said, “I told my mom about it and at first like when we started out and doing the interviews and my mom was like, why are you doing that? What is it for? Later on, I told her about today; when we had the executive meeting. She was like, ‘oh, they picked you out of all of those willing candidates?’”

“Are you going to tell him?”

In speaking for the group, Esther said, “You want to know something?” Ruth said, “You going to tell him?” Esther said, “We are big procrastinators.” Esther’s comment drew a laugh from Mary. Esther said, “I procrastinate everything and so that’s why I was like what did I get myself into because like we fall into the time and having to read my interviews and having to be at the meetings and making sure I did all of my homework before I came to the meetings, but how long did we know about this Venn diagram? We came up with the idea, right.” Esther said, “We didn’t prepare for the presentation until the night before.” I responded, “Why do you think I sent the email last night?” My early interactions with the collaborators provided me with an awareness of their difficulty balancing school, work and family responsibilities. While I sent the email reminder to comfort my anxiety, Esther’s comment that they had prepared the night before indicated that the collaborators’ managed their task as it fit into their schedule availability.

“It felt like we were on the same level.”

Esther said, “I wasn’t expecting that. Whenever you were telling us that we’re going in front of the executive board and the president, present this to them, I like imagined them sitting at a table in front of us and us up standing.” Esther added, “Standing and talking and teaching and showing them this. I imagined it like that.” Mary felt, too, that the presentation would have been more formal. However, Mary, Ruth and Esther all agreed that they liked the informal presentation style with Esther saying, “I liked that we were all sitting that we were on the same level. Ruth said, “I was telling Esther that I was actually not that, like, intimidated because, again, what you guys were talking about, the positions and students coming in, kind of like you’re just like, these higher people than me, you know, I don’t know. But, it felt good like Esther said, being on the same level. Mary said, “I liked how it was informal. We were all sitting together and they were not there to criticize but in the back of my head I still thought they’re going to be there to criticize us.

“White Knuckle” and “Lone Wolf”

During the collaborators’ presentation to OSU-OKC’s executive team, an administrator who was also first-in-family to attend college made an observation regarding students’ transition to campus. The administrator noted that in his conversations with high school students and parents that he emphasizes, from his administrative perspective, the importance of advanced placement (AP) courses, and students’ academic proficiency as measured by grade point average (GPA). However, the administrator appeared to reflect upon his status as a first-in-family college student when he said, “I’m going to start asking people to get connected within their high school and learn how to use systems, and to rely on each other.” He added, “You can be like

Carlos and Luis and white knuckle things and be a lone wolf but that's not the best way to get through, or probably the most effective way to get through." The collaborators' presentation to the campus executive team inspired action and change as evidenced as an administrator reflected on his personal history and vowed to adjust his message to prospective students.

CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNER'S MIND

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,
in the expert's mind there are few" (Suzuki, 1970).

In this study, I served as principle researcher alongside my role as a site administrator. I approached the study, as researcher and practitioner, with the perspective of a beginner's mind as I reflected, critically, upon my practices, my understanding of my practices, and the situations in which I deploy my practices (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This project made visible, with help from retained students as collaborators, the bits and pieces of students' everyday lives that constituted their college-going lived realities. This project also made visible the silent but fascinating tension that existed between students' college-going lived realities and the assumptions, habits, precedents, and ideologies that constituted the context of OSU-OKC's campus learning environment.

I engaged OSU-OKC's retained students throughout the study's iterative cycles of activity. The students' interactions and insights disrupted my traditional work routines and thought patterns, and the professional boundaries that govern my typical interactions with students. I also monitored and observed the disruptions that collaborators experienced as they, due to the weight of their personal demands from spaces not part of this study – work, family,

and other --were at some points during the study unable to advance at the pace and level of engagement that I had envisioned.

Collaborator and peer interviewee perspectives were a source of authentic, local knowledge, although their perspectives could not reflect the diversity of the 244 retained students constituting the study's prospect pool. However, the combination of my research knowledge and professional experience coupled with students' local knowledge and partnership was, indeed, powerful within its assigned space. Through this work, we were able to unearth fragments of students' college-going lived realities that, once identified, inspired real action and shaped changes that will improve students' experiences and, ultimately, OSU-OKC's rate of student retention. Perhaps the greatest conclusion I reached is that efforts such as this one should be woven into my day-to-day efforts as a sort of continuous improvement endeavor rather than as a singular event.

Patton (2002) suggests that inductive analysis, and the exploration of meaning begins with an inventory of practices that are important to the individuals within the setting. This study included four of OSU-OKC's retained students as research collaborators and eight retained students as peer interviewees. While each collaborator and interviewee was an independent source of local knowledge, the collection of interview transcripts produced a powerful context-specific inventory of these students' experiences and indigenous meanings that were hidden in plain sight; nested within, contributing to, and competing for attention within the public and conventional framework of meaning that is OSU-OKC's campus context (Crotty, 1998; Fish, 1990).

Unearthing a unique student profile

This study was situated on a two-year college campus and surfaced a student profile that is, most likely, not unique to OSU-OKC. The student profile is the product of multiple layers of complex and interacting personal characteristics and structural forces that cannot be captured as a single data point within an institution's data system, and be neither assessed nor understood apart from its campus or community context. This unique profile contains characteristics that include: 1) the student's family had no experience of high school education in the United States, 2) the student was first-in-family to graduate from high school, 3) the student was first-in-family to enter college, 4) the student declared that his or her primary reason for entering college was in response to a supportive others' expectations that they improve the family, 5) the student selected the campus for reasons that included proximity to home and work, tuition cost, peer encouragement, and interest in a specific academic program, 6) the student entered college with an enrollment status of first-time (no prior credit hours earned), and enrolled at full-time credit status (a minimum of 12 credit hours). Accordingly, the student profile was a member of the first-time student cohort that is monitored, federally, for retention and completion performance.

Community and family: Leave it at home or take it to college?

Tinto's well-known and well-accepted Interactionalist Model (1987) posits that a student's decision to return to college for the second fall term is based, in part, on his or her integration into the campus' academic and social systems. Tinto's model posits that students' progress through three phases: separation, transition, and integration. In the model's first phase, the student separates from the norms, values and behaviors that represent "membership in the

communities of the past" (p. 95). Such communities include family, high school, and the formal place of residence. In the second phase, the student completes the separation phase and enters the new environment but is yet to adopt, fully, the behavioral patterns and norms of the new environment. The model's third phase is labeled integration and is marked as the student replaces prior behavioral patterns and norms with those appropriate to the campus' intellectual and social system. Tinto's model argues that the campus' academic and social systems are nested within the external environment that is governed by its own patterns and values. Accordingly, students' consider each environment as they reconcile commitments, goals, and interactions.

Tinto's model is generally well accepted in higher education but is not without its critics as the model is the product of research conducted on the four-year, residential campus (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Consequently, the model privileges the experiences of Caucasian, middle-class students without due consideration of the greater diversity that may exist at a two-year college campuses. Findings of this study raise questions regarding the transferability of Tinto's model to the two-year campus given the student and campus characteristics that are typical of the two-year college environment. Regardless of the model's limitations, it remains the most prominent and accessible framework available for considering student engagement and retention. Thus, I selected it, *a posteriori*, as a platform on which to examine this study's findings.

Reviewing study data against Tinto's separation phase

This study's data suggested that OSU-OKC's retained students did not proceed in a linear path through the three phases of Tinto's Interactionalist Model: separation, transition and

integration. Instead, data suggested that OSU-OKC's retained students' bypassed the separation phase and entered the transition phase as a step toward integration. OSU-OKC's retained students' revealed that they did not abandon communities of the past but still lived with their families; that they were active in helping their siblings with homework and transportation; that they had responsibilities to the household such as running errands; and that they welcomed opportunities for family members to participate with them in school-related activities. OSU-OKC's retained students' also claimed that they attend college to "improve their family." These findings suggest that students' families are an important source of support despite the family's possession of minimal quantities of social and cultural capital.

Tinto's model suggests that because the campus environment is nested within the external environment, students consider each environment as they reconcile commitments, goals, and interactions (Tinto, 1987). Study data indicated that students faced a variety of tensions as they did not abandon their community of the past, but instead needed to reconcile competing interests that stemmed from home and school environments (1987). An example of such tension was visible in Mary's statement as she described her mother as her greatest source of support, but also as her biggest crutch. Mary claimed, "It's just her and my brother. I don't want to leave them." She added, "I wish that I would have stuck to my initial plan after graduating from high school. I wanted to attend a four year university instead of transitioning to a two-year college near home. I would have gotten away, instead of getting away slowly." Ruth described a similar tension as she stated, "It's just so hard for them to let go of their kids. It's holding me back. They won't let me go." These statements represent the forces of push and pull that, on one hand,

encouraged students to attend college while, on the other hand, encouraged students to remain in close proximity to home. In Ruth's vignette presented in Chapter three, I referenced her genuine fear associated with graduating from a two-year college and attending one of Oklahoma's largest four-year universities. Given that Ruth did not separate from her family, as a community of the past, it is possible that Ruth's fear was associated with the safety she found at a two-year college and the separation anxiety this created. Ruth's imagination of her possible self at the four-year institution had negative overtones evidenced when she said,

> "I dream about the large university and want to join a sorority when I get there. However, I have seen college life presented in the movies. I am scared that once I get there the people might be mean and life will not be what I expected. At this school I know everybody, but at the large university I am going to be lost and on my own.

Ruth's experience suggests that Tinto's notion of separation, as the model is applied on a two-year campus, may reside at the point of students' *completion* from the two-year college rather than at the point of college *entry*.

Examining the data against Tinto's transition phase

Tinto's second phase, labeled transition, is marked as students complete the separation phase and enter the new environment but are yet to adopt, fully, the behavioral patterns and norms of the new environment (Tinto, 1987). As stated, study data showed that OSU-OKC's retained students did not abandon their communities of the past, thus, bypassing the separation phase and entering the transition phase, directly. However, students' entry and progress in the transition phase is delayed given their requisite to consider the home and school environments as

they reconciled each environment's commitments, goals, and interactions (Tinto, 1987). This study's data suggested that retained students' may not adopt, fully, the behavioral patterns and norms of the new environment because they bypassed the separation phase and have minimal quantities of social or cultural capital to help facilitate their transitions to college. For example, Ruth indicated that when she entered college she did not know her reason for attending. She said, "We're told that education is important and that we have to go to school in order to be better." She added, "We don't know what we're doing but it's easier to start going to school to get basics, at least." Ruth's use of the pronoun "we" seemed to suggest she has first-hand knowledge that other retained students enter college with a shortage of reason, direction, and support. Her comment indicated knowledge of college jargon as she used the term "basics" and presented the notion that one can pursue "basics" without having a sense of direction or purpose. During one of the study's data analysis meetings, Ruth stated, "All of us here, our parents didn't go to college and we all found a way and a different support system." Ruth's declaration showed an awareness of her parents' lack of capacity to help her navigate the path to college, or to provide support as she persisted toward degree completion. Ruth's use of the word "found" implies, perhaps, that retained students know they need support and that they need to identify campus allies capable of providing support. In a similar example, Sophia stated, "I had my parent's right there with me all the time. But I learn in English and my mom learned in Spanish. Sometimes I don't understand the words she uses or she doesn't understand what I try and explain to her. Retained students' tension associated with the transition phase is, perhaps, most visible in the following statements such as Esther's comment that, "We're just thrown out here

and we have to figure it out ourselves." Ruth echoed the sentiment, "I'm the only one who's going through this. It's not like I can relate to my mother." Sophia added, "Nobody else that I was related to could help me." And Luis claimed, "It was like I was a person in my own world."

During the collaborators' presentation to the campus executive team, an OSU-OKC administrator described himself as first-in-family to attend college. The administrator noted that he encourages high school student audiences to enroll in advanced placement (AP) classes and to maintain a grade point average that demonstrates academic proficiency. However, the collaborators' presentation seemed to inspire a visible point of critical reflection as the administrator declared, "I'm going to start encouraging people to get connected within their high school and to learn how to use systems." The administrator added, "It's important to be able to network and rely on other people, and how to work within a system." The administrator concluded that students can, "White knuckle things or be a lone wolf but that's not the best way to get through, or, probably, the most effective way to get through."

The students' and administrator's statements align with O'Shea's study findings (2016) that revealed that students who were first-in-family to attend college reported a sense of disorientation during the initial weeks of the semester, as well as feelings of loneliness and isolation that seemed to underscore a sense of lacking entitlement to college (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997). In the administrator's case, it is possible that he was distanced from his own college transition experience and that his interaction with this study's collaborators prompted a moment of critical reflection that emphasized the importance of students' abilities to navigate a system. This study's data suggests that students attending a two-year college persist despite not

satisfying the criteria of Tinto's transition phase as they do not separate from home and explore, in an effort to adopt, the behavioral patterns and norms of the new environment. The data suggests that two-year campus administrators should acknowledge students' connection to their community of the past and seek ways to help students, and their community of the past, understand and adopt behavioral patterns and norms that support student success.

Examining the data against Tinto's integration phase

Tinto's third phase, labeled integration, is marked as the student replaces prior behavioral patterns and norms with those appropriate to the campus' intellectual and social systems (Tinto, 1987). In review, OSU-OKC's retained students' did not abandon their community of the past, thus, bypassing the separation phase. Furthermore, student advancement to and progress within the transition and integration phase was delayed given that students must consider the implications of the home and school environment as they reconcile each environment's commitments, goals, and interactions (Tinto, 1987). Consequently, students were not equipped to achieve full integration into the campus environment and replace prior behavioral patterns and norms with those appropriate to the campus' intellectual and social systems. Students' inability to integrate, fully, was a source of tension exemplified as follows. Sophia expressed her inability to adjust her patterns and behaviors to those appropriate to the campus learning environment. She said, "The biggest barrier for me was not being able to do my work because I didn't know how." She added, "Keeping up with all the material and trying to understand it. I wasn't studying correctly, or doing stuff the way I should have." Esther noted a time in which she failed an exam. She stated, "That particular class, it doesn't match how I learn." She added, "I have to

hear it, see it, and do it so I'm, like, a hands on person." Esther's statement demonstrated her effort to reconcile her operational patterns and norms with the realization that her patterns and norms weren't sufficient to pass the exam.

In an example pertaining to social integration, Ruth stated that she participated in social activities in college "because it positions her for scholarships." She added, "I know that my parents aren't going to pay for school so if I'm going to get that money then I have to make myself likeable on paper." Ruth's statement demonstrated, perhaps, her awareness of the purpose of social integration but, for her, the statement also demonstrated an awareness that participating in institutionally sponsored activities can translate to a type of currency or capital that can increase the potential of scholarships. Ruth's motive for engaging in social activities exemplifies this supposition as she declared her social engagement positioned her for scholarships. This study's data suggests that students attending a two-year college persist despite not achieving a full integration into the campus' intellectual and social system. Moreover, Ruth's statement regarding her motive for social engagement demonstrates her awareness of the importance of being perceived as engaged in the campus' social system as a means by which to secure financial assistance.

Students' persist despite the lack of separation, transition and integration

This study's data suggests that OSU-OKC's retained students operate in contrast to each phase of Tinto's Interactionalist Model (1987). For example, students' suggested that they do not separate from their community of the past but, in a sense, carry the community of the past with them to college. Study data also suggested that students' transition to the college

environment is, perhaps, difficult and delayed as students' negotiate a variety of tensions as they reconciled the home and college environment's commitments, goals, and interactions. Finally, students' full integration into the campus environment did not occur as students' remained in the transition phase trying to comprehend the campus' intellectual and social systems and developing strategies to replace prior behavioral patterns and norms with those appropriate to the campus learning environment. This study unearthed a unique student profile as students submitted and demonstrated via stories that they still lived at home and that family was a significant aspect of their college-going lived reality. Accordingly, this study offers findings that contrast with Tinto's notion that students separate from communities of the past. This study's data suggests that Tinto's model reinforces university-based operational traditions rather than presenting a disruptive, non-deterministic lens through which to embrace the diversity present on the two-year college. Yosso (2005) presents a type of anti-deficit framework that considers students' experiential knowledge as a foundation for college persistence and success.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework

Yosso (2005) presents a Community Cultural Wealth framework (CCW) that is founded upon one's experiential knowledge, or agency Yosso's framework presents six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Yosso and Garcia (2007) argue that these forms of capital are interrelated and that they overlap and shift based on the focus of analysis. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to preserve hope and dreams despite obstacles that are real or perceived (2005). Linguistic capital involves the strength of communication skills, including bilingualism and storytelling (2005). Familial capital includes

family and friends and recognizes the family's collective knowledge (2005). Social capital refers to a network that presents practical and embodied support (2005). Navigational capital refers to navigation of social institutions, as premised upon individual agency and social networks (2005). Resistance capital relates to a disposition that informs behaviors that challenge the status quo (2005).

In this study's data collection activities, OSU-OKC's retained students discussed the incidents that helped and hindered their retention experiences. The students' stories reflect the application of various forms of capital that mirrored the forms Yosso presents in the CCW framework.

Aspirational capital. Regarding aspirational capital, this study's data revealed multiple examples (Yosso, 2005). For example, Mary stated that her mother "Didn't go to college so she pushed me to get an education. Since I'm the oldest, I have to be an example for my brother." Ruth said "We don't have anybody who has been the first doctor in the family or anything like that. I think that makes it harder because, for me, I'm the only one who is going through it." These data points, drawn from students' vignettes in chapter three, represent the students' hopes to complete college in order to improve their family's situation. Accordingly, this study suggests that students' aspiration capital is sourced and replenished as students' reconcile the commitments, goals, and interactions of the home and school environments, and reflect on their hopes to improve their families.

Linguistic capital. Linguistic capital involves the strength of language and communication skills, including bilingualism and storytelling (2005). Yosso argues that

linguistic capital may include memorization, attention to detail, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme (2005). However, Yosso presents linguistic capital as including the intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences (2005). A review of study data revealed that students were native English speakers, so they did not encounter language challenges while attending high school or college. Examples of student possession of linguistic capital surfaced early in the study as study collaborators reviewed and reworked the peer solicitation email to shorten its length, simplify its wording, include a participation incentive, and disseminate from a student account. Each of these elements demonstrated students' intellectual and social skills learned through electronic communication. During the training and implementation workshop, the collaborators' noted concerns pertaining to conducting peer interviews. While Esther referenced the potential for an awkward social interaction during peer interviews that solicited information on personal information, Mary noted that interviews improved her social and communication skills. Students also noted improved social skills following their presentation to OSU-OKC's campus executive team.

Familial capital. Familial capital references students' social and personal resources as derived from their family and community network (2005). Yosso submits that familial capital includes a cultural knowledge that students' utilize to better understand socioeconomic status and social position (2005). This study's data revealed that many retained students are first-in-family to complete high school and enter college. Reyes (2012) suggests that students without generational experience of education often channel their parent's work ethic and determination rather than the social and cultural capital that a parent is unable to provide. Indeed, students

acknowledge parental support. However, study data suggested that students' social and personal resources derived from their family and community network are but one element within array of considerations as students reconciled the commitments, goals, and interactions between the home and school environment.

Social capital. Social capital centers on students' social contacts and their use of contacts to access college (2005). Yosso defines this type of capital as the networks of people and sources that can help a student navigate social institutions (Yosso, 2005). Study data suggested that students' were first-in-family to attend college; originated from families with no generational experience of higher education; originated from families with no generational experience of a high school education in the United States; who declared that their singular reason for entering college was because of a supportive others' expectations. Thus, it is possible that OSU-OKC's retained students had limited access to informants within their networks who understood the transition to college, and the patterns and behaviors that lead to success within college (Ceja, 2006; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Given that the networks of the retained students in this study had minimal knowledge of the college-going experience, the network appeared to offer few, if any, norms and sanctions, or the ability to monitor student progress while in college. In some cases, social capital can function as an "unsocial capital," generating cultural preservation that does not advance upward social mobility (Gandara, 1994).

The data reveals this reality through Esther's comment that, "We're just thrown out here and we have to figure it out ourselves." Luis said that when he entered college that he was nervous and didn't have any family in the area. He said, "I didn't know anybody. I was trying

to make friends. I was trying to get to know a new place. It was like I was a person in my own world." Ruth shared a similar sentiment as she referenced her mother's ability to help her understand the transition to college. Ruth stated, "I'm the only one that's going through it. It's not like I can relate to my mother." Sophia said that the most difficult thing for her was that she did not know where to start. She said that her brother was a high school dropout so he never applied to a university. Sophia added, "Nobody else that I was related to could help me."

Navigational capital. Navigational capital references students' capacity to navigate interactions within the structured campus environment (2005). Yosso suggests that such capital pertains to students' abilities to overcome the routine presence of barriers (2005). Given that this study's work was to better understand the incidents that help and hinder student retention, the product of this work is to enhance students' navigational capital and to enhance interactions with campus' faculty and staff as the means by which to improve student retention.

Resistance capital. Resistance capital is also an element within Yosso's framework and the form of capital relates to students' disposition toward challenging the status quo (2005). This study's data offers multiple examples of students' disruptions of the status quo. For example, students persevered and were first-in-family to complete high school and enter college. Moreover, students demonstrated awareness that their non-degree parents had jobs but that a college education can improve job prospects. The students also described their plans to complete a two-year degree as a step toward a four-year degree, thus, resisting the draw of entering the workforce in order to further improve job prospects. It is interesting to note, though, that students' disposition toward challenging the status quo did not appear to apply to their roles

within and responsibility to the families. Study data suggested that students' experienced great tension as they reconciled commitments, goals, and interactions of the competing home and school environments. Further research may surface the cultural aspects of students' family structures and expectations that permit them to challenge, freely, the status quo in some contexts while preventing the challenge in other contexts.

The Community Cultural Wealth Framework as the basis for designing interactions

Bejarano and Valverde's (2012) argue that higher education institutions use orientation-type programs to acculturate students into a manufactured "sea of sameness" in an effort to separate from the norms, values and behaviors that represent membership in the communities of the past. As this study revealed a unique student profile, an approach to campus orientations that was influenced by Yosso's framework, and the interrelated and overlapping forms of capital that students bring with them to the OSU-OKC campus, may enhance the experience. OSU-OKC does not require first-time students to enroll in an orientation course that packages onboarding elements. Accordingly, the following initiatives are embedded into OSU-OKC's physical space with the hope of assisting with students' efforts to integrate with college space: the honor roll posters and celebration event are positioned in the campus dining area; signage that carries support messages are positioned on the campus lawns that separate the parking lot and classroom buildings; and signage is affixed to restroom mirrors. Messages serve as visible signal markers that convey a sense that the institution itself projected a human-like personal of warmth, compassion, and directness. The signs were rotated across the academic semester so that students were exposed to signs leading up to and during the first week of classes that stated, "We

believe in you." The second round of signs, dispatched at the start of the term's second week stated, "If you want to pass, go to class." The third round of signs dispatched prior to the semester's final date to add or drop classes stated, "Be stronger than your excuses." Finally, the fourth round of signs dispatched after the final date to add or drop classes read, "You belong here" (Appendix X).

Designing and interjecting interventions to enhance and accelerate the transition

This study's epistemological lens suggests that an individual constructs truth or meaning as he or she engages with the world (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, the singular or social constructions of truth manifest as a culture of meaning as individuals access, inhabit, and are embedded within public and conventional frameworks of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Fish, 1990). In reference to the habitation of a framework of meaning, Dixon and Durrheim (2004) describe an individual's place identity as the familiarity or insided-ness within a physical environment; the sense of belonging within the physical environment that includes symbolic meaning as it relates to self; and the environment's role in facilitating the achievement of identity relevant projects (2004). Given that a college campus, as a place, facilitates students' achievement of identity-relevant projects and degree completion, it is perhaps important for students to comprehend campus' behavioral patterns and norms as one key to college success. Such patterns and norms inform the students' place identity and help facilitate cognitions of who they might become, who they want to become, and who they are afraid of becoming (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Krupat, 1983; Ozaki, 2016).

OSU-OKC administrators can utilize knowledge generated in this study to support the design and interjection of instructive, context-specific interventions into the transition spaces that campus data reflects as points in which students are most vulnerable. Such interventions would respond to students' voiced, self-relevant cognitions of their possible selves (who they might become, who they want to become, and who they are afraid of becoming) to create a context-specific place identity that is responsive to the complex array of characteristics that includes no generational experience of higher education and no generational experience of high school completion. This study data suggest that the customized place identity can be supported by a series of signal markers, or touchstones of affirmations, that help students and parents understand the behavioral patterns and norms of the campus learning environment so that they can, together, reconcile family and school related commitments, goals, and interactions.

A school for parents

Mary claimed that parents tell their children to attend school but "don't have the knowledge to give their child." She added, "Parents aren't able to communicate college, or why it's important." In an example specific to her, Mary claimed, "My mom doesn't know English that well so she couldn't help me. I want to be able to help those parents." Mary suggested the need for a "school for parents," or a resource to help parents understand college and ways in which they can help their child transition from high school to college, and succeed within college. Esther referenced her observation of her parents' attempts to help her, "Not knowing how to help, but trying. And, still not being able to help is very frustrating. I've seen that." Esther provided an example of an exchange with her mother wherein her mother adjusted the

content of the questions that she asked about her academic coursework and performance. Esther noted that her mother, "Used to ask questions about grades but I don't get questions about grades anymore." She added that her mother asks, "If I am on top of things, or did it get finished?" The mother's adjustment of her question content suggests that an open-ended question may solicit a student response that is, perhaps, beyond the mother's comprehension given her limited knowledge of academic process and the campus learning environment. However, the mother's revised question suggests her continued interest in her student's academic performance; the question's close-ended construction is, perhaps, the mother's effort to contain the conversation within the mother's range of expertise.

Student sensitivity of the knowledge or experiential disparity embedded in student and parent efforts to co-create meaning of college is, perhaps, represented best from a student who claimed that she did not want her parents to feel inadequate. In a different example, Esther noted, "My mom can be the one who supported me, encouraged me, pushed me on, but then she's always, like, look, your uncles are here. Drop your homework and come in here, or let's go somewhere." Ruth added, "My mom is like that, too." Ruth then explained her mother's lack of understand of the college-going behavioral patterns and norms that support success. Ruth noted that despite her efforts to balance school, work and family responsibilities, "I don't have a desk so my computer is set up in the dining room. My mom watches her soap operas from 9:00 – 10:00pm so I have to wait until they're done doing their thing then I can really concentrate."

This study's findings prompted a two-part action in response to OSU-OKC's retained students' mention of a school for parents. The first action involved the production of a series of

short videos that featured male and female Hispanic students and a female student and her mother's discussion of her transition to college and strategies for college success. The video series was labeled The Language of Success to emphasize success related to time management, the use of tutors, homework environment at home and at school, and the role of supportive others. The video series was uploaded on the institution's social media platform and, as of this writing, several videos have received nearly 4,000 views. The videos were a result of student input and are now a standard component of fall, spring, and summer student enrollment campaigns.

The second action involved a celebration with parents. The study's findings prompted the expansion of a current practice to include parental involvement. At the conclusion of each academic term, the campus prints its semester honor roll to poster boards that are exhibited in the campus dining area known as the HUB. It is not uncommon for students to take their photos beside their names and post to their social media accounts. However, student input prompted the expansion of the exhibition to include a celebrator event that encouraged students and family members to attend. In December, 2016, the institutions mailed invitations to the poster board exhibition to over 1,000 students who made the honor roll. On the night of December 20, 2016, nearly 140 students and family members arrived for the celebratory event to take photos and enjoy refreshments.

Study data suggested that OSU-OKC's retained students felt a sense of disorientation, loneliness, and isolation long after the initial weeks of the semester. OSU-OKC's retained students who attended the new student orientation, Orange Crush, referenced their receipt of an

event t-shirt. Holly stated, “We wear our Orange Crush shirt after Orange Crush on the first week so that you can identify, hey, you’re a new person here, too. It’s not as intimidating.” In response to this finding, student services purchased an additional 100 t-shirts for campus’ faculty and staff. The front of the shirt presented a message that welcomed students to campus and the back of the shirt stated “Question? Ask Me!”

In her peer interview, Destiny stated, “I always felt that I was never good enough” while another student stated that she sometimes lacked the “courage to get up, every day, to do what I have to do.” In a similar instance, Luis disclosed that his issue with self-confidence manifested as shyness. Luis claimed that it is often difficult for him to “open up and get to know other people around me”; this effort was also in response to Ruth’s comment that expressed a need for “stuff to remind us to keep pushing through.” While OSU-OKC offers referral services for mental health counseling, students’ comments indicated a need for a more robust effort to present positive messages as well as informational interactions and connections. Prince notes that one’s relationship to place incorporates place-related symbols, affects and beliefs that are “preconscious emotional landscapes and embodiments” (2014, p. 698). Accordingly, the student comments informed the development and launch of the previously referenced comprehensive communication campaign, via the use of yard signs that carried support messages that was responsive to the campus’ non-residential status and student movements from the parking lot to the classroom and from the classroom to the parking lot.

In addition to the yard signs, OSU-OKC introduced a messaging campaign that sought to reinforce student confidence through a printing technique that would allow for printed messages

to be affixed to restroom mirrors without damaging the mirror. Accordingly, the print shop identified a plastic material for this project's use. Messages included, "She believed she could, so she did," and "A cowgirl will either find a way, or make one." The mirror clings were hung in all women's restrooms across campus as OSU-OKC's degree completion data indicates that females complete at a higher rate than males. A campaign developed for males was not completed by the time of this writing. The mirror clings placed within the male restrooms stated, "If you feel like quitting, remember why you started." I gauged one aspect of the campaign's interest by the fact that several faculty members wanted a stack of the mirror clings to make available to students who had requested one (Appendix X) (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Data from this study also informed the redevelopment of my existing efforts to send note cards to first-time, full-time degree seeking students prior to the first week of class and prior to the mid-term point. While my messages conveyed to students that OSU-OKC was proud of them, the messages also conveyed that they belonged at OSU-OKC. The redevelopment of the effort occurred as I began to use an orange envelope to represent the school's colors; integrated onto the envelope an image of Pistol Pete, the school's mascot; and integrated onto the envelope the words, "You belong here" so as to reinforce a sense of belongingness. Finally, I changed the address font from a formal script to a handwriting font that appeared less formal. During the collaborators' presentation to OSU-OKC's administrators, Esther said, "I remember even before taking part in this research project, that I would get a few letters from Brad. I was like, who's this guy, but thanks." Esther added, "My mom would say, you got another letter from Brad." Esther concluded, "We love that." The fact that the Esther's mother interacted with the letter

reinforced, perhaps, the notion that I, as a campus agent, was helping the mother understand an element of the college experience that demonstrated the availability of a campus support system that was responsive to her child's needs.

This study's data suggests that OSU-OKC's retained students experience feelings of isolation and loneliness that may extend longer than the initial weeks of class. Student services staff who managed the campus' President's Leadership Class scholarship program discussed the possibility of replacing the scholarship criteria to make room for recipients to conduct campus service hours that would include a type of mentorship role to peers. While recipients, themselves, may not be fully acclimated to the patterns and norms of the campus environment, a type of buddy-system would reinforce a cohort model in which students look after their peers during the transition phase.

Tinto's Interactionalist model stresses that a student's decision to return to campus for the second fall term is based, in part, on the degree to which the student integrated into the campus' academic and social system. However, on a two-year campus, I favor of Deil-Amen's (2011) reference to a need for an alternate model that is responsive to students' life routines that may restrict their ability to integrate, fully, into academic and social systems that are suggested in Tinto's four-year model. Deil-Amen (2011) argues that, on a two-year campus, the constructs of academic integration and social integration do not function in isolation but can be fused to create socio-academic integrative moments that blend academic and social integration elements into a single encounter that is incorporated within classroom learning environment. The notion of socio-academic integrative moments warrant further exploration as student affairs budgetary and

staffing resources could, perhaps, be deployed to incent, support, or help measure outcomes of student interactions with instructor-initiated, pedagogical techniques that examine best practices for helping facilitate academic and social integration into the campus learning environment. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth framework would suggest acknowledgement of students' forms of capital on which to construct classroom-based moments that linked students' capital to collaborative academic experiences that are responsive to social and academic

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

Despite awareness of student and institutional characteristics believed to shape student academic performance and progress, OSU-OKC and two-year colleges across the nation continue to experience a stagnant rate of student retention (ACT, 2010; CCSSE, 2014). This participatory action research study engaged retained students, as collaborators, in an effort to better understand the incidents that helped and hindered their successes at the community college campus, and to discover their ideas for improving the experience. A second focus of the study was on the experiences of retained students who participated, as collaborators, in the study's collaborative activities. These combined efforts led to implications for research, theory, and practice.

Implications for research

A review of ProQuest Digital Dissertations database revealed that, in 2016, 88 published research studies utilized the participatory action research methodology. In the past five years, 518 studies utilized the participatory action research methodology. Of the studies conducted over the past five years, none have used the methodology to engage retained community college

students in an effort to understand students' college-going lived realities for improving retention. This study expands the participatory action research methodology's range of use while it also expands the body of literature regarding student retention on a two-year college campus. This study's implications for research also involve its team of collaborators: The study's mechanics facilitated the involvement of four Hispanic females at the average age of 19 in ways that led to unique outcomes for this community college campus; this suggests that other studies at community college campuses may also benefit from collaboration with students.

Action research's value stems from its concern for action within a context of practice, its use of the practitioner as an agent of change, its reliance on partnership and participation (AR Journal, 2014). Regarding the concern for action within a context of practice, this study's demonstrates the critical action and change that may result from action research efforts: relating to student orientation programming, yard sign and restroom sign campaigns, student mentorship programs, campus celebrations of student success, and a video series that helped families understand the transition to college and student success strategies. Regarding the practitioner as an agent of change, the study's work demonstrates that the researcher's position within the study is a source of local knowledge that is authentic and capable of generating action (Huang, 2010). However, the researcher's role duality makes it difficult to achieve the full spirit of collaboration given the presence of power dynamics and considerations of time when progressing the study. Regarding the study's reliance on partnership, the study's collaborators represented the retained students' voices and reported a range of incidents that help and hinder students' returns to

campus for the second fall semester, as well as ideas students believed could improve the experience.

The researcher found no formal examples in the academic literature wherein a campus administrator, as a practitioner, deployed the participatory action research methodology on a two-year, open-access college campus. This study's outcomes should encourage future researchers to consider the methodology's investigative and action-orientated pursuit for appropriate problems, thus elevating the methodology's position within the body of academic research literature on community colleges and student retention. The study's outcomes should also encourage future researchers to consider points at which to involve staff, and deeper analysis of administrative interaction with collaborators and discussion of study data. Finally, the study's outcomes should encourage future researchers to explore the collaborators' commitment to the study and to each other while operating within the scope of the study. Collaborator vignettes depict a range of experiences that were common. It is possible that the collaborators' participation in the study facilitated interactions that helped each improve their respective navigation of the college-going experience.

Implications for theory

This study transitioned from broad, and generally accepted, retention theory considerations to context-specific findings and action within a two-year, open-access institution.

Community and family support: Leave it at home or take it to college?

This study's data suggested that OSU-OKC's retained students in this study progressed through a variation of Tinto's (1987) three phases: separation, transition, and integration. The

data suggested that retained students bypassed the separation phase and entered the transition phase prior to integration. However, progress in the transition and integration phases was delayed due to students' work to reconcile the commitments, goals, and interactions between the home and school environments. The data suggested that, for some retained students, separation from their communities of the past did not occur. Instead, students' ties to communities of the past were a source of support that helps them persist through college. Accordingly, this study's data suggested the rejection of Tinto's theory for the two-year college; alternatively, the data suggested that Yosso's Community Cultural Framework (2005) may serve well as an anti-deficit approach to helping students transition to college and persist toward degree completion. Discussion in a previous section of this chapter details the range of cultural capital that may serve students at the point of institutional entry and may sustain a student toward degree completion if campuses acknowledge Yosso's six forms of capital and seek ways to generate socio-academic integrative moments that draw students into the campus learning environment.

Implications for Practice

The case for action research

Prince (2014) writes that place-based experiences can manifest as entrapments and restrictions that can become part of *current self* and may also be part of *possible self.* This study's application of the action research methodology found, within the context of the campus learning environment, that students who were first-in-family to attend college had a narrow vision for their *possible self* due to their family's limited access to social and cultural capital.

However, this study also facilitated, via sustained critical reflection, a greater awareness of my own place-based experiences that entrap, restrict, and regulate my work to the realm of familiarity and tradition rather than supporting a continuous search for improvements to enhance students' retention experience. Accordingly, the methodology's collaborative underpinnings can help practitioners amplify the student voice in a way that encourages efforts to seek the continuous improvement of strategies and plans to support student success as the strategies and plans unfold within the context of the campus learning environment.

Crowdsourcing a student retention strategy

Crowdsourcing suggests that presenting a problem to a large group increases the opportunity to generate a new innovation (Shepherd, 2012). Typical crowdsourcing activities involve the use of the internet to enlist the help of the individuals with an interest in examining an issue. This study posits that that participatory action research methodology mimics crowdsourcing, formalized, as its mechanics solicit user-generated contributions from people closest to the unit of study. This study did not utilize the internet as the basis for data collection, but engaged students, as system users, in activities to discover and act upon findings. Despite this study's range of findings, my sustained critical reflection across the study prompted me to consider seating a student advisory board to help me reflect, critically, on all student institutional recruitment, retention and completion strategies under my immediate control.

Student lives transformed

This study contained a second research question that examined co-researcher experience in the study's collaborative activities as the source of personal, or agency transformation. This

study's collaborators registered individual, transformative changes in areas that included a change in their attitudes toward others and empathy toward their peers; greater appreciation for their personal support network; and an increase in active listening behaviors when engaged in conversations with others. While each area of personal transformation suggests a change in co-researchers' human agency, the personal transformations contribute, also, to the methodology's validity criteria in the areas of outcome validity, process and dialogic validity, and democratic and catalytic validity.

Undergraduate research on a two-year campus

Undergraduate Research Experiences (URE) place individual students in a faculty research laboratory setting with an opportunity for mentorship (Linn, Palmer, Baranger, & Stone, 2015). Linn et al (2015) suggests that UREs present students with an opportunity to participate in research practices such as planning, modeling observations and data analysis. Linn et al (2015) reports that UREs often engage students in experimental protocols and not data interpretation and that student placement is highly competitive due to the availability of laboratory space and research mentors. A different type of undergraduate research is Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs) accommodate a greater number of students as the method utilizes lectures and readings to help students understand the research process (Linn et al., 2015). The authors posit that their work to better understand UREs and CUREs has surfaced the value of asking students to reflect on their research experience (2015).

Hensel and Cejda (2014) note the importance of the partnership between the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and the National Council of Instructional Administrators

(NCIA) as the coordinated effort investigates, formally, the role of undergraduate research on a two-year campus. The partnership is grant-funded through the National Science Foundation and provides community colleges with resources to plan and implement undergraduate research strategies. The authors submit that undergraduate research is an effective method for improving students' work habits and problem-solving skills, motivating students to persist in college, and connecting academic experiences to the world of work (2014). However, this research study submits that the partnership's current investigation of undergraduate research emphasizes research as a faculty-driven pedagogical tool that enhances classroom instruction in subject-specific areas that are often related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (Caplan & MacLachlan, 2014). Accordingly, the benefits implied are associated with the pedagogical context in which undergraduate research is deployed and, perhaps, the subject-specific areas to which it is associated.

This study was not faculty driven but, rather, nested within OSU-OKC's administrative unit. Furthermore, the study was not linked to an academic program but, rather, its purpose engaged students in activities to identify and explore peer retention experiences as a means by which to improve the retention experience. During a focus group session that marked this study's end, the collaborators discussed the benefits of participating in the undergraduate research experience. The group's discussion broadened the list of benefits that Hensel and Cejda suggest (2014).

This study suggests that the benefits of undergraduate research on a two-year campus may vary based on the positioning of the project within an academic or non-academic unit, and

the study purpose and unit of study. This study suggests that the participatory action research methodology is a mechanism capable of engaging undergraduate students in research activities beyond the classroom. Accordingly, the resulting research activities can extend the number and variety of research opportunities available to undergraduate students. Also, this study's methodology contains protocols that disrupt the status quo in order to help institutional agents develop a greater understanding of student experience in order to improve it. Accordingly, the merit of this study, and others like it, is compounded as students benefit from the research experience and the research findings generate actions capable of achieving a lasting effect on institutional practices.

This study agrees with Hensel and Cejda's (2014) suggestion that it is not typical for two-year colleges' to have a mission statement that references undergraduate research. Consequently, investigators pursing undergraduate research projects must act upon their own initiative when conducting research, or when identifying sources to sponsor research activities. It is possible that administrators who acknowledge and embrace the benefits of undergraduate research on a two-year college can identify ways both inside and outside the classroom to promote and strengthen a culture of inquiry on the two-year campus (2014).

Demonstrating study validity

Outcome validity

Outcome validity is described as the extent to which study activities prompt action and change (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this study, participants identified and explored critical incidents that were the meaning of the student retention experience. While this study also sought

to discover student ideas to improve the retention experience, I realized that students from a family with no educational memory of higher education may not be able to name a type or frequency of program to improve the retention experience. This study's outcome validity was based on retained students' authentic interaction and participation in pursuit of new knowledge as the basis for action and change. The outcomes that resulted from this study included the creation of an event where families could celebrate student success. This action was based on student comments that suggested that parents had little knowledge about college or academic performance expectations but students sought ways to share the experience with their parents. The event was a reception to celebrate student placement onto the semester honor roll. OSU-OKC's marketing and communication office printed its fall 2015 honor roll, 1492 students, onto poster boards for public display in the campus dining area. Student Services mailed invitations to each student listed on the honor roll inviting the student, and their family, to an honor roll reception on their behalf. Over 130 students and family members attended the event. The event served a dual purpose in that it provided the campus with an additional platform to ask students if they had enrolled for the subsequent spring semester. Furthermore, the event facilitated the development of relationships between families and campus representatives.

The participatory action research methodology submits that while power dynamics permeate the study, given the researchers role as practitioner, the dynamics are necessary for carrying out the action elements of the study. As the power dynamic pertained to the honor roll reception, the researcher as practitioner drafted the plan to conduct the honor roll reception; assigned budgetary resources to the event; tasked the campus registrar to work with the campus

communication office to generate poster boards for public display; developed and printed hand-signed honor roll certificates; and generated administrative team interest in supporting and attending the event. The event aligned with the elements of Tinto's student departure theory or model of academic and social integration (1975, 1993) that submits that student persistence is influenced by the student's interaction with campus academic and social systems (Wild & Ebbers, 2012). A student statement that supports this supposition is from a student who attended the event and stated, "My name was on the honor roll poster. I went to see my mom and I cried because it was an accomplishment. I never cared for high school but knowing that I'm going to college and doing it by myself, it's a huge event."

A different outcome that resulted from this study was based on student comments that during the first weeks of class they were unsure of how to navigate the campus environment. In response, student services purchased 100 t-shirts for volunteers that help with traditional welcome-week activities held during the first week of the semester. The front of the t-shirt contained a standard welcome message but the back of the shirt had a statement "Question? Ask me!" Students, faculty and staff who volunteered for activities during the welcome week were provided the t-shirt and asked to wear the shirt as they could so that students could become familiar with the shirts and view the shirt's wearer as a source of help.

A different outcome or action was based on a student's comment that claimed, "We don't know what we're doing" as a description for participating in college despite knowledge of college. At present, OSU-OKC has thirty students who are on a full scholarship labeled the president's leadership class scholars. Among the requirements for receiving the scholarship is a

mandate that recipients are to participate in a minimum of two student organizations. An outcome of this study is an effort to redesign the scholarship requirements to reduce the participation in student organizations down to one organization. The student's time focused, historically, on the second organization would be spent participating in a range of campus events to fulfil an identified number of campus service hours. The range of campus events would include different types of outreach to new students as a means by which to help students integrate into the campus environment.

A different outcome that was also based on the student's comment that claimed, we don't know what we're doing" involved a collaboration between student services and the campus marketing department to produce student testimonials labeled "The Language of Success." The video testimonials were integrated into OSU-OKC's digital media plan. The content of the testimonials were students explaining their transition to college, transition points that may be confusing, and how to function and navigation within the campus learning environment.

A different outcome that was also based on the student's comment that claimed, "We don't know what we're doing" involved a series of letters sent to first-time students from the vice president of student services. The letters incorporated messages of "I believe in you" and "you belong here" and included the researcher's business card. The letters were mailed to the student's home address in hopes that parents would also see the letter. This hope was confirmed when a co-researcher referenced during the team presentation to OSU-OKC campus administrators that her mother called her one day and stated, "You got another letter from Brad." The letters conveyed a continuous message of support and provided students with a list of

campus resources that included tutoring, academic advisor information, and scholarship and financial aid information.

Process validity

Process validity involves the extent to which study's methodology supports sustained individual or system teaching (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Herr and Anderson (2015) submit that process validity can borrow from the practice of triangulation in that multiple perspectives guard against viewing incidents in a simplistic way. This study's collaborative nature and processes engaged student collaborators, peer interviewees, an independent reviewer, and OSU-OKC's administrative team in activities to discuss, via these multiple perspectives, the study's premise, processes, and practices (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Democratic validity

Democratic validity is described as the extent to which the researcher's collaboration with stakeholders permeates the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The goal of action research is to blur the lines of terms such as expert, participant, and research in an effort to achieve authentic collaboration with others who are invested in generating knowledge that improves practice (2015). Herr & Anderson suggest that the body of work pertaining to collaboration is in need of ongoing development as it relates to sharing power, and addressing authority and hierarchy. Prince (2014) argues that places are "always reflective of and constituted within, and by, relations of power" (p. 709) and that the point of participatory action research, and the critical theoretical perspective, is to destabilize knowledge to achieve action and change. However, I submit that for any project that utilizes PAR that is bound, inherently, to a timeframe then the

project's initiator is pressed to advance the study which makes visible a hierarchy. Moreover, as participatory action research submits that power is needed to advance the project's action and changes then, this too, makes visible a hierarchy which counters true democratic collaboration (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

The study does document its relative degree of collaboration in the transcripts of the researcher's reflexive audio journal, the researcher's meetings with collaborators and the focus group session. Furthermore, the researcher references collaborators throughout the study. The study's repeated reference to the collaborators represents the students' contribution to the study and acknowledges their ways of knowing as an element critical to the generation of authentic action capable of change. However, the greatest demonstration of this study's democratic validity is, perhaps, centered on the co-researcher's presentation to OSU-OKC's team of campus administrators. In the study's final activity, the co-researcher focus group, Esther stated, "I've always said you really do have a voice here on campus." She added, "But I've never had that opportunity where my voice has been heard." Mary stated, "Like helping you with this and then knowing that we'll get to be in front of the executive team and get to introduce this and if they make changes that we gathered or that we came up with and helping them do that, that's really great."

Another example of the study's democratic validity that describes the extent to which the researcher's collaboration with stakeholders permeates the study also involves the co-researcher's presentation to the campus executive team. Following the team's presentation, Ruth said, "I wasn't expecting that." She added, "Whenever you were telling us that we're going in

front of the executive board, and the president, I imagined them sitting at a table in front of us, and us standing up. More formal" Esther added, "I really liked this. I liked that we were all sitting, that we were on the same level. I was actually not that intimidated." Mary noted, "I liked how it was informal, we were all sitting together and they weren't there to criticize us. But, in the back of my head I still thought they were going to be there to criticize us." This example represents the team's collaboration with OSU-OKC's campus administrators but, perhaps, more important demonstrates the researcher's management of the power dynamics inherent within the study's participatory methodology. The student's presentation was structured as semi-formal, facilitated discussion and positioned all participants, equally, seated around the president's conference table. This example is, perhaps, a representation of the participatory methodology's social justice objective that engages marginalized citizens in a process to improve social situations.

Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity is "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing realities in order to transform it" (Lather, 1986, p. 272). In this study, the researcher presented OSU-OKC's stagnant student retention rate, and the interest to counteract it, in the participant solicitation email, initial interviews, training workshop, data analysis meetings, and the final focus group meeting. The researcher also included specific reference to the stagnant retention rate within documents presented to participants. I emphasized these activities to ensure that participants were aware of the study's purpose and their opportunity to help understand and explore actions that may counter the stagnant rate. This

study's catalytic validity is also reflected in a data unit in the section on democratic validity as a co-researcher claimed, "I feel like I have a voice now." This study's catalytic validity suggests my need to conduct a longitudinal study that follows collaborators' life trajectory over the next ten years.

Dialogic validity

Dialogic validity seeks to achieve what Myers (1985) describes as "goodness-of-fit with the institutions of the practitioner community, both in its definitions of problems and in its findings" (p. 5). In this study, I resourced a peer reviewer from within the institution. However, I was unsuccessful in engaging the reviewer's full commitment as this aspect of the study's design presented no substantive contribution to the meaning making process and, therefore, did not interrupt my single interpretation of the data. On multiple occasions I presented progress updates to my dissertation committee chair, and to the OSU-OKC president. I also maintained a reflexive audio journal through the study that documented my struggle to advance the project while struggling to identify projects, for reference, that were similar in nature.

Conclusions

This study's greatest contribution is, perhaps, the potential to inspire campus administrators to embrace the action research methodology to identify context-specific ways to improve students' retention experience and/or to solve other institutional issues. For OSU-OKC, this study surfaced the campus' need to help parents, as students' source of help, understand college processes and share the academic experience. Findings also surfaced the need to improve campus programming to help students navigate the transition to college and function

within the campus learning environment. A finding that warrants future research involves OSU-OKC's retained students' participation in the research experience and how their participation shaped their life trajectories.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Solicitation of permission and request for site support

Date

Natalie Shirley, President
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City
900 North Portland
Oklahoma City, OK 73107

President Shirley,

I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I am in the Higher Educational Leadership program within the School of Educational Studies. The purpose of my writing is to inform you of my interest to conduct a research study on the site of Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City. The study's purpose is collaborative in nature and it enlists the help of six of OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, to inquire about and to help analyze the retention experiences of ten of their peers.

This study utilizes the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) to guide the capture and analysis of critical incidents that retained students' submit as incidents, with examples, that helped and/or hindered their return to OSU-OKC for the second fall semester. The ECIT method is also used to identify wish list items, or campus supports that retained students' indicate did not exist at OSU-OKC but could have improved their retention experience. This study's outcome is one of action in that student collaborators will present study findings and recommendations to OSU-OKC's campus administrators, thus serving as peer advocates.

Should you agree to this proposal, please find the following enclosures for your files:

- Institutional Review Board approval of the study's purpose and mechanics.
- Letter to OSU-OKC's office of institutional effectives requesting student data.
- Letter to OSU-OKC's retained first-time, full-time students (fall 2014 cohort).
-

- Letter to OSU-OKC's faculty and staff trained in qualitative research theory and practices as the study's critical friends.
- Training and Implementation workshop agenda

Your approval of this study will benefit future OSU-OKC students as this study's purpose is to identify and reinforce critical incidents that help, mitigate incidents that hinder, and advocate for wish list items that can enhance the student retention experience. Your approval of this study will also benefit OSU-OKC as the campus endeavors to improve its programs and services that support student retention. Should you approve this study to occur on the Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City campus please sign and date below.

_____

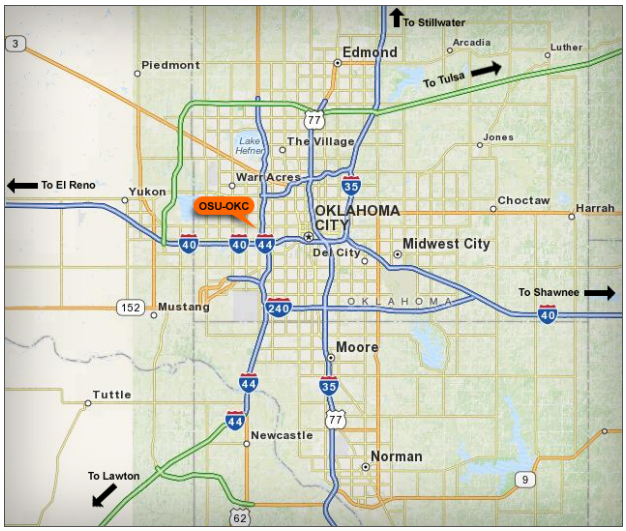
Natalie Shirley, President, OSU-OKC Date

_____

Brad Williams, VP of Student Services, OSU-OKC, practitioner and researcher Date

APPENDIX B


N
PARKING LOTS
DISABLED PARKING
ENTRANCE/EXIT
NO PARKING
N. PORTLAND AVE.
BLACK GOLD DRIVE
PRECISION DRIVING TRAINING COURSE


To Stillwater
Edmond
Arcadia
Luther
Piedmont
To Tulsa
77
Lake Hefner
The Village
Jones
To El Reno
Yukon
Warr Acres
35
OSU-OKC
OKLAHOMA CITY
Choctaw
Harrah
40
44
Del City
Midwest City
152
Mustang
240
O K L A H O M A
To Shawnee
Moore
Tuttle
Newcastle
Norman
To Lawton
9
62

APPENDIX C

Request for student information from OSU-OKC Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Date

Kristi John, Data Coordinator
OSU-OKC Office of Institutional Effectiveness
900 North Portland
Oklahoma City, OK 73107

Dear Kristi,

I currently serve as OSU-OKC's vice president for student services and am also working on my doctoral degree in higher education leadership through OSU-Stillwater. Please find the enclosed approval from OSU's Institutional Review Board regarding my proposed study. Moreover, please find the signed letter of approval from OSU-OKC's president, Natalie Shirley, granting me access to OSU-OKC first-time students in order to collect data in support of this study's purpose. For your files, I am enclosing the letter of solicitation to be emailed to retained students inviting them to participate in the study.

I am requesting the following student data:

- A file of OSU-OKC's first-time, full-time degree seeking student cohort entering during the fall 2014 academic semester (the fall 2014 cohort) and returning to campus for the fall 2015 academic semester.

- Student information requested includes the following directory data elements:
  - First and last name
  - Primary mailing address
  - Campus email address
  - Primary and secondary telephone number

I appreciate your assistance in this matter. According to research protocols, this list will be stored on an external storage drive and in hard copy form. The external storage drive and hard copy form will be locked in a storage cabinet, away from other data, in the researcher's home office. At the conclusion of this study, the file of student information will be destroyed.

I appreciate your assistance.

Brad Williams, Vice President of Student Services
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

APPENDIX D

Letter soliciting student participation as collaborators

Date

Dear (student name),

I need your help!

I serve OSU-OKC as its vice president for student services but I'm also a student working toward a graduate degree at OSU-Stillwater. As a part of my education, I am conducting a research study focused on people, like you, who entered OSU-OKC in the fall 2014 term as first-time students and who are returning for the second fall semester (August 2015). I am inviting you to serve as one of six students to work with me on the study. I've included some information below to help you make an informed decision.

Why I'm doing this study: Two-year colleges across the United States report that less than half of all first-time students who enter college don't return for the second fall semester. Your enrollment status indicates that you are a returning student so I am very interested in the factors that helped and hindered your return to OSU-OKC. I'm also interested in the sort of things that could have helped you, but didn't exist at OSU-OKC.

What if you agree to participate in the study? I would like to visit with you and tell you about the study, and my expectations concerning your participation, and to inform you of a workshop you will complete prior to helping me with the study. The study has many moving parts so I want to make sure you are fully informed.

Will the study help you or hurt you? This study won't hurt you, but it may not directly help you either. Your participation in this study provides you with an opportunity to act as an advocate for your peers. Think of your participation as a gift to OSU-OKC's future students.

Who will know that you are in the study? If interested, and you complete the workshop and commit to the study, you will be one of six collaborators who will help interview ten of your peers. While your identity will be anonymous in the data and its summaries, there are times that you and other collaborators will assemble as a group. You may also see the

students that you interview around campus. In addition, the final outcome of this study is to present findings and recommendations to OSU-OKC's campus administrators. Accordingly, you and the other collaborators will be seen and heard.

Do you have to participate in the study? You don't have to participate. I ask that you contact me if you would like to participate. You can even choose to join and then withdraw later, without consequences, if you decide that you no longer want to participate. Participation is voluntary; it's your choice.

Questions? Please call me or drop by my office at any time should you have questions. My office telephone number is 405-945-3204 or you can email me at bradford.williams@osuokc.edu. If you have questions regarding this study you can also contact my advisor, Dr. Kerri Kearney at Kerri.Kearney@okstate.edu as she is my research supervisor.

I have read and fully understand the information presented above. I sign this form expressing my interest in participating in the training and implementation workshop.

_____

Student participant Date

_____

Brad Williams, VP of Student Services, practitioner and researcher Date
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

APPENDIX E

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

AGENDA

Monday, November 9, 2015
2:30pm, Communication's Conference Room
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

1. Consent form
2. Verify that each participant has completed a consent form.
3. Disseminate name tags
4. Present student with an information packet
    a. Meeting agenda
    b. Research study purpose and questions
    c. Research study abstract
    d. Participatory Action Research overview
    e. Enhanced Critical Incident Technique overview

Agenda
Hour One

Welcome
Icebreaker exercise
Explanation of study purpose
    OSU-OKC retention rate
    Soliciting student insights and perspectives as the basis for action
    Promoting social justice and agency change
Why did you choose to participate?
    What do you expect?
    What do you hope for?
    What do you want from the project?
Discussion of research ethics

What are ethics and how do they relate to research?
Privacy and confidentiality
Informed consent
Rights as a co-researcher
Rights as a study participant
Logistics
Consent
Confidentiality

Hour Two

Team norms
Team identity: Let's pick a name
Team goal: Let's pick a slogan
What ground rules do we need to establish
Explanation of research design and methodologies
Qualitative and quantitative
Participatory Action Research
Explanation of Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT)
Incidents that help, hinder, or are wish list items
Present the interview guide for in-room practice interviews
Discussion of interview guide and interview outcomes
What makes a good or bad interview?
Active listening and respecting boundaries
Student insights, thoughts or feelings regarding the study?

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Consent form

I need your help!

I serve OSU-OKC as its vice president for student services but I'm also a student at OSU-Stillwater. As a part of my education, I am conducting a research study focused on people, like you, who entered OSU-OKC in the fall 2014 and who are returning for the second fall semester (August 2015). I am inviting you to serve as one of six students to work with me on the study. I've included some information below to help you make an informed decision.

Why I'm doing this study: Two-year colleges across the United States report that less than half of all first-time students who enter college don't return for the second fall semester. Your enrollment status indicates that you are a returning student so I am very interested in the factors that helped and hindered your return to OSU-OKC. I'm also interested in the sort of things that could have helped you, but didn't exist at OSU-OKC.

What if you agree to participate in the study? I would like to visit with you and tell you about the study, and my expectations concerning your participation, and to inform you of a workshop you will complete prior to helping me with the study. The study has many moving parts so I want to make sure you are fully informed.

Will the study help you or hurt you? This study won't hurt you, but it may not directly help you either. Your participation in this study provides you with an opportunity to act as an advocate for your peers. Think of your participation as a gift to OSU-OKC's future students.

Who will know that you are in the study? If interested, and you complete the workshop and commit to the study, you will be one of six collaborators who will help interview ten of your peers. While your identity will be anonymous in the research data and reports, there are times that you and other collaborators will assemble as a group. You may also see the students that you interview around campus. In addition, the final outcome of this study is to present findings and recommendations to OSU-OKC's campus administrators. Accordingly, you and the other collaborators will be seen and heard.

Do you have to participate in the study? You don't have to participate. I ask that you contact me if you would like to participate. You can even choose to join and then withdraw

later, without consequences, if you decide that you no longer want to participate. Participation is voluntary; it's your choice.

Questions? Please call me or drop by my office at any time should you have questions. My office telephone number is 405-945-3204 or you can email me at bradford.williams@osuokc.edu. If you have questions regarding this study you can also contact my advisor, Dr. Kerri Kearney at Kerri.Kearney@okstate.edu as she is my research supervisor.

I have read and fully understand the information presented above. I sign this form expressing my interest in participating in the training and implementation workshop.

Student participant Date

Brad Williams, VP of Student Services, practitioner and researcher Date
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Study Purpose and Research Problem

OSU-OKC's stagnant rate of student retention reflects that of the nation's community college system in that fewer than half of all first-time students (no prior credit hours attempted) return to campus for the second fall semester. The stagnant rate of retention persists despite campus awareness of the range of student learning and social characteristics influencing student retention, despite campus access to published student support best practices, and despite the availability of the body of academic literature investigating student retention on a two-year and four-year campus.

The proposed study utilizes the Participatory Action Research Methodology to guide the enlistment of three to six of OSU-OKC's retained students to serve as collaborators who will inquire about and help analyze the retention experiences of five to ten of their retained peers. The number of potential collaborators and retained peers will yield a total of 8-16 study participants. The student collaborators will present study findings and retention considerations to OSU-OKC campus administrators, thus serving as peer advocates promoting social justice and agency change.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Participatory Action Research

Action research is part of a family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time" (Dick, 1999). Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as a "form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162). Bergold and Thomas (2012) reference participatory research methods as a collaborative process with people "whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study" (p. 192). Bergold (2007) submits that the methodology "argues in favor of the possibility, the significance, and the usefulness of involving research partners in the knowledge-production process" (p. 192). Action research teaches participants new skills, expands their knowledge and engages them in social justice (Gaventa, 1988). Bergold and Thomas (2014) note that the aim of the approach is to change social realities on the basis of insights into everyday practices that are obtained by means of collaboration.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Study Design

This study embraces the qualitative research design as the design's plan and procedures for data collection and analysis guide the pursuit of meaning that participants assign to a phenomenon. Traditional use of the qualitative research design positions the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the design encourages the researcher to maintain an objective distance from participants to manage researcher bias (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). As this study's purpose involves the pursuit of meaning that is a collaborative endeavor advocating for social justice and agency transformation, the researcher partners with participants in pursuit of meaning and researcher involvement is acknowledged as an asset capable of increasing the study's strength. Accordingly, this study's qualitative research design incorporates the Participatory Action Research Methodology to accommodate its collaborative, action-orientated agenda. Carr and Kemmis (1986) define the methodology as a "form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (p. 162). Dick (2014) suggests that there are several forms of action research and that some forms emphasize action with research as a by-product while other forms emphasize research with action as a by-product. Regardless, Dick (2014) suggests that the literature is in agreement insofar as the methodology's cyclic or spiral approach involving researcher participation in planning that precedes action, and reflection that follows action. The literature is also in agreement regarding the methodology's

emphasis on a study's responsiveness to context rather than a study's capacity for replication (Dick, 2014).

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Enhanced Critical Incident Technique
Interview Guide

Participant Name: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interview date: _____

Interview start time: _____

1. Study context component

More than half of OSU-OKC's first-time students don't return for their second fall semester. The purpose of this study is to collaborate, or work together, with OSU-OKC students who have returned to campus for the second fall semester in order to understand how students have successfully managed their return. My interview with you is to collect information about your experience, both as an entering and current OSU-OKC student, and how you have dealt with those experiences.

a. Tell me about your experience as an entering OSU-OKC student?
b. Tell me about your experience as a continuing OSU-OKC student?
c. What are the top reasons that you chose OSU-OKC?
d. You were invited to participate in this study because you have returned for the second fall semester and are doing well. In your words, what does it mean to do well?
e. What experiences have affected your school life?
f. How have the experiences affected your school life?

2. Critical incident component (Help, Hinder, Wish List)

In the first set of questions, you referenced a range of experiences. I have three goals which are to better understand experiences that helped you do well in school, experiences that made it difficult for you to do well.

Help item:

a. What helped?
b. How did it help?
c. Provide an example of the incident. What led up to it and what happened next?

Hinder item:

a. What made it difficult for you to do well?
b. How did it hinder your effort to do well?
c. Provide an example of the incident. What led up to it and how it resolved?

We have talked about specific things (review specific reference) that have helped you do well as an OSU-OKC student. We have also talked through specific things (review specific reference) that have made it difficult for you to do well as an OSU-OKC student. If you could create a wish list of things that would have made it easier for you, or things that could help you going forward, what would be on that list?

Wish list item:

a. What is the wish list item?
b. How would it help you?
c. Provide a situation or context in which the wish list item would be helpful?

General questions

a. At what point in your student experience did you feel like you were doing well?
b. Will you cite an example of what prompted this feeling?

3. Demographic component
   a. From what high school did you graduate?
   b. What was your high school GPA (approximate)
   c. Did your parents attend college?
   d. What made you choose OSU-OKC?
   e. Do you receive financial aid, campus scholarships? If so, what?
   f. Do you work? If so, how many hours per week?
   g. Do you live with your family or on your own?
   h. Age
   i. Gender
   j. Ethnicity

Interview end time: _____

Interview length: _____

Interviewer's signature/date: _____

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

Informed Consent Form – Participating in the Training and Implementation Workshop

This study's purpose is to enlist the help of six of OSU-OKC's retained students, as collaborators, to inquire about and to help analyze the retention experiences of ten of their peers. This study utilizes the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) to guide the capture and analysis of critical incidents that retained students' submit as incidents, with examples, that helped and/or hindered their return to OSU-OKC for the second fall semester. The ECIT method is also used to identify wish list items, or campus supports that retained students indicate did not exist at OSU-OKC but could have improved their retention experience. This study fulfills the methodology's action agenda as it empowers student collaborators to serve, ultimately, as peer advocates by presenting research findings and recommendations to OSU-OKC's campus administrators, thus promoting agency and social action.

OSU-OKC's retained students expressing interest in participating as a study co-research must complete a training and implementation workshop. The two-hour workshop is designed to achieve the following:

- Discuss student commitment to the research study
- Explain the study's purpose
- Discuss research ethics
- Explain the research design, methodology and methods
- Explain the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT)
- Present the interview guide for interviews
- Discuss the interview guide and interview outcomes
- Discuss interviewing techniques
- Introduce a role-playing scenario for interviews
- Present next steps and identify timelines

I have read and fully understand the information presented above. I sign this form expressing my interest in participating in the training and implementation workshop. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw without fear of negative consequence.

Student participant Date

Brad Williams, VP of Student Services, practitioner and researcher Date
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City

APPENDIX F

Letter soliciting student participation, developed by student collaborators

“Hello, we are current students here at OSU-OKC and we are a part of a research group. We noticed that you began taking classes last August and have returned. We applaud you! We think that YOU will be a great help to us. We'd like to visit with you so that we can get to know you and your experience here at OSU-OKC. It would only take an hour and we will provide snacks! You are very important to us and we hope that you'll join us. Thank You"

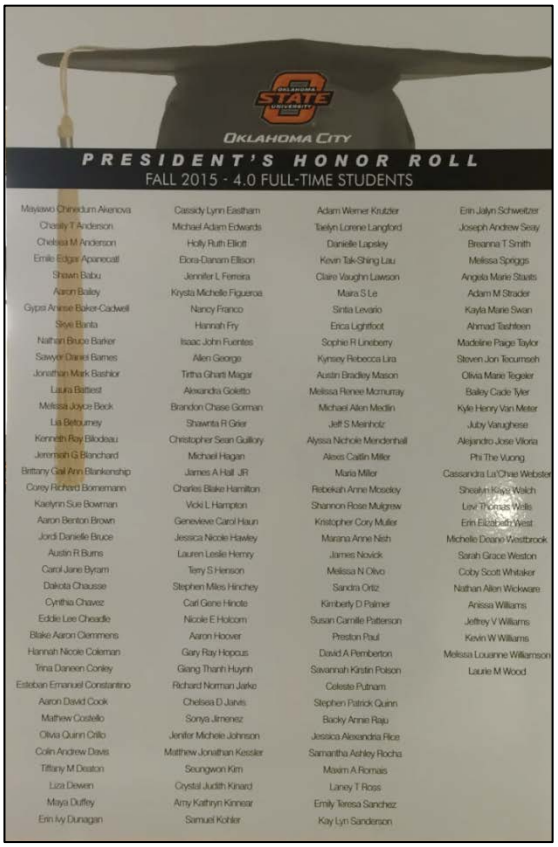
APPENDIX G

Focus group with collaborators

1. What did you expect from participating in this process?
2. What have you learned from participating in this process?
3. What have you learned about the participatory action research process?
4. What differences do you see in yourself?
5. What specific things are you proud of as you think about your participation?
6. What are the things that have the greatest impact on you during your participation?
7. In what ways do you think that you helped future OSU-OKC students?

APPENDIX H


OKLAHOMA CITY
CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS AS AN
OSU-OKC
HONOR ROLL
STUDENT
December 21, 2015
Friends and Family Invited!

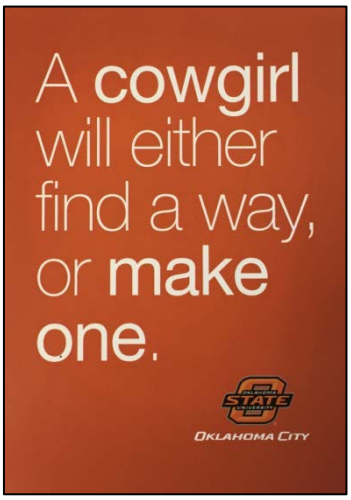

OKLAHOMA CITY
PRESIDENT'S HONOR ROLL
FALL 2015 - 4.0 FULL-TIME STUDENTS
Maiyawo Chinedum Akenova
Chesly T Anderson
Chelsea M Anderson
Emile Edgar Apanecatl
Shawn Babu
Aaron Bailey
Gypsi Anirose Baker-Cadwell
Seye Banta
Nathan Bruce Barker
Sawyer David Barnes
Jonathan Mark Bashior
Laura Battiest
Melissa Joyce Beck
Lia Betourney
Kenneth Ray Bilodeau
Jeremiah G Blanchard
Brittany Gail Ann Blankenship
Corey Richard Bornemann
Kaelynn Sue Bowman
Aaron Benton Brown
Jordi Danielle Bruce
Austin R Burns
Carol Jane Byram
Dakota Chausse
Cynthia Chavez
Eddie Lee Cheadle
Blake Aaron Clemmens
Hannah Nicole Coleman
Trina Daneen Conley
Esteban Emanuel Constantino
Aaron David Cook
Mathew Costello
Olivia Quinn Crilo
Colin Andrew Davis
Tiffany M Deaton
Liza Dewen
Maya Duffey
Erin Ivy Dunagan
Cassidy Lynn Eastham
Michael Adam Edwards
Holly Ruth Elliott
Elora-Danam Ellison
Jennifer L Ferreira
Krysta Michelle Figueroa
Nancy Franco
Hannah Fry
Isaac John Fuentes
Allen George
Tirtha Ghart Magar
Alexandra Goletto
Brandon Chase Gorman
Shawnita R Grier
Christopher Sean Guillory
Michael Hagan
James A Hall JR
Charles Blake Hamilton
Vicki L Hampton
Genevieve Carol Haun
Jessica Nicole Hawley
Lauren Leslie Henry
Terry S Henson
Stephen Miles Hinchey
Carl Gene Hinote
Nicole E Holcom
Aaron Hoover
Gary Ray Hopcus
Giang Thanh Huynh
Richard Norman Jarke
Chelsea D Jarvis
Sonya Jimenez
Jenifer Michele Johnson
Matthew Jonathan Kessler
Seungwon Kim
Crystal Judith Kinard
Amy Kathryn Kinnear
Samuel Kohler
Adam Werner Krutzler
Taelyn Lorene Langford
Danielle Lapsley
Kevin Tak-Shing Lau
Claire Vaughn Lawson
Maira S Le
Sintia Levario
Erica Lightfoot
Sophie R Lineberry
Kynsey Rebecca Lira
Austin Bradley Mason
Melissa Renee Mcmurray
Michael Allen Medlin
Jeff S Meinholz
Alyssa Nichole Mendenhall
Alexs Caitlin Miller
Maria Miller
Rebekah Anne Moseley
Shannon Rose Mulgrew
Kristopher Cory Muller
Mariana Anne Nish
James Novick
Melissa N Olivo
Sandra Ortiz
Kimberly D Palmer
Susan Camille Patterson
Preston Paul
David A Pemberton
Savannah Kirstin Polson
Celeste Putnam
Stephen Patrick Quinn
Bucky Annie Raju
Jessica Alexandria Rice
Samantha Ashley Rocha
Maxim A Romais
Laney T Ross
Emily Teresa Sanchez
Kay Lyn Sanderson
Erin Jalyn Schweitzer
Joseph Andrew Seay
Breanna T Smith
Melissa Spriggs
Angela Marie Staats
Adam M Strader
Kayla Marie Swan
Ahmad Tashfeen
Madeline Paige Taylor
Steven Jon Tecumseh
Olivia Marie Tegeler
Bailey Cadie Tyler
Kyle Henry Van Meter
Juby Varughese
Alejandro Jose Viloria
Phi The Vuong
Cassandra La'Chae Webster
Sheaton Kaye Welch
Lev Thomas Wells
Erin Elizabeth West
Michelle Deane Westbrook
Sarah Grace Weston
Coby Scott Whitaker
Nathan Allen Wickware
Anissa Williams
Jeffrey V Williams
Kevin W Williams
Melissa Louanne Williamson
Laurie M Wood

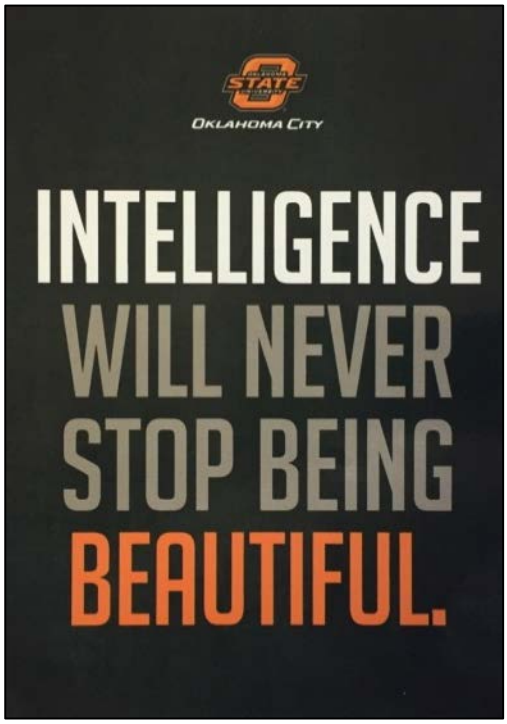

Congratulations on being named to the OSU-OKC fall semester honor roll. You, your friends and family are invited to a special event to recognize this achievement.
YOU'RE INVITED!
Monday, December 21, 2015
5 p.m. to 7 p.m. (Come and Go)
OSU-OKC Student Center, The Hub
Refreshments will be served.
900 N. Portland Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73107
Find your name on the OSU-OKC fall semester honor roll at www.OSUOKC.EDU/honorroll.
OSU-OKC
900 N. Portland Ave.
Oklahoma City, OK 73107


BOTH WORLDS
OSU-OKC

APPENDIX I

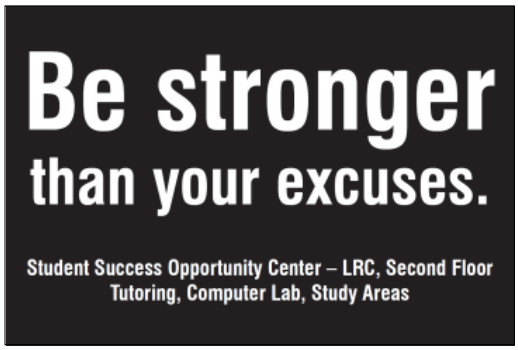

SHE BELIEVED
SHE COULD
SO SHE DID
STATE
OKLAHOMA CITY


A cowgirl
will either
find a way,
or make
one.
STATE
OKLAHOMA CITY


STATE
OKLAHOMA CITY
INTELLIGENCE
WILL NEVER
STOP BEING
BEAUTIFUL.

APPENDIX J


IF YOU WANT TO
PASS...
GO TO CLASS!
THE #1 PREDICTOR OF
ACADEMIC SUCCESS
IS REGULAR ATTENDANCE.


Be stronger
than your excuses.
Student Success Opportunity Center – LRC, Second Floor
Tutoring, Computer Lab, Study Areas


If school is important to you,
YOU will find the time.
How bad do you want it?


Enroll Today!
YOU BELONG HERE.
OKLAHOMA CITY

VITA

Bradford Brown Williams

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: A STUDY UTILIZING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO PURSUE RETAINED TWO-YEAR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AS THE BASIS FOR ACTION AND CHANGE

Major Field: Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Human Resource Administration at East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in 1999.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communication with a minor in Marketing, and Piano Performance at East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in 1997.

Experience:

Vice President of Student Services, Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City