THREE YEARS IN A DOCTORAL COHORT

A SURVIVALIST'S GUIDE

By

BRIAN A. JONES

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Education
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Oklahoma
1994

Master of Science in Educational Administration
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
2007

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
Dec. 2020

THREE YEARS IN A DOCTORAL COHORT

A SURVIVALIST'S GUIDE

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Katherine Curry

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Lucy Bailey

Dr. Ben Bindewald

Dr. Sue Jacobs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Glory of God. Amen.

I would like to thank Dr. Curry, Dr. Bailey, Dr. Bindewald, and Dr. Jacobs for allowing me a bit of freedom in my presentation of this dissertation. I know my somewhat disregard for the conventions of professional writing has caused some amusement, some angst, and some "how should I even start to edit this?" dilemmas, but I want you to know that without your support I probably would not have been able to pull this off at all. Dr. Curry, thank you for everything.

Thanks also goes to my fellow members of the TWELVE. It has probably never been truer for a person to say, "Without you guys, I could have never done this." No, literally. It would have been impossible, you know, since the whole story is about the TWELVE. Now, let's go get our professors off-topic and then grab something to eat.

I would like to thank my students who reminded me for the past several years that every Wednesday afternoon I would have to immediately get in my car and drive over to class, without stopping to talk to anyone in the halls or I would be late. See, guys? You are about to begin your post-secondary adventure and I am living proof that it can be done. Also, students, if you are reading this and can identify various memes throughout the text of the dissertation, I will give you extra-credit on your next homework assignment.

If this is the first page that you are reading of my work, I should probably warn you that my writing style comes collectively from reading and studying a pool of talent so large that it will be impossible to list them all; well… Challenge Accepted. I borrow my style of writing from:

> Adams, Anthony, Asimov, Brooks, Brown, Butcher, Card, Carroll, Cervantes, Child, Christie, Clancy, Clarke, Crichton, Da Vinci, Dante, David, Dick, Fforde, Flynn, Gaiman, Goldman, Grisham, Halderman, Heinlein, Homer, Jefferson, Jordan, Kafka, Larson, Lewis, Machiavelli, Melville, Orwell, Pratchet, Rothfuss, Rowling, Sanderson, Shakespeare, Shelley, Simmons, Stephenson, Sterne, Swift, Tolkien, Twain, Verne, Virgil, Weis, Wells, Woolf, … okay, okay… I should not have started that list – I just know in a few days I will be in the middle of a world history lecture and another name will pop up in my mind. Egad! Chaucer. How could a person forget Chaucer?! Oh, no… Sophocles! Now I have a problem.

Moving on.

My mom (Hi, mommy!) was a big part in helping me get to this stage of my education (read: tuition), and dad has been the model for our family when it comes to setting high standards for himself and his students. Mom will read this whole dissertation in one sitting, dad will skim it, and we will all go out to our usual Saturday lunch without too much applause because in the Jones family high expectations are the norm, Trivial Pursuit is a blood sport, and another degree in the family is just what we do every half-decade or so.

Locke, Rousseau, and Hobbes! Add them to the list. That is just embarrassing.

My now five-year old daughter Tori, who was born just a few weeks into our first series of doctoral classes, has been an inspiration for me to succeed in this endeavor. Is daddy doing homework again tonight? No, honey, daddy is done with his homework for a while; that is, at least until you get to high school trigonometry where I might have to break out the ol' textbook when you ask for help. And no, you can't use my signature as a "doctor's note" to get out of any classes. Good try.

My wife Nicole has been my biggest fan (right, dear?) for 10 years, and has always supported my odd (eccentric? brilliantly clever?) education dreams – from writing theatre scripts about pirates, gods, and inmates at an asylum (those are three different plays, mind you) to allowing me to accept a Fulbright to spend a summer in Greece just three days after our wedding. She is my best friend and soul mate. Love.

Finally, I would like to dedicate the sheer heretical nature of this dissertation (you'll see) to my Aunt Laura, who passed away just two years ago when she lost her battle with cancer. Her joie de vie, her "it's not the letter but the spirit of the law" attitude, and her penchant for always seeming to just stay out of trouble by the narrowest of margins makes me smile whenever I think of her. Laura, I hope you like this final edition.

Brian A. Jones
Spring 2019

Name: BRIAN A. JONES

Date of Degree: Dec. 2020

Title of Study: THREE YEARS IN A DOCTORAL COHORT – A SURVIVALIST'S
GUIDE

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Abstract: This narrative study examines the relationships and experiences of twelve members of a doctoral cohort in the field of educational administration. Although many studies on the success of the cohort model have been conducted, this study offers an uncommon viewpoint as the researcher is himself a member of the cohort from the first day of coursework through the last day, three years later. As such, one-twelfth of the relationships and experiences within the cohort are understood and narrated through the first-person experiences of the researcher, with the other eleven members of the cohort being given equal time and equal voice in second-person narration. The study was completed at the end of a three-year period of coursework and individuals of the cohort, the original twelve that both started and finished their degrees as part of the cohort, were interviewed individually as well as in a focus group regarding their memories, experiences, and relationships. Social network theory was used as the theoretical framing for the analysis, which surfaced three themes: the process of joining the cohort, the support cohort members provided one another, and the experiences and relationships that developed from being a member of a three-year doctoral cohort. Conclusions are drawn involving the success, as defined by the completion of the coursework, of the cohort being tied directly to the relationships that were formed by cohort members. Implications involving the establishment of relationships among cohort members are shown, and other recommendations for further studies are given.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION

I would like to tell you a story.

I am a member of a doctoral cohort at a tier one research university. About three years ago, a dozen doctoral students were sitting in our Qualitative Methods evening class, taking notes, making arguments, and checking emails as we are wont to do during this day and age, when the professor spoke a phrase that would turn my dissertation on its head.

He simply said, "… and then there is Narrative Inquiry."

My ears perked. "Inquiry" was a term we had heard repeatedly in our classes as a reminder that research is a disciplined process of seeking answers to complex questions. Up to this point, the majority of us were solidly within the qualitative inquiry group, the rest being in that quantitative inquiry *outlier* group. However, when we started learning about the approaches to qualitative inquiry design, many of us planned to take different paths; some of us were choosing case studies, others were choosing a phenomenological approach, while others chose an ethnographic approach. I was firmly entrenched in the latter. Firmly. Entrenched.

The term "Narrative," however, made me listen just a little closer. It seems there was a dissertation style that has been developed across several decades, and much longer if one considers the narrative basis for ethnographic studies (Bochner, 2001), that allows the researcher to focus on telling a story. Being the kid that wrote episodic series for his circle of friends while in 7th grade, being the young undergraduate always looking to start term papers with "once upon a time", and being a … little older … playwright who pushes the boundaries of styles from the Homeric to the Kafkaesque, I was instantly intrigued by the term "narrative." "Narrative Inquiry," continued the professor, "is a way to connect to the audience using your skills as a storyteller."

Several of my cohort members turned to me and said that writing a narrative was "right up my alley." I remember nodding my agreement while trying to not immediately tune everyone out and start thinking about the story. Right then. Page one. Paragraph one. There I was, ready to create an artifact that I could later use for my data collection – a jotted down tumble of ideas that came to me about what made our cohort the perfect narrative study. Ready… go. At that moment, I recognized that the topic of my dissertation would focus on my experience in a doctoral cohort. Involvement in a cohort deeply influenced my experience in the doctoral program, and, because of relationships established in the cohort, I was motivated to persist in reaching this important educational goal. At that time, I knew that this was a worthy topic for my dissertation.

Cohorts

A cohort can be defined in the broadest sense as individuals linked as a group in some way for the purpose of learning, engineering change, or experiencing an event (Glenn, 1977).

The literature on cohorts suggests that there is much potential for a cohort to exist as a social support network not only during the time the cohort is together, but possibly afterwards (Maher, 2005). Relationships in a cohort, whether they be family-like, team-like, or acquaintance-like, can fulfill the need for not only support but for affiliation from a group as well (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Maher, 2005; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Maher (2005) suggests this affiliation can create a sense of camaraderie amongst cohort members that meets one of the upper levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954). Cohort relationships may even fill a need for strong emotional ties (Brooks, 1998; Twale & Kochan, 2000).

In educational contexts, an educational cohort is a group of individuals choosing an alternative organizational structure through which the degree program is delivered *en masse* and who are bound by a shared purpose or educational goal (Bentley et al., 2004). The emotional component of cohort membership may alleviate the distress that many students experience when they find themselves pulled in several directions at once, including their academic lives versus their social lives (Tinto, 1998; Hagan & Goodstein, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

When seeking a higher degree, individuals may have several options as to the educational path they take in accomplishing their goal, including the traditional model of education, the cohort model, and the fully-immersed on-line model (Birkly, 2006; Phelps, 2008). However, although each model may have the same end goal, the models do not have an equal number of participants successfully completing the program (Ross, 2006). The

cohort model has been shown to be a very successful model (Siefert, 2006; Tucker, 2008) that leads to enhanced completion rates.

Research suggests that the cohort model provides a number of benefits (Brooks, 1998). These benefits include forming relationships in a cohort, whether they be family-like, team-like, or acquaintance-like, which can fulfill the need for not only support but for affiliation from a group as well (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Maher, 2005; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). However, despite that fact that much is known regarding the outcomes and benefits of cohorts, little is known regarding how they actually work to support student success. In fact, the cohort model has been successful in some educational contexts (Seifert, 2006) but has been unsuccessful in others (Golde, 2014). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of relationships and social supports from within a successful cohort can lead to further understandings of cohort effectiveness in educational settings.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to narrate the experiences of one Ed.D. cohort and to illuminate how this particular cohort, during this particular time, at this particular university, with these particular professors, has been able to meet the challenges of a rigorous doctoral program.

Research Questions

1. What can we learn about cohorts from within a cohort?

2. What are the nuanced moments and characteristics that make this cohort work?

3. What can we learn from this study that will be beneficial for others?

While the above questions will be used as the questions that guide this study, the ultimate, over-arching question this study will attempt to answer is this:

"What trials and tribulations, anecdotes and accounts, and/or scenarios and stories come to mind when one is asked to describe one's three-year experience being a member of this doctoral education cohort?"

More specifically, "What is the story of this cohort?"

Methodology

An auto-ethnographical approach to narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for this study. Narrative inquiry differs from other forms of inquiry. In fact, Bochner (2011) claims that "narrative inquiry relies less on rigid scientific structures to allow more flexibility in the rigor of storytelling" (p.7). Narrative inquiry, a type of research that has been developed by several leading researchers including Bochner (2011), Labov (2006), and Clandinin (2006), is a scholarly practice in that,

> Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35)

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, 2004; Holman-Jones, 2005). The autoethnographer is part of the story and does not necessarily live through the experiences solely to use as material about which to write (Freeman, 2004). However, when the autoethnographer sees a nuance in culture that may not be in the norm, he or she may say, "That sure was interesting… I bet others would love to hear about it." Of note: it is not enough for an autoethnography to "just" be a good story – the narrative must always situate the personal tale within the larger context of the culture, giving the readers a glimpse not only of the who and what, but also of the how and why (Freeman, 2004). One might identify this study to be an autoethnographic-flavored narrative inquiry that focuses more on the "ethno" (the culture of the group in the larger culture of higher ed) and "graphy" (the writing of this culture); but there is plenty of "auto" parsed betwixt and amongst the paragraphs and chapters to keep the autoethnographic dash of flavor.

While, narrative writing allows the author to "witness" for the audience (Bochner, 2001) using "thick descriptions" of the culture, an autoethnographer not only tries to make the story culturally engaging from exploring his or her personal experience, but because of the storytelling medium, the author may be able to reach a wider and more diverse audience than traditional research may actually reach (Bochner, 1997). A narrator, in short, uses the power of prose to purposefully pen a paper powerfully providing the purport and prominence of the parable.

Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry

Narratives with an autoethnography flavor can be quite diverse, as they can cover a spectrum from the narrator being a part of the study to shedding light on a larger identified culture like a Higher Education program in a particular place and time, such as the three years of our cohort's coursework, using the auto as the catalyst. Regardless, autoethnographies share a trait in highlighting the relationship between the Auto and the Ethno, an idea that has been impactful for this particular study.

This narrative study examines the relationships and experiences of twelve members of a doctoral cohort in the field of educational administration. Although many studies on the success of the cohort model have been conducted, this study offers an uncommon viewpoint as the researcher is himself a member of the cohort from the first day through the last day of coursework, three years later. As such, one-twelfth of the relationships and experiences within the cohort are understood and narrated through the first-person experiences of the researcher, with the other eleven members of the cohort being given equal time and equal voice in second-person narration. The study tells the narrative of how the twelve cohort members met, formed relationships, and successfully completed their three-year doctoral program.

As hinted at above, this narrative addresses the important topic of educational cohorts at the doctoral level. Specifically, this narrative tells the tale of twelve educators who found themselves in a position in which they believed committing a significant amount of energy, time, neurons, and blood pressure medication was worth the cost-risk analysis of earning their Ed.D. in educational administration. Due to an amazing set of coincidences, serendipitous actions, and plain dumb luck, these educators found themselves attached to one

another for three years taking classes one night a week, fall, spring, and summer, and have ended up not only an incredibly strong Tolkien-esque assembly of erziehungsroman success, but they have each made eleven life-long friends.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher retells the story, putting the audience in the midst of the story. What makes this study unique, besides its uncommon method of including the researcher as a member of the group under study, is its re-telling of a story of a particular group of people at a particular time and place that has distinctive personalities and unique relationships. Narrating the cohort's experiences through three years of intensive coursework will allow the reader to follow the trials and tribulations during the three years we were together as a cohort and to gain an insight into the world of graduate-level education for educational professionals that follows a cohort model.

Data Collection and Analysis

I used a narrative inquiry methodology which has a rich history in educational research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data collection occurred through eleven individual interviews with participants, a focus group involving all participants, field notes taken throughout the three years of the cohort, and document analysis. I completed eleven one-on-one interviews with others in the TWELVE (a name given to the cohort that will be used from this point forward) and then conducted a focus group with all in attendance. The three years of my personal observations and artifacts including on-line interactions were also used to triangulate the data. When in the process were interviews. One line. To analyze the data, I began by coding the transcripts of the interviews, looking for commonalities. After several rounds of this, I looked for themes (Reisman, 2008) upon which to build the cohort's story.

Ultimately I was able to place the data collected from the interviews, artifacts, observations, and interactions into three categories, explained in chapter four, the narrative.

Epistemological Viewpoint and Theoretical Framework

Epistemology

This study uses interpretivism as its epistemological viewpoint. The underlying idea of the interpretivist approach is that researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions and interactions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2008). In this view, the researcher is part of the research, interprets data and as such can never be fully objective and removed from the research. In this study the researcher, myself, was a member of the cohort under study, one-twelfth of the group. Because I was both interacting as a researcher and a member of the cohort, it was impossible and inappropriate to remove myself from either role on a permanent or a semi-permanent basis, and as such I have written this narrative using the lenses of both roles – firmly placing myself in the interpretivist camp.

The shared reality of our cohort over a period of three years was a social construct that became an integral part of our lives, and the narrative in chapter four of this study will explain how that happened.

Interpretivists avoid rigid structural frameworks and adopt more personal and flexible research structures which are receptive to capturing meanings in human interaction and make sense of what is perceived as reality (Carson et al., 2001). This personal and flexible structure is evident in this study through the use of the story-telling narrative in chapter four. Interpretivists also believe the researcher and his informants are interdependent and mutually

interactive (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). As I have shown throughout this study, particularly in chapters four and five, the cohort members are interdependent in many ways (emotionally, mentally, and physically) as well as mutually interactive.

The researcher who uses interpretivism remains open to new knowledge throughout the study and lets it develop through the process of data collection. The use of such an emergent and collaborative approach is consistent with the interpretivist belief that humans have the ability to adapt, and that no one can gain prior knowledge of time and context bound social realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). An interpretive approach in the social sciences grows out of the idea that the social world is ontologically different from the natural world, and/or that the social world requires specific methodological tools to be understood (Crotty, 1998). Although the researcher for this particular study was one-twelfth of the subjects under study, the other eleven cohort members contributed equal shares in a collaborative, adaptable, and interpretivist belief of our reality. Indeed, as we will see from the data collection, some parts of our story I only learned of through the interviews and document analysis of the others in the cohort.

The goal of interpretivist research is not to generalize and predict causes and effects, but to understand and interpret the meanings in human behavior (Neuman, 2000; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). For an interpretivist researcher it is important to understand motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences which are time and context bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000). Yes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks utilized for this study are Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital and Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory. Lin's network

theory of social capital explains the importance of using social connections and social

relations in achieving goals as social capital, or resources accessed through such connections

and relations, is critical (along with human capital, or what a person or organization actually

possesses) in achieving goals for individuals, social groups, organizations, and communities

(Lin, 1999). In the most successful examples of networking, social capital is both an

individual and a collective good (Lin, 1999), and "social capital is defined by its function"

(Coleman, 1988, p. 98). For example, if the group members believe the collaboration only

benefits the collective or the network itself, motivation of the group's members may be

lacking. A necessary condition for the emergence of effective norms is "action that imposes

external effects on others" (Coleman, 1988, p. 105). However, if the group believes the

collaboration is benefiting only individuals within the group and not the network as a whole,

the group members may feel limited trust and diminished network capacity (Lin, 1999).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (2005) offers a framework through which

community psychologists examine individuals' relationships within communities and the

wider society. The theory is also commonly referred to as the ecological/systems framework.

It identifies four environmental systems with which an individual interacts: Microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each of these systems expand the number of

relationships and complexity of relationships an individual experiences (Bronfenbrenner,

2005).

My Role as Researcher

For myself, this dissertation would have been extremely valuable, as five years ago I

was struggling with the decision as to whether or not I should sign on to a three-year cohort

with strangers that could have ended up as dissimilar as Gilligan, MaryAnn, and Thurston

Howell III on Gilligan's Island (CBS, 1964)– coincidentally enough, their three-hour tour ended up being three seasons long, the same amount of time our cohort was on our own erziehungsroman adventure (three years of collaborative coursework). Although I was reasonably sure in my own ability to tackle this degree-seeking with just me, myself, and I (and a laptop), being stuck on a three-season erziehungsroman adventure with strangers gave me pause. Had I had an example, a narrative inquiry perhaps, that allayed my reservations, I might have joined into the group's rapidly developed synergetic dynamic earlier than I did – more on this later.

Which brings me to an important point:

I am a member of the TWELVE (my new name for the 12-member cohort that sounds just ominous enough to spark a little trepidation and schadenfreude-inspired curiosity yet is innocuous enough that the name gently harkens back to historic twelves of world history). Yes, one might assume my membership is a huge limitation to the study, but I assert that because this study is a narrative inquiry with autoethnographic components, it is a boon to have the storyteller's own experience interwoven within the main tapestry's plot (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). As a member of the cohort under investigation, it is my good fortune to have access to the stories that are presented, and I did my level-best to put you, the reader, in the action, seeing and hearing their stories and the events as they transpired.

The narrative is telling the story of a very specific group of individuals: the TWELVE sitting down at the end of three years together and talking about their experiences both individually and within a group setting. Finally, and bear with me here, or, as one of the

TWELVE would say, "bare with me," you may have realized that this cohort has quite a story to tell.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this study:

> **Cohort** - in the broadest sense it is individuals linked as a group in some way for the purpose of learning, engineering change, or experiencing an event (Glenn, 1977).

> **Erziehungsroman** – a German word that means a story whose protagonist seeks to better himself through education (The Free Dictionary.com, 2016).

> **Interpretivism** – an theoretical perspective or paradigm that the concepts and language researchers use in their research shape their perceptions of the social world they are investigating, studying, and defining (Macionis & Gerber, 2011).

> **Narrative Inquiry** – a process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Summary

This brings us to the end of chapter one which has given me a chance to introduce to you a most interesting research project – that of twelve graduate students attempting to complete their three years of doctoral classes which then set them up for beginning their own dissertations. Chapter 1 provided an overview of how this study will explore the thoughts and feelings of the TWELVE as they navigated the classes in ways both individualistic and cohort-istic. The narrative will explore how the TWELVE laughed, cried, sputtered, rallied,

and passed through the gamut of outrageous emotions often experienced in doctoral settings. To understand the thoughts and feelings of the cohort members is essential to the understanding of why the cohort successfully completed the three-year program together.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature to provide context for the TWELVE's cohort at the TWELVE's university during this time period with the TWELVE's professors. Chapter Two also proposes two theoretical frameworks that will be used to explain the story of the TWELVE. Chapter Three provides an explanation of the methodology used for this study. Chapter Four is the narrative of the TWELVE. Chapter Five explains how this study fits into narrative inquiry and makes suggestions how this type of research can be expanded through further study.

Is your comfy chair ready?

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is to inform the reader of prior research done in the field, to elucidate upon the holes that said research might have within its scope, and to bring a "critical analysis of the relationship among different works" (Mongan-Rails, 2014, p. 55).

The literature I examine in this chapter is structured according to the following headings: What are Cohorts?, The Cohort Model and Social Influence, Cohorts and Student Resolve, Influences of Group Dynamics on Group Norms, the Influence of Faculty on Cohorts, and Characteristics of an Effective Cohort.

What are Cohorts?

A cohort can be defined in the broadest sense as individuals linked as a group in some way for the purpose of learning, engineering change, or experiencing an event (Glenn, 1977). Additionally, an educational cohort is a group of individuals choosing an alternative organizational structure through which the degree program is delivered to *en masse* and who are bound by a shared purpose or educational goal (Bentley et al., 2004). In general, programs are organized in such a way that the students within the cohort

receive the same instruction at the same time, although there does exist flexibility, and will all finish at approximately the same time (Lawrence, 2002). Cohorts have been defined variously in the literature as:

- Communities of critique (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001);

- Societies of education (Birky, Shelton, & Headly, 2006);

- Holding environments (Drago-Severson et al., 2001);

- Learning laboratories (Basom, 2015);

- Purposeful communities (Saitel & Russo, 2001);

- Transformational societies (Mountford, 2005); and,

- Constructivist communities (Wisniewski, 2016).

Mealman and Lawrence (2000) suggest all learners within a cohort contribute synergistically to the whole. How many learners should there be? Several studies have found educational leadership programs vary in size from ten to twenty-five students (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 1996**;** Saltiel & Russo, 2001) with the suggested "perfect" number being fifteen (Saitel & Russo, 2001).

Saitel and Russo (2001) suggest there are four primary attributes that distinguish cohorts from other educational models:

1. Membership is defined and unvaried (i.e., the cohort's population changes through either students leaving or entering into the cohort) throughout the course of the cohort.

2. Academic and emotionally supportive members within a cohort are more likely to achieve their shared goals.

3. Having a schedule of classes that meet fewer times but for longer periods, generally once a week.

4. There exists a synergetic learning relationship among cohort members. Holmes et al. (2008) suggest interdependence, shared identity and discourse history, and intense relationships amongst members within the cohort are also differences that exist between cohort and non-cohort models.

The Cohort Model and Social Influence

The literature on cohorts suggests that there is much potential for a cohort to exist as a social support network not only during the time the cohort is together, but possibly afterwards (Maher, 2005). Relationships in a cohort, whether they be family-like, team-like, or acquaintance-like, can fulfill the need for not only support but for affiliation from a group as well (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Maher, 2005; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Maher (2005) suggests this affiliation can create a sense of camaraderie amongst cohort members that meets one of the upper levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954). Cohort relationships may even fill a need for strong emotional ties (Brooks, 1998; Twale & Kochan, 2000). The emotional component of cohort membership may alleviate the distress that many students experience when they find themselves pulled in several directions at once, including their academic lives versus their social lives (Hagan & Goodstein, 2005). Indeed, feelings of isolation might be assuaged by use of the cohort model (Boes et al., 1999) as the model may be able to "create a space" within which a cohort member may find a place to bond with his or her peers in the cohort (Norris & Barnett, 1994, p. 30). These bonds can become strengthened

through a variety of factors, including time one remains in a cohort, forming relationships outside the academic experience, and shared trials and tribulations (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Pinna et al., 2018).

Many studies on doctoral cohorts have produced similar findings: that peer support and reassurance are two of the most valued aspects of joining a cohort (Bair, 2015; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Kerka, 1995; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Being a member of a group of individuals with similar goals, including getting one's advanced degree, has shown positive correlation with achieving the goal (Brien, 1992). Other factors of success include instructional assistance and personal encouragement (Imel, 2014).

Findings from Irby and Miller (1999) suggest that doctoral students who were in their initial stages of their program (first semester) had a positive experience with being in a cohort because membership in a cohort related to being able to "cry on one another's shoulders" with regard to the responsibilities, the uncertainties, and the homework that one suddenly finds oneself doing when joining a doctoral program (p. 4). Specifically, camaraderie has a positive effect on students joining a doctoral cohort, lending an empathy that may not be present otherwise (Wesson, 1996). If cohort members believed they could share their experiences amongst other members of not only the highs but the lows of trying to juggle full-time jobs, full-time families, and getting enough sleep, the cohort could be thought to be a "unique, and extremely vital" source for support (Dorn, 1995, p. 17-18).

Cesari (1990) reported that reliance on one another within a cohort for guidance was a principle measure of success of individual students as measured by the students' self-perceptions of their place on the current trajectory towards their goal. Helping one another with references, research methods, and resources (the three r's) allowed cohort members to succeed and to "gain a sense of competence and self-worth" for not only the cohort member that is giving guidance but also for the guidance given to their peers (Holmes et al., 2008, p. 12).

Factors that Influence Attrition (sans Cohort)

Dr. Thomas Bender (2004), University Professor of Humanities at New York University, writes:

> Retention and attrition are extremely important issues for students and for the institution. Far more doctoral students are enrolled in graduate programs than complete the degree. It is essential that departments and the profession as a whole determine the dimensions and causes of attrition and focus their attention on retention. The human and financial costs of high levels of attrition demand responsible action by the profession. (p. 95)

"Perseverance," "tenacity," "doggedness" are words that describe what it takes to survive a doctoral program's grueling, upwards-of-a-half-a-decade trek to the graduation stage (Maher, 2005); Bair (2015) simply says it is a "continuance of a student's progress towards completion of the goal" (p.138). Regardless of the wording one uses to describe this characteristic, most graduate students, when entering the degree-seeking program, believe themselves to have full command of this ability and are ready to show the world

their perspicacity in achieving the goal (Nelson & Jackson, 2000; Thune & Storen, 2015). However, Bair's (2015) research showed over two-thirds of doctoral degree-seeking students will not reach their original goal, with the majority of them falling to the attrition-bug in the first year and a surprising, yet significant, number making the decision to leave after achieving candidacy.

Why such high numbers of attrition in these doctoral degree-seeking programs? Often times life catches up to a doctoral student, and no matter how much hard work, persistence, and obstinacy they are able to muscle, it will not be enough to overcome life. Examples abound:

- Lack of tangible coping skills (Cesari, 1990);

- Lack of adequate financial support (Kerka, 1995);

- The opportunity cost of a doctorate is too great when weighed against one's family and friends (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997);

- Lack of connection with one's advisor (Golde, 2014);

- The ethical climate of education (Schulte, 2002);

- Negative Peer interaction (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005);

- Departmental culture (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

- Not having on-campus directedness (Hughes, 1983); and

- Having a sense of disconnectedness from the larger university community (Glover, 1988).

In a 2001 study by Lovitts, she discovered the vast majority of determination of whether a student will leave a doctoral degree-seeking program comes after the student

has begun classes. For example, a student may not have planned for the drive time to and from classes, may not have realized the expense of textbooks when figuring tuition costs, or may have underestimated the amount of self-motivation a doctoral program requires (Lovitts, 2001). In a study conducted in 2012 of doctoral students, the researchers did not find a significant difference in attrition numbers based on demographic factors of sex, age, race, nationality, marital status, children, or employment when comparing those who completed their degrees and those that were unable to do so (Bair, 2014).

One of the most frequently cited factors in the success of any educational program is the attrition rate of the students (Kerka, 1995; Zeichner, 2014). The importance placed on attrition rates has been shown in many studies including those on counselor education programs (Provitnik & Foss, 2009), engineering education (Arends, 1998), or higher education (Tinto, 1998).

Cohorts and Student Resolve

An established and significant link has been established between persistence in an educational program and learning that occurs in a cohort model (Basom et al.,1996). The networks of relationships established, including the strong emotional ties amongst cohort members, can be ascribed to this link (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Reynolds & Hebert, 1998; Wilkins et al., 2016).

Reasons given for being persistent in completing doctoral programs while in a cohort abound:

- Friendships and networking that occur among cohort members (Provitnik & Foss, 2009);

- Support and encouragement shared by group members (Cunningham, 1996);

- Shared experiences (Holmes et al., 2014);

- Personal motives, or a philosophy of never quitting what one begins (Twale & Kochan, 2000);

- Belief the doctoral degree will be helpful in aspiring for a more successful career (Dorn, 1995); and

- Tacit priority of keeping the group intact (Lawrence, 2002).

Several studies have shown that students immersed in a cohort for their doctoral program often cite belonging to the cohort as a significant reason for completing their programs (Holmes et al. 2014). Just by being a part of a cohort, participants believed that their ability to understand the complex nature of methods and designs, to advance themselves in professional learning, and to write higher quality proposals and dissertations was much improved (Burnett, 1999). With this in mind, Paredes and Chung (2012) conducted a study in which program-long cohort models were shown to proactively address retention in doctoral programs.

Influences of Group Dynamics on Group Norms

A cohort is not immune from general group social dynamics; its development, function, and performance are tied to the synergy of the individuals (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler Olcott, 2001). Cohort members influence the social dynamics within the group simply through their regard from one another, their individual proclivities of social interaction, and their spatial-temporal circumstances (Maher, 2001; McDonald et al., 2013).

Each cohort is unique. The type of program and the type of professional people in one's cohort and the context matter. Even the cohort's journey in a land-grant institution in a college of education is central to its challenges, strengths, particularities in experience (Pennington et al., 2018). The individuals making a cohort, although having a similar goal to earn a doctoral degree and being drawn from particular groups more than others, are as varied as a group of people as any, be it ethnicity, age, gender, or socio-economic upbringing (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). Additionally, group dynamics cannot be, in any way, predicted to within a significant confidence due to the chaotic nature of people, no matter their similar goal of desiring a degree (Maher, 2004; McDonald et al., 2013). Bandura (1997) suggests that even though the same material (e.g., course plan of studies) is used amongst different cohorts, the outcomes and group dynamics within the cohorts compared to other cohorts can be quite varied.

Group norms, the shared expectations of outcomes within the cohort, are established within the first few courses that are completed together (Lawrence, 1996). These shared expectations provide security among cohort members as to what is expected not only of one another but of themselves. A culture develops within the cohort - pigs dominate the thinking, horses do the grunt work, and the sheep are hoping that the professors are wise, understanding, and benevolent (Orwell, 1945). Lawrence (2002) suggests that when group norms allow for mutual respect and trust, the cohort's success, as defined by the educational success of its members, is strengthened.

However, all is not roses and apples. When early stereotypes of norms are not accurate, when cohort members believe other members are actively attempting to undermine the process, and when members are unable to contribute their full potential to

a group, there can be a large and troublesome problem for gaining any cohesiveness in a cohort (Lawrence & Mealman, 1996). Strong personalities may quickly rise to the forefront and, either intentionally or unintentionally, inhibit other members in the group from giving opinions simply by monopolizing speaking time or by harshly criticizing other's opinions (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). In one study, strong personalities were shown to be able to influence weaker personalities to join in the destructive program behaviors of attempting to alter program goals, remove professors, or organize resistance against "unfair homework" (Beck & Kosnik, 2001, p. 81-82). Faculty members that are new to the program, who join after the cohort has been together for some time, may feel overpowered by strong personalities within a cohort that have not been reined in by others (Maher, 2004; McDonald et al,, 2013).

Leadership within the cohort is an integral part of the success or failure of the group as a whole (Maher, 2005; McCarthy, 2015), but how important are the faculty on a cohort's success?

The Impact of Faculty on Cohorts

Faculty in a cohort setting are not just experts in their respective academic fields – they are also called upon to act as intermediaries, coaches, soothsayers, and referees. The roles of faculty members are multitudinous and varied (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000; Pennington et al. 2018). Faculty members serve a unique function for the cohort, including being the glue which keeps the program together (Basom et al., 1995; Lawrence 2017).

Faculty members are usually the final arbiters on the make-up of the cohort; they must make selections not only based on candidates' academic ability, but on what faculty members deem to be "persistence-like" qualities (Bentley, 2004). The faculty must be able to have the flexibility to counsel students with rigid learning styles, obvious prejudices, or other biases not in line with the stated goals of the cohort program which may include up to removing them from a selected counseling program (Hayes & Paisley, 2002). But even using the most stringent methods of selection, there is no guarantee that a cohort will coalesce into a group which works together effectively for the next three plus years (Norris & Bennet, 1994).

Faculty have the ability to influence the social interaction within the cohort, usually by making decisions regarding pedagogy and power (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). The faculty can serve as a positive role model to the cohort by showing collegiality amongst the members of the faculty, showing empathic listening skills, and showing respect for diverse views (Holmes et al., 2014). Faculty can be important facilitators by enabling the proper conditions for a cohort to evolve into a synergistic community (Holmes et al., 2014). Maher (2004) suggests that one positive method of establishing such a community is to spend some time in the first classes of the cohort doing team-building exercises which will set the stage for collaborative working environments later on in the program.

Another role faculty members must play with a cohort is that of "mother hen." It has been shown that the best way for a cohort to succeed in building connectivity is with a hands-off approach by the faculty (Posselt, 2016). It is important, however, for the faculty to monitor group interactions such that they do not impede academic progress

(Lawrence, 1996). Keeping close tabs on the interactions within a cohort allows faculty members to exercise their best judgment on whether or not there should be an intervention to help the cohort work out any dysfunctional relationships (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

<h2 style="text-align:center">**Characteristics of an Effective Cohort**</h2>

Johnson and Johnson (2003) state that effective groups operate using a variety of characteristics, including having a clear purpose, open communication, acceptance amongst the group, support, trust, high levels of inclusion, and shared leadership, all ideas that the cohort within this study were able to have that we will see in succeeding chapters.

The question becomes whether an effective cohort needs to show all of these characteristics to be so labeled. Norris and Barnett (1994) suggest that cohorts need to only show remarkable interaction, purpose, and interdependence to be defined as effective. Witte and James (1998) suggest the notion of *quid pro quo* is prevalent in effective cohorts, with cohort members constantly scratching one another's backs (figuratively) to receive the same treatment in the future. Interdependence means relying on one another for learning, resources, and support, and to depend on each member in the cohort to accomplish their tasks (Hayes & Paisley, 2015; Wilkins, 2016). Without interdependence, a cohort may devolve into a "winner-takes-all," "king-of-the-hill," Hunger Games (Collins, 2008) scenario.

Cohorts can exhibit characteristics of families (Maher, 2001; Zeichner, 2014). Cohorts can effectively serve as surrogate families to members both during and after the

cohort classroom experience (Bunce & Jones, 2017). These healthy bonds are essential for an effective cohort (Lawrence, 2002). Bonding goes hand-in-hand with collaboration (Dorn et al., 1995; Saitel & Russo, 2001).

Groups who believe individual voices carry weight within a cohort's decision-making allow for individual empowerment, and effective cohorts find a way to see that everyone has a voice (Maher, 2001; Dona et al., 2017). However, it is the group voice that carries the biggest weight. An effective cohort can use its collective voice to negotiate (course requirements, deadlines, and material, etc.) (Teitel, 1997). Because of this negotiating power, an effective cohort may sometimes be a challenge to teach due to a shift in the balance of power between the students and the faculty (Maher, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is comprised of different theories and theoretical constraints that help explain a phenomenon (Shields, 2013). While a theoretical framework may certainly help a researcher draw implications from a data set, it also helps people who do not care about the specific application or phenomenon being studied to nevertheless take an interest in the research – they may choose to identify what is the broader idea of the research by reading the specific study and then taking what can be analyzed and generalized from that study's results and seeing what implications these results may have on other types of actors in other types of situations (Shields, 2013).

After researching many theories, I have determined social network theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to be an excellent fit for this study. I will give an overview of both and then explain why these theories fit with this study.

27

Social Network Theory

Social network theory (SNT) has been useful in examining patterns and interactions in a variety of mediums:

- Einstein-Bose condensates (Bianconi & Barabási, 2001);

- Criminology (Bursik, 1988);

- Human disease distribution (Siettos & Russo, 2013); and,

- Traffic jams (Evans & Hanney, 2015).

In the last three examples, the interactions of humans within the society determines many aspects of life, whether that be distribution of wealth, the distribution of disease, or the distribution of mounting frustration at the long line of cars sitting in front of you on the way home after a hard day at work. More importantly and certainly more relevant to this study, social network theory has been used as a lens through which to examine groups of people working together and supporting one another to achieve a goal (Jones & Volpe, 2011; Gesell et al., 2016).

A network can be defined as groups or systems of interconnected people and organizations, including schools, whose aims and purposes include the improvement of learning and aspects of well-being known to affect learning (Haythornthwaite, 1998). While networking has recently come to the fore in education, the concept of networking has been long established in other fields, with strong ties in the social sciences, psychology, and business studies (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Arregle et al., 2015). One might argue that Leonhard Euler was the first person to come up with a network theory

"situation" in 1736 when he proposed the Seven Bridges of Konigsberg problem in which

a pedestrian was tasked with finding a route in the city that met various criteria including

not swimming in the river (Newman, 2004). Francis Guthrie used network theory in 1852

to prove one only needed four colors to color a map such that no boundary had the same

color adjacent (Gonthier, 2008). In the 20th century, network theory has been used to

show relationships within ecological systems, within genetic interactions, and within

transportation systems (Newman, 2004).

Network theory has wide applicability when it comes to showing

interrelationships amongst items. Three distinct theoretical perspectives contribute to the

broader category of social network theory: constructivist organizational theory, the theory

of social capital, and the Durkheimian (Wasserman & Faust, 1999).

According to constructivist theory, groups or organizations are sense-making

systems creating shared perceptions and interpretations of reality (Weick, 1995). Each

group or network makes, to a certain extent, its own identification of reality, a unique

perception anchored in the context of its purpose. This sense-making system is essential

for groups to function effectively but it also runs the risk of becoming myopic in that

"this shared perception may be closed to external influences leading to a disconnection

with alternative realities and the [group's] environment" (Noteboom, 2004, p. 9). This,

however, is the very situation for which networking provides a solution; networking is

able to combat myopia by providing complementary cognition (Noteboom, 2004).

The constructivist approach of collaborative ventures as communities of practice

presupposes that new knowledge emerges as groups work together towards the

achievement of goals (Noteboom, 2004), whether those are "sand castles on the beach or

a theory of the universe" (p. 2). The catch-22 in this collaboration is that group members need to be dissimilar from one another in their approaches and background knowledge, yet they must also be similar enough for dialogue to be possible and constructive (Nooteboom, 2004). As group members work with one another over time, the similarities will begin to accumulate, and less diversity may be seen; interestingly enough, this may conversely begin the path towards myopia (Boylorn, R, 2006).

According to Woolcock and Narayan (2000), social network theory seen through the lens of social capital focuses specifically on the value, whether real or perceived, of collaboration among group members. Social capital was introduced as a way to explain social action and how group involvement can enhance group members' life situations (Aldritch & Meyer, 2015; Coleman, 1988). Social capital can be described as resources embedded in a social context that are accessed or mobilized in purposeful action (Lin, 1999). Therefore, social capital does not describe the linkages between members of a group; in contrast, it describes the resources that are available to group members through their connections with one another (Coleman, 1988). Resources available in a social network includes information exchange (content, direction, strength) (Haythornthwaite, 1998). Social network theory posits social norms and conventions, for example the idea of consensus building being used to spontaneously achieve a selection, are an integral process in successful networks (Granovetter, 1983).

The value of this lens is seen in its ability to harness resources held by group members and increase the flow of information in a network (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Graham, 2015). In turn, the value of networking lies in spanning "structural holes" where information is lacking (Kim & Goodstein, 2017, p. 26). The more members in a

group working collaboratively, the less likely there will be structural holes in the information in which some member is not proficient in covering the information, or at least is able to spot where the hole is and alert others. However, if group members are unable to cover the structural holes, whether through lack of ability, lack of knowledge, or lack of effort, there may exist a situation in which negative behavior patterns among group members emerge (Hunter et al., 2015; Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

In the most successful examples of networking, social capital is both an individual and a collective good (Lin, 1999), and "social capital is defined by its function" (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). If the group members believe the collaboration only benefits the collective or the network itself, motivation of the group's members may be lacking. A necessary condition for the emergence of effective norms is "action that imposes external effects on others" (Coleman, 1988, p. 105). However, if the group believes the collaboration is benefiting only individuals within the group and not the network as a whole, the group members may play a zero-sum game, thus limiting trust and eventually causing the demise of the network (Lin, 1999).

The final lens through which social network theory may be applied is through the Durkheimian Theory. Durkheim (1972) concerned himself with anomie, which is the feeling of malaise or ennui in an individual, and its impact on the association of alienation and purposelessness. Anomie commonly occurs when society has or is undergoing a rapid change, and when there is a significant discrepancy between the ideological theories and values individuals and society hold and their actual practices (Durkheim, 1972). According to this theory, anomie may result from a lack of strong ties and the lack of regulation, integration, and collaboration individuals bring to a group. By

allowing oneself to become part of a network, the regulations can be balanced with the clear health benefits of an individual compared to one that has loose ties or no ties at all to a group (Pennington et al., 2018.)

Durkheimian Theory varies from constructivist and social capital theories in that it focuses on an aspect that the other two do not: moral purpose as a key factor in the successful performance of organizations (Harris & Lambert, 2003). According to Durkheim (1938), moral purpose is a factor of moral density and is a key component to avoiding anomie.

The demand for ever higher levels of achievement, intolerance of failure, and, in some countries at least, concern over the remaining inequities that characterize the system, means that schools are increasingly being given demanding goals requiring innovation (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). A factor related to this ever-increasing demand is the erosion of the power of the nation state in favor of complex layering and networks between different tiers of government (Phan & Airoldi, 2015).

In contrast to views of networking as being necessarily concerned with learning and school improvement, other goals are both theoretically possible and present in education systems (Nooteboom, 2004). These goals may include broadening opportunities, increased accountability, and sharing resources.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed that individuals are part of larger and larger groups that emanate outward from the individual at the center; these groups are, according to Bronfenbrenner, akin to ecosystems. The four ecosystems are the

microsystem in which the individual is part of his immediate group of close friends and relatives, the mesosystem in which the individual interrelates two or more microsystems, the exosystem in which the individual does not have control within the system, yet the system impacts the individual's microsystem, and the macrosystem in which exist the "developmentally-instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and pattern of social interchange" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 101).

Cohorts as a social network fall within Bronfenbrenner's meso- and exo- systems. Specifically, a social support network is a complex, multidimensional construct, involving both quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Devine, 2012). Quantitative dimensions include the "structural characteristics of the network, such as size, resources, diversity and types" (p. 12) while the qualitative dimensions of a social network "generally are reflected in individual perceptions of the availability of support, attitudes seeking assistance, and skills accessing and maintaining relationships within the network" (Devine, 2012, p.13).

Social support is an inherent aspect of social networks and may include kinship ties, friendship circles, and collegial relationships (Paredes & Chung, 2012). At the beginning of a cohort's experience, the latter relationship is most probable, but studies have shown where effective cohorts are maintained, friendships develop allowing for a tighter social network.

In conclusion, as the limitations of individual organization become more apparent in our increasingly connected society, social network theory provides a lens through

which to view possible solutions to these limitations discussed previously by facilitating collaboration, networking, and the building of relationships. Whether social networks are best seen as constructivist realities, social capital exchanges, or moral purpose houses, this theory certainly allows for the possibility that educational cohorts are worthwhile.

Social Network Theory and Ecological Systems Theory Applied to this Study

After researching social network theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, it became apparent that these theories would be appropriate for guiding this study. Because this study emphasizes not only the nature of the relationships between cohort members but also the physical, mental, and emotional support given to one another, it is directly related to social network theory's constructivist organizational theory, the theory of social capital, and the Durkheimian theory. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, that of expanding groupings and their accompanying relationships, can be shown by this cohort's story.

Using these theories as a lens through which to look at the data, it became clear that the theories chosen for the narrative should emphasize relationships both as individuals getting to know one another over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner's theory) and as the group itself and its interactions both internally and externally to situations (social network theory).

Summary

This chapter was a broad review of the literature on the topic of cohorts. It covered definitions of cohorts, discussions on the cohort model and social influence, how cohorts can influence student resolve, the influences of group dynamics on group norms,

the impact of faculty on cohorts, and the characteristics of an effective cohort. The

chapter also includes an explanation of the theoretical framework for this study. Without

further ado, we shall bid this chapter adieu.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

According to Myers (2008), interpretive researchers assume that access to reality

(given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language,

consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. The underlying idea of the

interpretivist approach is that the researcher is part of the research, interprets data and as

such can never be fully objective and removed from the research. In this study the

researcher, myself, was a member of the cohort under study, one-twelfth of the group.

Because I was both interacting as a researcher and a member of the cohort, it was

inappropriate and impossible to remove myself from either role on a permanent or a

semi-permanent basis, and as such I have written this narrative using the lenses of both

roles – firmly placing myself in the interpretivist camp.

The shared reality of our cohort over a period of three years was a social construct

that became an integral part of our lives, and the narrative in chapter four of this study

will explain how that happened.

Interpretivists avoid rigid structural frameworks and adopt a more personal and

flexible research structures which are receptive to capturing meanings in human

interaction and make sense of what is perceived as reality (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, &

Gronhaug, 2001). This personal and flexible structure is evident in this study through the use of the story-telling narrative in chapter four. Interpretivists also believe the researcher and his informants are interdependent and mutually interactive (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). As I have shown throughout this study, particularly in chapters four and five, the cohort members are interdependent in many ways (emotionally, mentally, and physically) as well as mutually interactive.

The researcher who uses interpretivism remains open to new knowledge throughout the study and lets it develop with the help of informants. The use of such an emergent and collaborative approach is consistent with the interpretivist belief that humans have the ability to adapt, and that no one can gain prior knowledge of time and context bound social realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Although the researcher for this particular study was one-twelfth of the subjects under study, the other eleven cohort members contributed equal shares in a collaborative, adaptable, and interpretivist belief of our reality.

The goal of interpretivist research is not to generalize and predict causes and effects, but to understand and interpret the meanings in human behavior (Neuman, 2000; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). For an interpretivist researcher it is important to understand motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences which are time and context bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2000).

As stated in chapter one, the research questions for this study are:

1.   What can we learn about cohorts from within a cohort?

2.   What are the nuanced moments and characteristics that make this cohort work?

3.   What can we learn from this study that will be beneficial for others?

4.   "What trials and tribulations, anecdotes and accounts, and/or scenarios and stories come to mind when one is asked to describe one's three-year experience being a member of this doctoral education cohort?"   More specifically, "What is our story?"

Two Historical Storytellers – Goodall and Sahagun

This study will attempt to pay homage to the immensely popular and well-respected research of the world's foremost primatologist and chimpanzee expert Dame Jane Goodall (b.1934). Dr. Goodall's (2002) ethnography was conducted *in situ* at the Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania over a period of 55 years. Beginning her studies with a notebook and a set of binoculars (and her mother who was required to accompany her for safety reasons), the 25-year old Goodall was able to effectively document the habits, actions, and activities of her subjects over a significant period of time by remaining still, aping (sic) her subjects, and making notes of their similarities and differences in actions, mannerisms, and sounds (Goodall & Peterson, 2002). Because of her research, people now know that chimpanzees are omnivores, able to work with simple tools, and are capable of establishing relationships not only in their immediate family members but with their extended tribe (Goodall & Peterson, 2002). Her work over the past half-century has given primatologists, ethologists, and anthropologists primary source material that may be used for the next several centuries.

Although Dr. Goodall's methodology was similar to many ethnographers, she did a few things that raised eyebrows due to their unorthodox nature; as an example, she named the chimpanzees instead of simply assigning them numbers (Goodall, 1999). Dr.

Goodall admits that one of her methodologies, setting up a food-station of bananas to entice the chimpanzees to come out into a more favorable viewing area, was not quite in the spirit of observing her subjects in their natural habitat and, therefore, has since regretted the practice (Goodall & Peterson, 2002).

The second, and perhaps less well-known of qualitative methodologists to whom I would like to pay homage in this study is Bernardino de Sahagun (b.1499- d.1590). Friar Sahagun, a Spaniard missionary, made the decision to insert himself fully into the Aztec culture so as to come up with the best plan for converting the indigenous peoples to Christianity. To do so, Sahagun would spend 50 years studying the culture, beliefs, and history of the Aztecs, learn their language (Nahuatl), and write a 2400-page book documenting his discoveries.[1] Sahagun wrote of the Aztecs' love of warfare, love of human sacrifices, and love of blankets that were, unfortunately, infected by smallpox. According to Austin (1974), Sahagun used the following methodologies:

- He used the native language of Nahuatl in his interactions with the Aztecs;

- He elicited information of elders, the cultural authorities publicly recognized as most knowledgeable;

- He adapted the project to the ways that Aztec culture recorded and transmitted knowledge;

- He used the expertise of his former students at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, whom he credited by name;

---

[1] The book, named the Florentine Codex by historians, was put on a back shelf in a church in Florence, Italy and not discovered by academia until two centuries had passed … since then the codex has been scanned and placed online for any and all who wish to practice their Nahuatl.

- He attempted to capture the totality or complete reality of Aztec culture on its own terms;

- He structured his inquiry using questionnaires, but was prepared to set this aside when more valuable information was shared through other means;

- He attended to the diverse ways that diverse meanings are transmitted through Nahuatl linguistics;

- He undertook a comparative evaluation of information, drawing from multiple sources, in order to determine the degree of confidence with which he could hold that information; and,

- He collected information on the conquest of Mexico from the Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco point of view of the defeated (Austin, 1974).

Friar Sahagun's 16th century example of ethnographic methodology is surely something against which to measure any other ethnographer's methods. His choice of blending in with the indigenous peoples, of mining information from the experts, of triangulating sources, and of being ready to drop everything and "pursue the White Rabbit down the hole" when necessary is exactly what this study is all about.

In summary of this introduction, the methodology used for this study will borrow heavily from Dame Goodall (2002) and Friar Sahagun (1590), both expert researchers and ethnographers who analyzed and interpreted their data and turned it into their narratives, their stories that have stood the test of time.

I have incorporated some autoethnographic components in this narrative inquiry. Autoethnographies are an approach to research and writing that seeks to systematically analyze and explain (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand or to

reveal cultural experiences (ethno) (Bochner, 2011; Ellis, 2004). As a member of the

cohort under study, I experienced what the TWELVE went through, and have been able

to write about my personal experience as a part of this narrative to reveal our experiences

in a first-person way. Autoethnographers want to concentrate on ways of producing

meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research

that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in

silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people

who may be different from us (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This study serendipitously meets

all three of these ideas: the identity of our cohort is revealed; the experience of being in a

doctoral cohort is shrouded from the outside world; and, the rigors and revelations that

accompany doctoral students may be a new experience with which for the reader to

empathize. It is a nice benefit when conducting this narrative study to be able to use my

unique position as a cohort member to add a bit of autoethnographic flavor to the

narrative, giving the study, at times, a unique view of the unfolding narrative.

Methodology

Narrative researchers look for ways to understand and then present real-life

experiences through the stories of the research participants (Connelly & Clandinin,

2006). The narrative approach allows for a rich description of these experiences and an

exploration of the meanings that the participants derive from their experiences.

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they
>
> interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal
>
> through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the

world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study

of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about

experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the

phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view

of experience as phenomenon under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375).

Some forms of qualitative research focus on a search for common themes across

participants' stories or use participants' stories to develop or confirm existing taxonomies

or conceptual systems (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). Because narrative inquirers attend to

individual's lives as they are composed over time in relation with people and situations in

a particular place or places, the focus remains on lives as lived and told throughout the

inquiry. The knowledge developed from narrative inquiries is textured by particularity

and incompleteness; knowledge that leads less to generalizations and certainties

(Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) and more toward wondering about the experiences being

experienced and imagining alternative possibilities.

Narrative inquiry is a process of entering into the midst of each participant's and

each inquirer's life. This draws attention to the importance of acknowledging the ongoing

temporality of experience when it is understood narratively.

Narrative inquiry always begins in the midst of ongoing experiences. In this

process, inquirers continue to live their stories, even as they tell stories of their

experiences over time. Inquiries conclude still in the midst of living and telling,

reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up narrative

inquirers' and participants' lives, both individual and social (Clandinin & Huber, 2009).

This study is a direct reflection of the above quote. Data collection for this narrative study began in the midst of the three-year process including artifacts (example: on-line message boards as well as notes taken in class) and continued on until the end of the last classes the TWELVE had together. I found myself living within the story as well as observing the story as it unfolded in front and around me both in first-person and in third-person. More of this will be discussed in chapter five.

Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography

In these last several pages I described characteristics of narrative inquiry and autoethnography. By incorporating autoethnographic components in this narrative inquiry, this study aims to take the best parts of both and synergistically creating a study that gives voice to the now expanded understanding of cohorts and the relationships created, while simultaneously doing so using "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). The nature of this study is somewhat unique because it uses a narrative inquiry methodology in which the author is a member of the group under study, the dissertation process is part of the cohort's work, the study of the group has implications for the author's self-learning, and also situates the author's voice and literary interests (auto) clearly in the narrative.

Understanding life as a narrative led Bruner (2004) to show that "the stories we tell about our lives… [are] our autobiographies" (p. 291). As a narrator, however, I must

understand that I am not telling this story in a vacuum. Freeman writes that autobiographical narrative inquiry is seen as "the interpretation and writing of the personal past… [and it] is a product of the present and the interests, needs and wishes that attend it" (2007, p. 137). This study is a story. This study is in part my story. This study is the TWELVE's story.

The Process of Data Collection

As I experienced the events in this particular "temporality, sociality, and place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) of this study, I wrote down thoughts in first-person. Later, when I interviewed the ELEVEN, I saw through their eyes how they experienced the three years together. Rather than focusing on my experiences only, my intent was to focus on my cohort's experiences as members of a cohort. I wanted to use narrative to add a piece of literature that is unique in its storyline and presentation, and there is nothing more unique than the telling of the story of the TWELVE. I also wanted to engage with my readers, because by doing so I see myself and you, the reader, as retelling our own narratives, coming to "changed identities and practices" (Clandinin & Huber, 2000, p.4), and making this story ours.

Narrative forms of inquiry can include thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Goodall, 2006). They accomplish this first by discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice (Bochner, 2011). Thus, the narrator not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural

experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Goodall, 2006). In narrative writing, researchers may interview others as well as consult with texts like photographs, journals, and recordings to help with recall (Bochner, 2011; Goodall, 2006).

A key quality that narrative and autoethnographic researchers require is the possession of a fine command of the print medium (Adams, 2008). They should be able to construct a product that is aesthetic and evocative, engaging to readers, and uses conventions of storytelling such as character, scene, and plot development (Ellis, 2004), and/or chronological or fragmented story progression (Didion, 2005). The story must illustrate new perspectives on the personal experience by finding the epiphanies and filling in the gap of existing, related storylines (Goodall, 2001).

The story can be artful and evocative by altering authorial points of view: first-person eyewitness accounts can be intimate and immediate (Cauley, 2008), second-person accounts can bring a reader into the script itself to actively witness the scene along with the author (Glave, 2005), and third-person accounts may be used to present findings, establish contexts for interactions, and present what others do or say (Cauley, 2008).

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers use a variety of ways of collecting material including introspections, narratives, interviews, and observations, in order to offer accounts of "moments and meanings" in teachers' and students' lives (Pennington et al, 2018, p. 599). The majority of early ideas and information about the cohort that began to shape

the basic stepping stones of the story came through dialogue and observations during the three-year time span that the TWELVE were together. These stepping stones (as an example, the cohort meeting for a cram-session at a local restaurant and regaling one another with our thoughts about that first Wednesday evening class) were then the catalysts for the questions that were created for the interview process. The formal data collection strategies were focused on the questions and ideas generated by the stones, and were specifically used including the conducting of individual interviews, participating in focus groups, and examining artifacts.

As mentioned in this study's introduction, I began to think about doing this study during the class in which narrative inquiry was introduced to the TWELVE. When my colleague leaned over to me and said that I should write about our group's experience as a narrative, it caught my attention as both a unique and interesting idea. Although I immensely enjoyed taking the classes, I found myself anxiously waiting to the end of the classes to begin my writing. I went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, explaining my study by detailing how I would go about interviewing the ELEVEN both individually and together as well as identifying how I would maintain confidentiality when it came to personal information of the TWELVE. I detailed to the IRB what types of artifacts I would be collecting, including electronic communications (such as message boards the TWELVE used during individual classes), group projects (such as results of personality tests and scripts performed in front of professors during classes), and class notes. The IRB approval is attached to the end of this paper.

At the end of the spring 2016 semester, the TWELVE were together in their final

classes of the cohort.[2] After the classes are completed, the dissertation proposal was

conducted, and the IRB review was approved, I conducted individual interviews of each

of the ELEVEN (n-me); individual interview questions are attached in Appendix A. The

individual interviews were conducted on each of the ELEVEN's "home court" at the

participant's choosing, be that their school principal's office, their favorite central office

building, or the classroom in which we met as a cohort for three years. Indeed, most of

the interviews took place at either the member's home-school office room or else at a

coffee shop, showing at once how members of the cohort saw themselves as professionals

and/or personal-relationship driven (or else, just needing a quick shot of caffeine in my

case).

Interactive interviews provide for an in-depth understanding that is intimate and

emotionally charged with sensitive topics (Odena & Burgess, 2017). These interviews are

collaborative endeavors between researchers and participants, research activities in which

researchers and participants probe together about the issues that transpire, in

conversation, about particular topics (Bochner, 2011). Interactive interviews are situated

within the context of emerging and well-established relationships amongst participants

and interviewers (Adams, 2008). The emphasis in these research contexts is on what can

be learned from interaction within the interview setting as well as on the stories that each

person brings to the research encounter (Mey & Mruck, 2010).

Each of the ELEVEN's individual interviews began in the same manner by sitting

down with the cohort member and explaining the purpose of what we would be doing for

---

[2] There were several more hours left in the doctorate process, including internships and dissertation hours, but the TWELVE were not together as a single group during these final stages.

the next 30-45 minutes and then having them sign a consent form. We talked about what aliases we would choose for the study's character names, although in the end I chose new names as the ones originally proposed were a bit too identifiable and having anonymity in responses is an important ingredient in this study. Each one of us laughed at the beginning, a common denominator among the TWELVE. I turned on the tape recorder, looked down at my first question, and began. This is where the paths of the eleven interviews diverged as the individual perceptions on our experience intentionally forced different follow-up questions. Although the questions I had written beforehand were all addressed, the route taken by each interview and individual was unique. Only in one interview did we go straight-down-the-page of questions. The others meandered, chased rabbits, and waxed and waned with impromptu dialogue. The collaborative nature of these interviews as they unfolded aligned with the group relationships and the focus of this study, showing how the TWELVE had developed bonds that allowed for personal and shared reflection.

After the individual interviews were completed, audiotapes transcribed, and patterns or themes identified, the TWELVE met and participated in a focus-group style question and answer session; focus group questions are attached in Appendix B. The focus-group was recorded on an audio tape recorder.

The TWELVE started taking classes together in the fall of 2013 and finished their classes in the spring of 2016. During this time, cohort members had written papers, reflected on questions, and posted their thoughts and opinions on online classroom posting sites as well as social media. Some of these artifacts informed the material for the interview questions. Subjects were asked permission to use any and all of these written

artifacts to help understand their relationships as members of the cohort with triangulation.

For this particular narrative, there exist data mined from sources including interpersonal interactions, memes, and personal experience (from interviews, emails, Facebook postings, etc.). Being a member of the TWELVE was not just confined to the solitary academic classroom; the TWELVE, over the course of our three years, became interpersonally intertwined with our lives, helping us understand one another's stories on issues such as child-rearing, house-building, and Bible-distributing. The stories give us insight into who we are as people and, therefore, are exceptionally beneficial for our story.

I never missed a class during the three years, and I suspect that I experienced as much as any of the others in the TWELVE when it came to the three-year long doctoral cohort process. As opposed to Goodall who walked with the apes and Sahagun who walked with the Aztecs, I walked with the TWELVE and was a TWELFTH.

My involvement in the cohort means that the visual aid of the rectangle must be changed to a shape that is more reflective of the variety of data collection this narrative employs (Table 1):

Table 1

Data Collection Sources

Sources	Examples/Explanation
1. Individual interviews	Each member of the TWELVE conducted separately at a place chosen by the interviewee
2. Observations	Observing class members and their relationships and actions before, during, and after class periods
3. Artifacts	Group Internet Messages, Personality Tests
4. Focus Group	Entire Cohort 60-minute group interview
5. Interpersonal Interactions	Interactions between researcher and other members within the cohort

Data Analysis

Once data collection commenced, triangulating the themes began to take place. Although it may appear that each of the seven points in the collection process are equal, it was the case that some of the data sources illustrated on the diagram are more prominent than others, and the narrative was more prone to emphasize the more salient data. There were several phases in my analysis of the data. The first phase was to familiarize myself with all the data I had collected by reading and re-reading what I had before me. I did this to become both immersed and intimately familiar with the content.

The next phase in my analysis was coding. I decided to do this manually (versus using a software program that counts and collates oft-used phrases) so that I could continue to immerse myself in the collected material. Highlighters of all colors, paper-clipped papers, and colorful sticky-notes adorned my dining room table, claiming territory heretofore acknowledged as my young daughter's plastic-figurines' palace; each

highlighter/sticky-note color assigned to a different aspect of the material through which I was slowly making my way. Examples of codes included the specific (e.g., "family" and "ANOVA" and "physical stress") as well as broader ideas (e.g., "working together" and "the chair incident" and "death of a child"). Each color got its own pile on the table, some piles being larger than others.

The next phase of my analysis saw me taking the piles and grouping them into larger, meta-piles that I could then use to look for themes or overarching ideas that would meet both the requirement of being within the dataset of artifacts as well as the requirement of being able to help me tell the narrative in a fashion that was suitable for this study. According to Braun (2019), a theme captures a common, recurring pattern across a dataset, clustered around a central organizing concept. Ultimately, three themes emerged from this coding that met the requirements. I gave each of these temporal themes a name: "Joining the Cohort"; "Support from the Cohort"; and, "Memories and Relationships Created."

Although data was collected from a variety of sources, it is easy to conclude that the majority of the data used for coding and subsequent theme determination came from the interviews of the cohort members.

The interview recordings have been transcribed to allow for a complete record, giving me a plethora of data from which to select the most significant elements of the interviews as these provided the main content of the reconstructed story. To transcribe the interviews I sat in front of my computer, turned on my tape recorder, and wished over and over that I had taken typing back in high school – my 20-words-a-minute typing speed may have been a detriment timewise, but it sure made for listening to ten seconds

of conversation at a time an extremely honest way to make sure that all the ums, uhs, and ehs were transcribed correctly.

How did I look for themes within the interviews? I paid attention to narrative at three levels: stories told by research participants (the TWELVE), my own interpretive account (narrative of narrative), and the reader of this study's reconstruction (narrative of narrative of narrative). Initially, I was engrossed mostly in the first level although I also engaged in my own interpretive process which means the unit of analysis is therefore both the interviewee (narrator), myself, and thematic. I looked for themes that fit into my theoretical framework of social network theory. In doing so, I found that Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) general narrative-inquiry ideas of situating the narrative within a time, place, and scene worked as well. The thematic analysis was an emergent process where concepts, imageries, figures of speech were gradually stabilized as themes over the course of the research.

When outstanding patterns emerged throughout the cohort members' individual interviews, the initial focus group questions were altered to reflect the patterns, much like Sahagun does in his ethnography field observations with the Aztecs. Specifically, there existed a pattern within the individual interviews in which the TWELVE wanted to talk explicitly about their first night of class and all the accompanying feelings tied to that evening, a topic that followed directly from one of my early questions within my protocol. As such, during the focus group the same topic was re-introduced which allowed for a conversation pocketed with thick imagery.

When I began analyzing some of the data and synthesizing some of material into initial themes, I began to wonder about the presentation. It was important that the study

was able to be comprehended by audience members who had never experienced a cohort, as well as audience members who were well-versed in the cohort experience.

Credibility and Validity

Validity and credibility are key characteristics of any research study. Credibility is seen as the most important aspect or criterion in establishing trustworthiness (Odena & Burgess, 2017). This is because credibility essentially asks the researcher to clearly link the research study's findings with reality in order to demonstrate the truth of the research study's findings. Two techniques used in qualitative research, triangulation and member checking, were both used in this study.

The triangulation for this narrative study involved using multiple methods, data sources, and observations to gain a more complete understanding of what it was like to be a part of the TWELVE. The multiple methods were used to make sure the findings presented in the narrative were robust, rich, comprehensive, and well-developed. The triangulation of methods was used to check the consistency in the findings and the triangulation of sources allowed me to check consistency across the board regarding the cohort's shared experiences.

The second technique I used to establish credibility was that of member checking. This technique of giving the TWELVE transcripts of their respective individual interviews allowed members of the cohort to clarify what their intentions were in their individual interview answers, to correct any errors, and to provide any additional information they believed was necessary.

For narrative inquiries and autoethnographies, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike,

believable, and possible (Bochner, 2011). Narrative researchers undertake their inquiries to have something to say to their readers about the human condition. Their efforts are not simply for their own private consumption. The knowledge claims they produce are meant to be taken seriously by their readers. This requires that they provide sufficient justification to their readers for the claims they make (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Readers should be able to follow the presented evidence and argument enough to make their own judgment as to the relative validity of the claim. Thus, narrative researchers, in the development and emergence of their research activity, need to consider and anticipate the kind of evidence and argument the research performance will yield to justify readers' acceptance of the plausibility of the resulting claims (Liblich et al, 1998). In their arguments, they need to anticipate and respond to questions readers may have about the acceptability of their claims. Given the complex and changing characteristics of the human realm, narrative researchers do not ask readers to grant validity to their claims only when they reach a level of near certainty about a claim (Bochner, 2011). Readers are asked to make judgments on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim.

In narrative research, the concern is clarification of what the storied text is intended to represent. For the reader to make an informed judgment about claims resting on the textual evidence, narrative researchers need to spell out their understandings of the narrators' experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

According to Polkinghorne (2007), the disjunction between a person's actual experienced meaning and his or her storied description has four sources:

54

1.) The limits of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced

meaning;

2.) The limits of reflection to bring notice to the layers of meaning that are present

outside of awareness;

3.) The resistance of people because of social desirability to reveal fully the entire

complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware, and

4.) The complexity caused by the fact that texts are often a cocreation of the

interviewer and participant (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 8).

Again, this narrative should spell out my understanding of the nature of the

collected evidence. The problem, therefore, is in the spelling, or in other words, how I

can convey the ideas I am trying to express in such a way that the story has a solid

transmission to the audience.

Education, taken in its broadest form, can be said to be principally about

relationships (McGettrick, 2008); relationships are central to effective learning and to

Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) version of narrative inquiry. Relationships are hugely

complex in that they are based on individuals' identities, on personalities of real people.

Coffey (1999) advises that undertaking fieldwork is a personal, emotional and identity

orientated process for the researcher and presenting the data involves self-presentation

and identity construction. What is crucial then is acknowledging and recognizing this

complexity, understanding the location of self within the culture being studied. This is the

principle of reflexivity (Heikkinen, 2007), researcher reflexivity, which directly relates to

our previous topic from Dr. Goodall.

The Researcher's Role

Both Goodall (2002) and Sahagun (1590) took to the field and recorded their subjects not only as objective observers standing on the hill overlooking their subjects' interactions, but they also sat down amongst them, participating in group activities. The inherent problem, however, is that the simple act of observing changes the act itself (Heisenberg, 1925). Just knowing the researcher is present may, in fact, alter the subjects' behavior, although this is certainly not a diatribe suggesting free will is no longer in existence (Davies, 2004). To help alleviate this problem, both Goodall and Sahagun attempted to become "one of the tribe" or "one of the cohort" so as to make themselves indistinguishable from their subjects and, therefore, be able to record more realistic responses and less "dog-and-pony show" responses that their subjects may attempt to do when they know that they are being watched

In much the same way, I am a member of the cohort and part of the TWELVE, which means I have quite a unique access to observations, communications, and inside jokes that an individual not part of the group may not have.

It did happen, from time to time, that while in a class there was a comment from another member of the TWELVE saying how I should make sure to log a specific instant (a funny comment, a recurrent meme, or a pratfall, to name a few) in hopes that it will make it into our story, but otherwise I was seen, and did see myself, as a cohort member first, and the lore-keeper second. I do not believe that the TWELVE, although fully aware from the second year-on of our studies that their and our experiences were being monitored holistically, changed their manner of interactions with one another or with myself because of this study. All relationships were genuine and are related as

56

authentically as possible. I also recognize the importance of making sure this narrative

was not a "narrator tells all" story; each of the TWELVE made a contribution, each told

part of the story in his/her own words, and each is featured individually, featured within

the group, and featured as a TWELFTH.   Speaking of…

Data Subjects

The TWELVE members of the cohort, a purposeful sample, are all members of a

Division One university in a Midwestern state and opted into the program with sound

mind and body under no duress, threats, or coercion. The TWELVE started the assigned

classes together in the Fall of 2013 and took eight semesters of classes together (54 post-

graduate credit hours) with a few exceptions.[3] During this time, the TWELVE have

communicated with one another outside of the classroom through personal interactions at

local hangouts as well as on social media, including Facebook, Skype, and email. The

TWELVE also had a standing get-together invitation to meet-up on Sunday afternoons at

a local restaurant to work out homework problems, discuss theory, and/or otherwise

reminisce about the time when there wasn't a research-paper deadline hanging over their

heads at any given moment.

Here is a general description of the TWELVE:

Within the TWELVE, there are seven women and five men;

> Ten of the TWELVE are administrators in the state's public schools (K-12
>
> principals, administrators, or advisors);
>
> Two of the TWELVE are public school (K-12) teachers (including the
>
> narrator);

---

[3] An exception example – one of the TWELVE opted to drive to another city for one semester so as to take Qualitative Methods II instead of ANOVA… who could blame her?

The TWELVE range in age from early 30s to early 60s;

Eleven of the TWELVE are Caucasian, and one of the TWELVE is

African-American.

Eleven of the TWELVE are married.

Eleven of the TWELVE have children, three of the TWELVE either

became first time parents *during* the cohort's three years or else added to

the family.

The TWELVE range in public school experience from 6 years to 32 years;

The TWELVE are all professional meme generators … more on this later;

The TWELVE have accolades galore, ties to their various communities,

and can be quite opinionated when it comes to dentistry credentials,

Ethical Considerations

Elliott (2005) cautions that the ethics involved in a narrative study are

significantly more complicated than those involved in most other forms of research. The

recognition that personal narrative is firmly bound up with individual identities raises

important questions about the analysis of narrative materials and the impact of the

analysis on the research participants (Elliott, 2005, p.140). In using personal experience,

autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate

others (Adams, 2006). Therefore, informed consent based on detailed information about

the research process, method of analysis and audience is particularly important (Bignold,

2009). A key ethical consideration in the use of narrative inquiry is understanding how to

preserve the individual's anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher should do all

within his/her capability to uphold the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant

(Bignold, 2009). For this narrative, names as well as identifying logistics (places of work, home telephone numbers, and zodiac signs) are changed. Stories about personal matters which became part of our experience as a cohort were included within this narrative, but only after all involved agreed to its publication. This narrative is not meant to libel, malign, or impart calumny in any way; instead, this narrative is a story of TWELVE individuals who formed a cohort in an effort to attain their doctorates. And, if I do say so myself, it is a great story.

However, for now, in this world of educational inquiry, stories (as a means of a report) are not yet allowed to stand alone. Such stories are still required to be justified, to be accompanied by their methodological apologia. Why? Because authors of such stories are making serious claims about their validity in the arena of social and educational inquiry. Because the stories are not offered simply as fiction – as in the case of a novel – but as representations of truth (Ronnberg, p 556.)

Smith and Deemer (2000), take a non-realist approach, suggesting that specific criteria for judging the verisimilitude of a narrative report should not be pre-determined. One set of criteria is suggested by Bochner (2002) who uses these criteria specifically to judge stories. His criteria look for:

1. Abundant, concrete details in facts and feelings.

2. Structurally complex narratives which move between past and present.

3. The author's emotional credibility, vulnerability and honesty.

4. Tales within the story, showing development of characters including self.

5. A high standard of ethical self-consciousness from the author (Bochner, 2002).

59

Will this narrative meet all of Bochner's criteria? The "game plan" is to do so beyond a shadow of doubt, but ultimately the verisimilitude of the narrative must be determined by the reader. I promise to give the reader my best possible narrative complete with abundant details (which is number 1 above) woven with a complex tapestry (2) of emotional credibility (3) which shows the development of self (4) and a high standard of ethics (5).

It is difficult to conceal identities because of my inclusion within the cohort and the very nature of this study, but I have changed names to protect the innocent, serve the greater good, and, in the case of at least half of the TWELVE, to allow us to plead the Fifth Amendment. Regardless, each member of the TWELVE was told the risks and benefits of participation. The ELEVEN interviewees had the details of the study explained to them including the study's process as well as their rights as members of the study; each signed an informed consent form acknowledging the risks and benefits of participation. The TWELVE of us are friends and are not subjects only to be mined for data. Ethical issues affiliated with friendship become an important part of the research process and product (Tillman-Healy, 2003).

More importantly, my style of writing can have a bit of an edge to it, and I must keep reasonable reigns on my storytelling. Specifically, this is not a "gotcha" expose' meant to embarrass one or more members of the TWELVE, the TWELVE's professors, or the institution of cohortishness. All choices as to the material contained herein are my own and only my own, and because of this responsibility, I deliberately chose to take the high road when discussing the subjects of this study.

Plan for the Narrative

…and so we come to the penultimate paragraph. In summary, in chapter one the study was introduced and limitations were addressed. Chapter two included a discussion on the importance of cohorts and their impact on lives of cohort members. Finally, in chapter three, I showed how this study used a variety of data sources (taking a triangulation approach of collecting, analyzing, and sorting data) about the TWELVE's experience during their three-year cohort.

The plan for the narrative was simple: tell the story in such a way that the individualization within the cohort is clear, but the nature of the cohort is clearer. It has been quite the journey that I wish to tell you, so let us set our compass to the second star on the right and straight on til' morning.

Once upon a time …

CHAPTER IV

OUR STORY

The purpose of this study was to discover what could be learned about cohorts from within a cohort, to recognize nuanced moments that made the cohort successful, and to learn things that might be beneficial to other cohort programs by exploring the stories and relationships of a particular cohort, at a particular university, at a particular time and place. I conducted individual interviews of the other eleven members of the cohort as well as conducted a focus group, consistent with qualitative inquiry methods (Odena & Burgess, 2017). Three thematic categories were developed after analyzing these interviews and other artifacts of the cohort. This chapter will use the thematic categories and the words of the cohort members to respond to the research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed after intensive review of the literature on the practice of cohorts, but with the variable that the researcher himself is part of the cohort. The questions were:

1. What can we learn about cohorts from within a cohort?

2. What are the nuanced moments and characteristics that make this cohort work?

3. What can we learn from this study that will be beneficial for others?

4. What trials and tribulations, anecdotes and accounts, and/or stories and scenarios come to mind when one is asked to describe one's three-year experience being a member of a doctoral educational cohort? In other words, what is our story?

In this study I set out to tell one cohort's story of coming together and experiencing three years in a doctoral program together with twelve educators with different backgrounds, different titles, and different motivations for joining the cohort, but yet all who had the same goal – that of earning a doctoral degree in educational administration. I analyzed data from interviews with all twelve cohort members to compare and contrast, interpret and explain, our stories in this chapter. I also analyzed data from notes I jotted in a journal that I kept throughout the classes, as well as social media stories that the TWELVE shared with one another.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is often used in qualitative research and focuses on examining themes within data (Reissman, 2007). This method emphasizes organization and rich description of the data set. Thematic analysis goes beyond simply counting phrases or words in a text and moves on to identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest & MacQueen, 2012). The thematic categories were developed from the themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews and artifacts of the cohort, as well as an understanding of the literature review on cohorts. The three categories that emerged are:

joining the cohort, support from the cohort, and the memories and relationships created from being in the cohort. Joining the cohort included both personal and professional reasons. Support from the cohort included emotional, physical, and academic varieties. Memories and relationships formed through the cohort include both positive and negative items, ultimately forming an experience worthy to be told.

Cohort Definitions

In Chapter One, I defined cohort in the broadest sense as individuals linked as a group in some way for the purpose of learning, engineering change, or experiencing an event (Glenn, 1977). However, cohorts have been defined variously in the literature as:

- Communities of critique (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001);

- Societies of education (Birky, Shelton, & Headly, 2006);

- Holding environments (Drago-Severson, Kegan, Broderick, & Portnow, 2001);

- Learning laboratories (Basom, 1996);

- Purposeful communities (Saitel & Russo, 2001);

- Transformational societies (Mountford, 2005); and,

- Constructivist communities (Wisniewski, 2016).

Other definitions of cohort include:

Cohort – an Ancient Roman military unit, comprising six centuries, equal to one-tenth of a legion (Oxford American College Dictionary, 2013).

Cohort – a group or band of people; a companion or associate[4] (American

Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition, 2016).

However, feedback from one of the cohort members seemed to sum up nicely the various

definitions in the literature:

Cohort – a group dedicated to helping one another out, willing to spend

Wednesday nights, Sunday afternoons, and many hours on the phone talking each

other off the ledge and pushing one another to just write that 'one more' page

(Portia, Cohort Member, Interview, 2017).

Naming Conventions

Although this study is of a particular group in a particular place in a particular

time, the hopes are that this particular story will be useful to others who are looking to

understand how cohorts work, and as such, anonymity is needed. This cohort, the

TWELVE, has met as a group several times after three years together, and as such,

members know one another very well. To combat this familiarity, I have created aliases

---

[4] Usage Note: The English word cohort comes from the Latin word cohors, which meant "an enclosed area" or "a pen or courtyard enclosing a group of cattle or poultry." By extension, the word could refer to any group in general and in particular to a company of soldiers or a troop of cavalry in the army of ancient Rome. The group of men forming the bodyguard of a Roman general or the retinue of a provincial governor was also called a cohors. Because of this history, some people insist that the English word cohort should be used to refer only to a group of people and never to an individual person. But the use of cohort in reference to individuals has become so common, especially in the plural, as to overshadow the use in the singular to refer to a group. In both 1988 and 1999 surveys, 71 percent of the Usage Panel accepted the sentence 'The cashiered dictator and his cohorts have all written their memoirs.' These results stand in stark contrast to those of our 1965 survey, in which 69 percent rejected the usage. Moreover, the Panel is divided regarding the traditional usage referring to a group. In 1988, 43 percent accepted 'The gangster walked into the room surrounded by his cohort', and in 1999, 56 percent accepted 'Like many in her cohort, she was never interested in kids when she was young' (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition, 2016).

that are unknown to cohort members so as to achieve the maximum possible anonymity with regards to statements, memories, and/or opinions expressed in this study.

The names I have chosen, having rejected characters from many books sitting upon the shelves in my room for being silly or otherwise too suggestive of character attributes (e.g., Don Quixote, or Agamemnon, or Hermione), have come from the Bard's works. Specifically, I Googled "best Shakespearian characters" and chose the first twelve (seven female and five male) names that appeared and then randomly assigned them to their respective gender. It is merely for anonymity that I have chosen these names, and not for any other purpose[5].

Thematic Category One: Joining the Cohort

Orientation

My personal introduction to this cohort provides an understanding of how the announcement for the new cohort was made and how several of the cohort members became interested in applying to the program. The email came across my screen late in the afternoon in early January 2013, pushed as a forward of a forward from the school district's central office to the individual school buildings' principals to the faculty and staff. It gave details of an informal meeting to be held down the street at the local outreach campus for those interested in hearing about a new cohort being put together to attain an Ed.D or Ph.D in Educational Administration. It was to be held on a Wednesday, at 5:30 one early winter evening, come-as-you-are, bring a friend. I remember thinking

---

[5] Ariel, Caliban, Cordelia, Desdemona, Edmund, Emilia, Falstaff, Henry, Horatio, Ophelia, Portia, and Rosalind were the names selected.

to myself that, even though there would be only a small chance everything could be worked out in my favor (time commitment, tuition, logistics, et al.), I would go to the meeting just to see what would happen.

Others in the cohort had similar inclinations. Ariel said, "I saw it is a challenge; I could commit to doing 'anything' for three years." Edmund arrived late that evening and talked to the professors after the meeting broke up, saying he felt, "very relaxed about the program and the genuine belief the professors had about the success of the program."

Some of the TWELVE did not attend the orientation meeting. "I actually heard about the meeting after-the-fact," said Portia. Henry planned on going, but the trip never materialized. Desdemona sent a proxy in her stead to get the information.

In the orientation meeting, the roughly seventy people in attendance were told about class loads, time commitments, and expectations. Interview data suggests that many thoughts went through the attendees' heads. Edmund had considered other options saying, "I had some friends who were doing the rival school's 2011 cohort and said that it was a cool program, but the professors really didn't care about them. I had some other friends who had been in [our school]'s program and had said that you would work really hard, but the professors were there to help every step of the way."

After an hour, the meeting dismissed, everyone leaving with a folder with instructions, due dates, and a decision to make.

The next several weeks the TWELVE all arrived at the same conclusion: *why not?* A few had to take the GRE/MAT, a few had to dig out from one of their old computer files a "professionally written" paper they had done during their master's

program as a sample of written work, and at least one started from scratch with the entire application process.

The majority of the TWELVE being administrators with extremely busy lives, some of the cohort members only just submitted their applications before the deadline. "The night before was when I submitted it," said Henry. Horatio turned his in "only a day or two early." Falstaff dropped it off at the university education department's secretary's desk the morning it was due. However, the winner of closest to the deadline goes to Desdemona, who turned hers in "…with 45 minutes to spare. No problem."

Three years later and looking back at the cohort's penchant for last minute entries, participants would laugh with one another about how that particular characteristic carried its way into our various classes. "There are soft deadlines and hard deadlines," said Cordelia, "but we eventually learned that at some point it is time to get it done; kind of like life, I suppose."

Being Selected

"I was not really optimistic," said Horatio, when talking about being chosen to join the cohort. Henry said, "Well, I didn't have anything to lose, except the GRE testing fee." Rosalind felt she had a "50-50" chance of making the cut. "We didn't really have an idea of how many were applying," said Ophelia, "but I thought I had a pretty good chance."

Caliban summed up his perception – "I guess I got lucky."

Individually, the TWELVE have beaucoup of awards, titles, fellowships, and board memberships attached to their resumes, but there were upwards of 70 people in the orientation meeting, and the statements above suggest that the perceived odds were not necessarily in our favor of being selected. However, bon chance, according to Caliban, and decent scores on the GRE must have culled the TWELVE from the herd and given them the selective nod.

The First Class Meeting

The TWELVE were given instructions that our first class would meet on the second floor of the university building on the third week of August in Fall 2013 at 4:30, a place and time that the vast majority of our classes would take occur.

Walking into a classroom full of strangers is nothing new for teachers and administrators. Walking into a classroom full of strangers with which we would be sharing three years of our lives is entirely something else. Horatio was particularly pensive, saying, "I had never been in a cohort before, so I was actually dreading that part of this process. It's not that I am anti-social, but … like people on Facebook - I just don't have time to sit there … or Twitter ... I don't have time to [tweet] out a message every time I think of something to say. I don't do any of that. I was just in this to get it done, and I wasn't interested in another social activity that I would be required to take part in. That was in my mind on my drive up to class that first night; just being uncomfortable meeting new people."

On the flip side, Emilia was looking forward to meeting people. She said,

I was wondering where everyone else was in their journey. I was wondering where I would fit within the group. Wondering if we would 'gel.' I had not had the pleasure of working in a cohort before, so there was a little anticipation. But I knew lots of people in Montague [alias] School District who had gone through a cohort, in fact, I think almost everyone in Montague had, so I had heard lots of good things about the experience, and I was looking forward to it. They had said, if you want to finish, the cohort model is the way to go.

Both Falstaff and Portia admitted to "having butterflies" when walking into the room on that first night. Henry "knew nobody when walking through the door." Ariel was pleased to see at least one familiar face, Emilia, who was from her school district, in attendance.

That first Wednesday evening class period introductions were made, syllabi were passed around, and the first assignment, a paper covering specific 20th century congressional acts in the field of education, was given.

Participant Perceptions After the First Class Meeting

The first night as a cohort spawned different opinions among cohort members when getting into the cars later that evening and heading home. Two of the TWELVE rode together, and conversed about their experience: "Honestly, during the car ride home, I was thinking aloud, 'Dear God, what have we done?'" and "I was starting to panic thinking about all of the work" and "Well… we're in it now." When he got home, Edmund told his wife that the first night of class was an "awkward situation, but it

seemed reasonable enough." Horatio chose to wait and form his opinion. He explained, "the jury was still out."

The statements shown here suggest there was a little bit of trepidation coming from that first night of meeting, but perhaps it was more of a fear of the unknown than of anything else. Participants indicated that they struggled with issues such as: How hard would the classes be? How much time commitment would class really entail? Would we as individuals be able to work together for three years?

Of course, we also have the outlier – Ophelia "was jazzed about the whole prospect and immediately went home and started on her first assignment." Sigh. There is always an Ophelia, isn't there?

Nine of the TWELVE cohort members reported feeling giddiness at being selected for the inclusion in the Fall of 2013 cohort, with the other three members leaning slightly towards "trepidation" and "being unsure." Although the cohort started with only three-quarters of the TWELVE being completely committed to the idea of this three-year adventure, the commitment level amongst the individuals within the cohort rose and fell throughout the three years the TWELVE were together depending on many factors that are discussed later. In the end, findings suggest that the number rose to 100% as the TWELVE crossed the finish line of cohort classes in the Spring of 2016.

There were several different reasons given for making the decision to join the cohort ranging from the most popular answer of "professional advancement" to "personal growth" to "it was a challenge." As the cohort moved further into the three years, "professional", "personal", and "challenge" melded into an all-encompassing thought as

championed by Cordelia, "Don't save the world, just get it done." That thought would push the TWELVE to the end.

All of the TWELVE were in some sort of leadership positions in their various schools at the time they were selected for inclusion in the cohort; some were head principals, some were assistant principals, some were lead teachers, and some were members of their district's central office. All were busy. All were crunched for time. Yet all made the choice to "put their names in the hat" and vie for a chance to add to their time management issues by taking on a significant multi-year project. This aspect of the character of the individual members in the TWELVE was apparent in the data from this study; they knew that it was going to be a challenge, a commitment, and sometimes a struggle, but they all made the choice to proceed willingly. This tenacity would manifest itself in different ways, as the next thematic categories will show.

Thematic Category Two: Support from the Cohort

A Short Story

The first Wednesday night of classes, the TWELVE were provided with important information regarding expectations for completing the program. The professor also provided a "reality check" concerning what to expect from their cohort experience. Even though the Wednesday speech was not electronically recorded, it was mentioned and paraphrased by all twelve members of the cohort. The speech began as the professor leaned back on the desk and said (paraphrased):

Over the next three years you will experience many events in your life that might not be able to be helped. Some of you will change jobs, some of you will move, you might have kids, there might be deaths in the family. You will gain weight, you might lose your hair, and your hair most likely will be slightly greyer at the end. There might even be a divorce or two. Your blood pressure will go up. Some of you will drop out. This is not easy… but it is worth it.

"That speech scared the crap out of me," said Ophelia. Desdemona "swore to herself she would not gain any weight." Rosalind pointed out that, hindsight being 20/20, three years later "it is interesting that almost all of that ended up being accurate…."

The TWELVE were about to embark on a long journey, and like many bildungsroman tales, the protagonists needed support emotionally, physically, and academically as described below.

Emotional Support

Being a group of upwardly mobile educators, several of the TWELVE were starting afresh in the Fall of 2013 with new positions in their districts, or in a new district altogether. Seven out of twelve had been in their current position for one year or less. "It was weird, all of us starting the program at the same time that we were taking on a new job," said Ariel. During the three years together, several members continued to change jobs and/or positions within their respective districts. One cohort member "started out as an intern" in year one, became the "assistant travelling principal" in year two, and "started the early childhood program for the district" in year three.

With all of the movement of jobs came a fair amount of stress. Cordelia said, "I am glad others were going through the new-job experience. I felt that they understood what I was going through." Caliban said, "The amount of time it took to process all the new things I had to do … well, at least I had the group (cohort) to fall back on."

One cohort member built a house from the ground floor up, another helped organize an international relief effort for her hometown's tornado damage that occurred a few months before classes began, and another struggled with finding a permanent home when she was relocated to another city for a new job. "Life is tough," said Portia. "Thank goodness that the cohort was always there."

Four members of the TWELVE added children to the equation, either natural or adopted. Three of those children came early in that first year. Falstaff indicated that the cohort helped him to persevere by stating, "Had it not been for Aunt Rosalind and Aunt Desdemona who talked me down off the edge of the cliff once diaper-changer became a full-time career…." Caliban merely used his 3AM feedings as a time "to read his new infant daughter a textbook selection about the history of school-community collaboration" while pacing the floor trying to get the young one back to sleep. The TWELVE, the majority being parents, understood the demands of parenthood and gave pep talks to one another as needed.

Emotional support was most evident when the group heard negative news. When one spouse of the TWELVE was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, the cohort members offered their emotional support; almost every Wednesday night one or more of the cohort would ask about the spouse. However, the stillbirth of a child of one of the

cohort members in the second year of the program was easily the lowest ebb experienced by the TWELVE. "We all cried," said Emilia, "because it was just so devastating." When momma came back to our Wednesday night classes a few weeks later, she was greeted with open arms and warm hugs. She said, "We were part of a family. I had one group supporting me one way, and another group supporting me in a different way, and then I had my cohort, my people, who supported me in a totally different way. It was good."

When it came to credit hours at the very beginning of the cohort, ten of the TWELVE started basically from scratch with no post-masters credit hours. Two, however, had several hours that they could transfer into the program. Emilia had nearly a hundred hours that could be transferred in part to the cohort's Plan of Study requirements, and Ariel had a different plan as well. Because they had already taken classes that were either identical or could substitute for classes on the Plan of Study, they both "went off the range" a couple of times and took classes that were not on the TWELVE's original course rollout. Emilia even changed her degree, saying:

> I made the decision to switch from the Ed.D. to the Ph.D., which involved an increased number of hours, and so I revised my POS to see the new scope and sequence. I ended up taking 12 hours two semesters in a row … which proved interesting. At one point I had nine hours of research together, really just to see if I could do it. Plus, I got to teach some underclassman classes – and I was able to be around other professors which gave me a very well-rounded experience of what higher ed was all about.

Ariel's reason for altering her course schedule was a simple, practical matter:

> It ultimately was all about money. The other university down the street gives vouchers to not only the mentors of the student teachers, but also to the principals of the school. So I thought if I could sub out a few classes at the other university, I would be saving a whole bunch of money.

Emilia and Ariel found that out on their own, in the big cold world, with nary a familiar face to smile at, or a friendly shoulder to lean on, or an enlightened mind from which to copy answers, was not the best of situations when compared to experiences within the cohort. "I missed everyone. Tremendously," said Emilia. "I found myself on Wednesday nights when I knew the cohort was in class, just sitting restless at home, thinking about everyone." Ariel said, "Those students in the other classes… they just weren't my 'peeps'" and "I didn't feel like I had any support like it was when the cohort met together."

Being a rigorous program lasting three years took a toll on everyone. While it is important to point out that all TWELVE finished their classes, that happy result of finishing the coursework was all but certain as the grind of continually showing up to class each Wednesday evening after Wednesday evening took a toll. "I was 9.8 out of ten close to quitting the program," said Edmund. Cordelia registered an 8 out of ten. She said, "I'm not a quitter, and I know that I never would have really quit the program, but there were times I thought about how nice it would be." Portia, when talking about a particular stressful class, said, "I just lost it and broke down" but "the cohort put things into perspective for me and gave me the strength to carry on." Caliban said, "Once I got

past that first year, I was in it all the way. We were all in it together." "Just keep pressing the 'submit' button and then re-edit the edits," said Emilia. She continued, "All of us just kept encouraging one another to keep hitting that button."

In individual interviews, the TWELVE were asked to give a number on a scale of 0 to 100 addressing how close they were to turning in their respective university ID badges and dropping out of the program, with a score of 100 being the act of dropping out. The range went from as high as 98 to as low as 0, with an average out of the twelve different scores approximately 60.

When did the cohort members feel the closest to dropping out? Several indicated it was within the first few weeks of the first series of classes. "Did I really think this was the best idea? What had I got myself into?" said Edmund. Others indicated they were thinking about abandoning the cohort just as the first summer session was about to start. "I thought about the time commitment this was taking, but I ultimately decided it was worth it," said Caliban. After the first year was under our belts, talking about dropping out didn't come up until the third year when the class was facing its hardest challenge in a statistical course focused on analyzing variance, ANOVA. "I cried and cried and cried," said Cordelia. "Then I called Portia and we figured out the next math problem."

Ultimately no one dropped out, and to the outside world, this might appeal to the perceived logic of acknowledging the individuals' tenacity to stick it out; however, it is clear from speaking to cohort members that their tenacity was given a huge boost from the emotional support shown by the others in the cohort. Portia makes the salient point, saying:

I think we all talked one another off the ledge quite a few times. After all, if someone had cut and run, they wouldn't have just disappointed themselves and their immediate family, but they would have disappointed the group, and I don't think any one of us would have wanted that to happen. How could one of us say 'I can't do this, but good luck to the rest of y'all'? We were all on a sinking ship together plugging holes, and if one of us had pulled a thumb out of a hole and left, the whole ship might have gone down.

When Ariel took a few classes away from the cohort she noticed that lack of support, saying:

I dressed up as a rapper for the final project in that alternative class, but I was kind of embarrassed in front of those others, which would have been nothing in front of the cohort – with the cohort I wouldn't have been in the top five of strangest outfits probably. I know we were always trying to one-up one another. We are such a strong and cohesive group; I guess that is why I missed it when I was off the range.

As these statements show, emotional support was a factor in keeping the cohesiveness of the cohort strong. Even the most self-identified reticent of the TWELVE to make friends with strangers ended up with emotional ties; Horatio said, "I know this is stupid, but I was worried that this would be like high school where there were cliques - where people would clique up and if you weren't with them then they wouldn't talk to

you. I am just not a clique person. But, in the end, I think it worked out. Really, I think we all became a single group - our own clique."

Physical Support - Sharing Rides and Chivalry

Although the TWELVE came from many different parts of the state, a few of them knew each other from previous graduate classes taken at a local college. Several of the TWELVE came from the same school district or neighboring districts, but they were generally only on an acquaintance-level of relationship. They shared rides from outlying areas. "We would get in the car and talk about class all the way home," said Desdemona. Portia said, "I think we were lucky that we got to be together like that because trying to decompress with someone who was not in the class would have been a much different experience."

Because the Wednesday classes were held in the late afternoon/evenings, the sun would be down when the class dismissed for the night. As the parking lots had dark spots, and wanting to stay safe, the cohort always travelled to their cars in groups. Falstaff, Henry, and Horatio would generally walk with the ladies to their individual cars. "That's just what we are supposed to do," said Henry. On more than one occasion, the ladies made positive comments. "It is nice to see a bit of chivalry now and then," said Rosalind. She continued, "I don't think we were ever in any real danger on the campus, but you just never know."

Specialty popcorn made its appearance several times over the three years, ready to help tide the stemming hunger that would encroach on tummies during the second class in a back to back schedule of evening classes; the first class of the evening generally met

from 4:30-ish to 7 pm with one professor and the second met from 7 to 10 pm with a different professor each Wednesday night. Candy appeared just as often; physical support does not necessarily equate to being healthful or nutritious, thank goodness.

Easily the most obvious example of a physical support was the time following the stillbirth of the child. Our momma took nine weeks off from her job to recuperate, and one of our cohort members volunteered to take over her duties as an assistant principal. According to momma, "Now I feel like I have a forever connection with her for what she did for me."

Looking at the statements from this second section, it becomes clear that physical support was a large factor for surviving the three years together in a cohort. Some of the TWELVE received more physical support than others, especially in the case of the stillbirth, but everyone was benefited throughout the class; if not by feeling safer being walked to the cars, if not by the hunger-reducing multi-flavored popcorn treats, but by the occasional hug or pat on the back given for no other reason than just showing up on that Wednesday night and being part of the TWELVE.

When asked about the physical process of coming from a long day at the cohort member's day job, getting into a car, driving to the university, climbing 28 stairs to the second floor, and plopping down in a chair for the next 5-6 hours, one might think there was a tendency to skip a class every so often.

One would be wrong to think that.

"I looked forward to Wednesdays," said Ophelia. Ariel said, "There were times that I wasn't enthused about going to class for the work's sake, but I was always glad to

be there knowing everyone else would be there." "Everyone was in the same boat, and that was what made it a good time for all of us," said Edmund.

We showed up. When trying to come up with attendance rate numbers, cohort members indicated that if it was averaged out across the three years, the class's attendance rate was "somewhat like 98%." Yes, Wednesdays were well liked.

Academic Support - Panera Bread and Facebook

The TWELVE did not limit their interactions with one another to Wednesday evenings alone. Often, they communicated by phone calls, whether it was a simple "hey, do you know if xyz is due this week or next week" to a more complicated "what made us think this was a good idea?!" Edmund said, "I would call and text everyone to get as many different answers as I could." Cordelia indicated that she only hung up on Edmund "once." Desdemona and Portia texted one another relentlessly. Ophelia felt like "a second wife" to Henry because of the so many times she called him "to nag about making sure his assignment was done on time."

Facebook was used extensively throughout the three years, with the cohort having a closed-group account. "How many pages do you have?" said one post to the cohort. "If I get called on, I will bluff my way out," said another. "Shall we meet at Panera Bread at our usual time this Sunday to work on ANOVA?" asked another.

The ANOVA course garnered more spikes in blood pressure than any other class, according to the interviews of the cohort members. However, ANOVA also garnered the most academic help from one another. "We met every Sunday afternoon for eight weeks or so," said Cordelia. "If it wasn't for the cohort, I would have a giant F on my

transcript," said Desdemona. Falstaff just quipped, "ANOVA? I think my brain just turned itself off when it heard that word just now." "Whoever showed up at Panera was my instant friend," said Portia. She continued, "That is, of course, if they could explain the next series of ANOVA problems to me."

The statements given here show that the TWELVE did not operate in individual academic vacuums but instead had at all times a group of people upon which to call if they had a logistical problem ("When is the online assignment's due date?"), a research question ("Do you remember where that citation came from?"), or simply a misunderstanding of the material question ("Tell me again when we have to use the Tukey post-hoc on the ANOVA?").

Did the professor's warning during the first week of class come true? Evidence collected from data in this study indicates that the professor's advice had veracity:

Over the next three years you will experience many events in your life that might not be able to be helped. – True. Life can be unpredictable.

Some of you will change jobs, some of you will move, you might have kids, there might be deaths in the family. True. Almost everyone had a job change or a title change, a few of us relocated across the state, there were several new additions to cohort members' families, and there were deaths, both within cohort members' nuclear families as well as extended families.

You will gain weight, you might lose your hair, and your hair most likely will be slightly greyer at the end. True. Most of us admitted to adding a bit of weight from late night snacking while sitting in front of the computer screen typing-away on our online

postings for REMS class. Looking at the first night's class photo and the three-years later last night's class photo, there might have been … a bit … more grey among the cohort members' hair.

There might even be a divorce or two. False – didn't happen.

Your blood pressure will go up. True… True… True.

Some of you will drop out. HA! False, which is what makes this such an interesting group about which to write.

This is not easy… but it is worth it. - TWELVE hands, high up in the air, agreed with the statement.

Thematic Category Three: Memories and Relationships Created

A Short Story

About six weeks into the first semester, Desdemona and Portia had contrived to arrive early and disrupt the natural order of things by sitting in different seats (intentionally, willfully, and with malice aforethought) than they had sat previously. The rest of the cohort were aghast as they walked in. The social order was breaking down. The fabric of the universe was being rent. Horatio summed up the situation, saying:

> I figured that everything was going to be all right and you know, it was probably the day that we walked in and they were sitting in other people's spots. You know, there is an unwritten rule that on the first day of class you pick your chair and that is your chair forever. No one has to write that

down – everyone understands that is a rule. When I saw them do that, I

started giving it to them, and they took it really well, and they started

giving it back to me, and I thought to myself – yeah, this is going to be

okay. I realized that they were some people that could take a joke and also

give it, so that really began to break the ice for me.

Cordelia adds, "When the two ladies sat in the wrong seats that day… yeah, that

was funny."

Yes, putting a group of educators in a confined space once a week over a

thousand-day period is going to elicit quite a few stories that give insight into their

characters and relationships. The difficulty for this particular study is the culling of the

stories to best reflect the characters and relationships in such a way that scores of stories

are not needed. Maybe it can be possible by telling only a few of the many stories ...

The Characters

In any group of people, it could be seen that there will be at least one person who

will volunteer to take charge, make a decision, or exercise their authority. In our

professional lives, this is the principal or the superintendent. But what happens when the

TWELVE are all "Alpha dogs" in their own right? Who becomes the Alpha-Prime? That

decision was made quite easily. On the first night of class, one of the TWELVE drew out

a sheet of paper and had everyone put their name, number, and email on a piece of paper

and then created a closed Facebook group for us to communicate with one another. She

was unanimously chosen as Cohort President due to her initiative, foresight, and

organizational leadership – three years later she was still organizing the cohort, sending

emails, and being class speaker when the cohort wished to negotiate with the professors. Speaking on her elected position, she said, "I think I just tried to keep everyone together. As class president, I felt a little pressure to know everything and keep everyone up to date. I wasn't really the mother hen, but I felt like the organizer, I guess. I just like to get things done, early, if not on time, and that is just how I am. We all have our own strengths, and everyone in the cohort was strong in something."

Edmund called Ophelia every week "to find out what was due the following Wednesday." Falstaff and others would convince Ophelia to attempt to "negotiate page length and due dates" with professors. "Without Ophelia," said Henry, "I don't know if I would have even known what class I was in at any given moment because it seemed the schedule was a little crazy at times."

Because the TWELVE were professional educators, none were timid standing up and making a presentation. Early in the three years, there developed a little one-upsmanship when it came to presenting, culminating in Henry making pronouncements on who took the longest to make their 5-10-minute presentation, according to his stopwatch.[6] Several presentations stood out over the years that were performed by the TWELVE as individuals or small groups to not only meet the requirements of class, but to attempt to one-up one another and break the monotony of structured speeches delivered from notecards. Standard presentation styles for most of the classes included people dressed as zombies in qualitative inquiry class to reflect lethargy/apathy in schools; one-act plays in educational law class over various school-related cases;

---

[6] Note: none of the TWELVE could stay within the 5-10 minutes, some were just … less concerned … about the maximum time limit than others.

cartoons drawn and animated in organizational theory class comparing Star Trek roles to roles performed in school administration; mimed stripper-pole dancing in finance class to parody poor financial decision-making; stand-up comedy in most all classes; stand-up not-so-comedy in all classes; poems written and then performed; and, in a daring 22-minute presentation ("17 minutes too long," according to the salty time-keeper), a Rubik's Cube was scrambled and solved as a metaphor for school-community collaboration class.

"I have to say, that… that was impressive," said Ariel.

The personalities of the TWELVE helped to cement the friendships among one another, and, because the relationships were strong, good-natured jibes and running jokes became a norm. In one series of animated cartoon presentations involving Star Trek, Harry Potter, and School Law, a pervading theme was the untimely demise of one of the TWELVE by the hands of the other eleven. Death by school bus, space alien, and spell splicing were done humorously. "Wait, why am I wearing a red shirt [in the cartoon]? … I know what happens to red shirts," said the victim. "That was soooo funny!" said Cordelia. "Let's do it again," added Desdemona. Our victim took it all good-naturedly, saying, "I think I was like the stress relief. Sometimes I would joke at my own expense, which was fine, if everyone got a laugh, or if it eased up stress a bit. So socially, I would say that that is it. I never tried to be too serious."

Towards the end of the three years, the cohort took a series of challenging classes, ending with the final semester taking Educational Law, a potential devastatingly difficult class … the anticipation was "as if the tape at the end of the marathon the cohort was

86

running" was in sight, but the last 300 meters suddenly shifted to a steep uphill gradient…

Steep. Uphill. Gradient. Many of the members took a big deep breath, trying to clear

minds and prepare for possibly the worst, before walking into the classroom, a room that

was around the corner from the normal classroom. The cohort walked in and sat down in

heretofore unclaimed but now permanently culturally- assigned seats and glanced at one

another, hoping that the professor would be kind. Then Horatio made an observation,

"Hey, does anyone else think that this room is in the shape of (a body part)?"

And then it was all going to be okay.

The Great State-Testing Scores Incident

One particular evening the TWELVE arrived, sat in the yet undefiled and clearly

acknowledged seating arrangement, and talked amongst one another. It was Ariel that got

everyone's attention when she announced that the state scores from the previous year had

been published and that they were available for all the principals to pull up their

individual scores.

Participants indicated that the tale took a dark turn at this point.

"I checked the scores online," said Ariel, "and saw that I had an A. My school

(that I just inherited that summer as the new principal and that was in the upper end of

socio-economic status) had an 89% Advanced score, which I guess wasn't any higher just

because of complacency. I was just so happy about the score that it apparently came out

as bragging," Edmund said, "Yeah, I just turned towards her and asked her if she could

just please shut up." "Complacency…?!" said Desdemona, who was aligned with a lesser

socio-economic school district. "Yeah, right," she said sarcastically, "complacency is the

root of all things socio-economic." Desdemona's school district continually fought with chronic turn-over of students, a 90% free-and-reduced lunch program, and extremely low test scores. Edmund, who's school was similar to Desdemona's, continued, "I wasn't trying to be rude… but the rest of us have real problems. I mean, I'm being sarcastic, and she laughed, and we got over it."

This incident began the running joke for the next three years of "who has it worse?" – a few of the cohort members were associated with a highly respected, middle-upper class, suburban school district, and some others of the TWELVE were associated with less respected, lower-middle to lower socio-economic schools. There came times that the differences in the schools played a part in our views of how something would work, say, for example, parent and community involvement, or how much discipline was handled in the school. There were striking differences, for example, in fighting amongst students in the professionals' respective schools. "Caliban did say that he had his second fight of the year at his school … and we were like in April at that point. I remember that. I thought, whoa, he's at a middle school, what the heck," said Rosalind. Falstaff said, "Fight number two in my school happened in the first week." "Two fights? We call that 'first hour' in my building," chimed Portia. Caliban, not done with egging on the conversation, continued, "Hey, guys, we have problems, too… that fight took some of my personal lunch time away that day."

It may appear to the outside observer that the socio-economic differences between the various school districts might have driven a wedge among the TWELVE, but in actuality it made the cohort closer in that the group could rib one another about the "grass being greener" on the other side of the school district boundary line.

Jokes about who has the best fights in their respective schools held no candle when it came to eliciting guffaws when compared to the TWELVE's first attempt of doing an online video conference. The idea was everyone was logged on and could use their microphone and/or keyboard to communicate/chat with the rest of the group while the professor was giving a lecture. The professor would ask questions, and the TWELVE would respond either verbally, once people figured out how their microphones worked or didn't work, or else could type responses in a field where everyone could see. Cordelia set the scene, "What was great about that class was that Henry had his camera turned on the whole time, so everyone on the VoiceThread could see a picture of him, but no one else had turned on a camera, so he was, like, the only person whose facial expressions could be seen." Desdemona continued the story, "We quickly found out that we could instant messenger one another without it showing up in the group thread, so Portia and I began to instant message Henry things to see if we could make him laugh and/or break character while the professor was presenting." Rosalind finishes, "I thought Henry kept his composure really well, especially when I found out that people were targeting him to get him to laugh."

"I …promise… at some point I will get her back," said Henry.

Stories like the one above give glimpses into the relationships among members of the cohort. The incident demonstrates how the collective sense of humor matured into good-natured ribbing and a release valve for academic-induced stress for members of this cohort.

Ancora Imparo **("I am still learning") – Michelangelo (1562) at age 87**

What did the TWELVE learn in the three years of educational leadership classes? One might argue just looking at the job titles of the TWELVE goes to show how they had already achieved some success in educational leadership. Again, all of the cohort members were either central office administrators, principals, or were lead teachers in their respective districts. What was there to learn for these knowledgably erudite educators? Plenty.

Budgetary education was an eye-opening experience for some of the cohort. "How much does [school district] spend on toilet paper?!" asked Henry jokingly. "So I guess it is either one-ply paper and having late-activity buses or going with the expensive two-ply and making the kids walk home after football practice." "Turn off the lights when you leave," said Horatio, the go-to person in his district when it came to saving money. "It is as simple as that." The classes on the budget always brought out interesting solutions, until the cause-effect nature of sweeping reforms was shown to be not as easily negotiated as initially believed (e.g., moving the time of the beginning of the day for a middle school which (oops) causes a shortage of buses for the elementary schools who (oops) need to be in school for three hours before lunch can be served but yet (oops) need to be able to have two hours of uninterrupted reading time for a new federal program … etc., etc.).

The TWELVE divided up the classes into two different categories – classes that were specifically designed for how to become a better school superintendent or other school administrator, and classes that were designed for teaching us how to become better

academicians. In the first group of classes were course titles of "School Law" and

"Organizational Theory" and "Politics in Education" while the second group of classes

included "Qualitative Methods" and "Research Traditions" and "ANOVA." "I liked

Organizational Theory class because I really learned stuff in that one," said Henry.

Rosalind preferred the interactions and information discussed in the politics classes.

Ophelia said, "I would take information I learned in class that week and attempt to apply

it to my district the very next week." Falstaff "took lots and lots of notes, since a lot of

this is new to me."

The Topics

One of the themes in the cohort was the amount of material that each member

knew about everyone else's dissertation topics. By the second year, the cohort members

had come up with the topic they would individually be researching, and the professors

intentionally structured several of the classes in such a way that the cohort would be able

to take the topics and relate them to the subject matter and/or perhaps narrow the focus of

the respective studies. Since this was done during the last 24 months of the cohort,

everyone in the room sat through a discussion of everyone else's topic several times.

Although it was somewhat repetitive for the group to hear one another's topics so

often over the course of the three years, there were certain advantages to doing so.

Benefits included members locating useful information for other members of the cohort

or running across an article. The group helped one another scour the Internet and when

chance, luck, or providence came calling, it was more often than not there would be a

forward of a forward to the correct cohort member, resulting in support for all of us as academic, emotional, and physical support overlapped yet again.

What are the twelve topics that the cohort chose to study? They ranged far and wide: funding for education of gifted students; value-added scores; perceptions of African-Americans in prison regarding their education; longevity of a superintendent's tenure; teacher grit; financial awareness for new superintendents; first-year teacher advocacy; third grade reading retention act' teacher retention; culture of transitional $3^{rd}/4^{th}$ grade schools; central office transformations; and, a narrative inquiry examining the influence of the cohort model on student perceptions.

Memories and Relationships

As this final thematic category shows, it was not the essays, it was not the deadlines, it was not the plans of study that made the memories and the relationships; instead, it was the people – Henry's head appearing on VoiceThread, the solving of a Rubik's Cube, the messing with each other over test scores or assigned seats – that the TWELVE remembered when asked to reminiscence about their three years spent together. We were "facilitators" for each other, said Emilia, "We were emotional support for each other, and we were stress relief for each other." "We were all class clowns, I suppose, at some point in the three years," said Portia. She continued, "I think we all tried to keep it light, because most of the content in those classes wasn't light." Desdemona said, "I just think that we all had a good time."

Emilia has the last quote, saying, "I guess what I want to know the most about this whole process is who will be playing me in the 2013 Cohort Movie…"

Now, let me tell you what all of this means in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover what could be learned about cohorts

from within a cohort, to recognize nuanced moments that made the cohort successful, and

to learn things that might be beneficial to other cohort programs by exploring the stories

and relationships of a particular cohort, at a particular university, at a particular time and

place. I conducted individual interviews of the other eleven members of the cohort as

well as conducted a focus group, consistent with qualitative inquiry methods (Odena &

Burgess, 2017). Three thematic categories were developed after analyzing these

interviews and other artifacts of the cohort.

In the previous chapter our story was told by conveying the highs (lots of laughs,

new found friends, and academic successes) and the lows (stress, struggles with life, the

death of a cohort member's child) of being together in the program for three years.

Individual interviews with the other ELEVEN as well as focus group answers

were paired together with other artifacts and my own observations to build themes around

which our narrative could be told. In this chapter I would like to take these themes and observations and answer the research questions posed back in chapter one.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the nuanced moments and characteristics that make this cohort work?

2. What can we learn from this study that will be beneficial for others?

3. What can we learn about cohorts from within a cohort?

4. What trials and tribulations, anecdotes and accounts, and/or stories and scenarios come to mind when one is asked to describe ones' three-year experience being a member of a doctoral educational cohort?

These questions guided and helped design individual interview questions (attached at the end of this study in Appendix A) as well as the conversation in the focus group (Appendix B). All the interviewees were members of the cohort of the doctoral classes for the three years we were together, and have remained friends and colleagues since our classes have ended. Although the TWELVE represented eight different school districts whose socio-economic and student population sizes were significantly different, the members of the cohort all had positions of leadership within their respective districts (Central Office, Principals, Lead Teachers). The TWELVE, including myself, were purposefully selected members by the university offering the doctoral cohort program. All members of the cohort agreed to participate not only in the three years of schooling, but in this study as well as they had been selected from a large pool of applicants and

realized that they had formed a unique group of people. We wanted our story told, and this study gave us a perfect platform in which to do this.

<div align="center">

Findings: Research Questions

</div>

Research Question: What are the nuanced moments and characteristics that make this cohort work?

Saitel and Russo (2001) suggest there are four primary attributes that distinguish successful cohorts from other educational models:

1.) Membership is defined and unvaried (i.e., the cohort's population changes through either students leaving or entering into the cohort, or, in short, folks just leave throughout the course of the cohort);

2.) Academic and emotionally supportive members within a cohort are more likely to achieve their shared goals;

3.) Having a schedule of classes that meet fewer times but for longer periods, generally once a week;

4.) There exists a synergetic learning relationship among cohort members.

Let's look at each of these in turn and apply them to this particular study.

Membership Defined and Unvaried

Defined. Each of the TWELVE were selected by the university to be included in the cohort based on their credentials, writing ability, et al., and as mentioned before, each were holding a position of leadership in their respective school district/buildings.

Unvaried. The TWELVE started on day one, that first Wednesday night class in August of 2013, and completed the three years together, all TWELVE, on a Wednesday night in May of 2016. Although two members of the cohort went "off the range" for a semester or two to complete additional course work or to substitute a class for one that they already had completed, they arrived back, safe and sound, within the cohort proper where they preferred to be primarily because of their relationships they had formed with the cohort. During the three years there were occasional classes in which the TWELVE were not the only students, especially in the case of on-line classes that hosted students from around the nation. However, the TWELVE remained steadfast and …unvaried. Thus, this defining and lack of variation of the TWELVE are similar to those studies of Saitel and Russo (2001) in their study of what makes a cohort a success. More importantly, this study helps to show similarities of other studies' findings by using a unique perspective of the researcher being embedded as a cohort member from the first day of the cohort.

Academic and Emotionally Supportive Members

Social support is an inherent aspect of social networks (Borgatti, 2013), and may include kinship ties, friendship circles, and collegial relationships (Paredes & Chung, 2012). At the beginning of a cohort's experience, the latter relationship is most probable, but studies have found that where effective cohorts are maintained, friendships develop allowing for a tighter social network (Zhou et al., 2013); those findings could have easily been the conclusions drawn from the three years that the TWELVE were together because of the relationships that changed over the course of the three years together. In the beginning of the first year, cohort members saw one another as equally ambitious

educational leaders who somehow managed to finagle a spot into the cohort. Members were cordial with one another, told the appropriate number of jokes for a group that realized they were going to be in the same classroom with the same people for one thousand days, and helped one another out with the logistics of being a student.

And, as cohort members explained, the magic happened sometime in the middle of the first semester.

Whether the catalyst was the Great Chair Fiasco of 2013 (Horatio's opinion) or the first late dinner at the local Tex-Mex restaurant that served margaritas out of very large glasses (Portia's opinion), the group transformed from the Doctoral Cohort of 2013 to the TWELVE. After the catalyst, the group began to feel that they were an individual unit, ready to take on the world, or, in the worst-case scenario, Analysis of Variance class.

It is easy to conclude from the previous chapter that the TWELVE became emotionally bonded, whether through happy events (celebrating a cohort member's new job), sad events (the death of a child), or through collective and shared experiences (hiding in a shelter next to the snack machines while the tornado sirens were going off). It is just as easy to conclude from the previous chapter that all members were academically bonded to one another as each relied on one another through an ever-increasing series of phone-calls, Facebook conversations, and visits to Panera on Sunday afternoons helping one another out with homework from statistics class.

The second attribute of the study of Saitel and Russo (2001) which helps determine whether a cohort will be successful or not, that of having academic and

emotionally supportive members within a cohort, can be exemplified by the relationships

amongst the TWELVE. It has been shown that the emotional support enabled the

academic aspect of the cohort to persist and thrive. This study's findings add to the body

of work that Saitel and Russo have done, and gives specific examples of these

relationships from the unique perspective not only members of the cohort, but an

individual member of the cohort from day one, the researcher.

The Schedule of Classes

The schedule of classes for the cohort was as such – every Wednesday night,

barring holiday breaks and the intercession weeks between semesters (including the

summer semester), the cohort would meet from approximately 4:30 pm to approximately

10 pm. This shorter number of days (once a week) and longer times (five hours each

Wednesday) meets Saitel and Russo's (2001) attribute number three of successful

cohorts, and helps to confirm their study on which attributes make up successful cohorts,

"success" being defined as "completion of the program" (Saitel & Russo, 2001, p. 2).

Over the three years the cohort was treated to classes with titles of "Organizational

Theory" and "Research Traditions" to the more scary-sounding titles of "Politics in

Education" and "Analysis of Variance" to the more existential titles of "The Human

Factor" and "Ethics" to name a few.

Synergetic Learning Relationships

The value of networking lies in spanning structural holes where information is

lacking (Burt, 1992). The more members in a group working collaboratively, the less

likely there will be structural holes in the information in which some member is not

proficient in covering the information, or at least is able to spot where the hole is and alert others (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

The TWELVE represented school districts from around the state that were socio-economically diverse (from a school district with 34% free and reduced lunches to a district with 94% free and reduced lunches) and had radically different student population sizes (from a district of 3600 students to a district with 45,000 students). Because of this difference, members could bring diverse perspectives to any given situation. When Ariel complained about having not enough "advanced" scores on the state tests while Desdemona, Ophelia, and Rosalind were lamenting the lack of "proficient" scores in their respective districts, it became apparent that members' "regular jobs" during the week, although all leadership-based, provided perspectives that might not just be different, but antagonistic.

Which, as the cohort explained in chapter four, was really a synonym for complementary.

Because of these differences, we could fill Burt's (1992) structural holes that a homogenous group of similarly minded and similarly experienced educators might have trouble filling. Our differences made us aware of problems that we had never tackled, let alone even conceived of being a problem in some cases. These hereto unconsidered problems did not come from just one district, as every district faces unique challenges, and the TWELVE marveled at one another's situations from week to week. Bringing fresh perspectives to solutions for other districts' problems was and is a selling point for making sure a cohort has heterogeneous characteristics. Borgatti and Foster's (2003)

"more members in a group working collaboratively" (p.7) means the less likely there will be structural holes is a perfect description of the very synergetic TWELVE.

Saitel and Russo's fourth attribute of successful cohorts is met. Taken as a whole, the TWELVE can be objectively described as a successful cohort as defined by Saitel and Russo's studies. However, while this study merely helps to confirm Saitel and Russo, it also gives an unusual perspective – that of the researcher being embedded within the cohort from the first day of class. Because of this autoethnographic-flavored perspective, this study can be either placed on the university library shelf with other narrative inquiries on cohorts or it can be used as a bridge connecting the autoethnography shelf to the narrative shelf.

Research Question: What can we learn about cohorts from within a cohort?

There have been scores of studies on the topics of cohorts, but I have not been able to find a study in which the researcher was a distinct member of the studied cohort with all the privileges and responsibilities attached. This unique study offers a chance to share with the world what such an experience was like. To wit: as I sat in class with the other ELEVEN, there was many a time that I felt like a character on a stage, aware of my meta-existence as a student but being a member of the "fourth-wall" audience at the same time. There were times that I found myself completely engaged in the lesson, responding to others and offering my insights as the others were doing in the classroom setting. Yet, there were also times that I found myself doodling on my notebook random phrases that came from the group's conversation, sketching rough caricatures of our personalities, or drawing meticulous god's-eye-view maps of the room, knowing that at some point I

could use this data to form a story. This dual-ego never bothered me, as I sat in class and observed while not intentionally observing, as well as intentionally trying to observe but then getting caught up in the lesson and forgetting all about my audience-member status.

The other ELEVEN occasionally would push me into my observer status by making a comment such as, "Oh, did you get that comment for your study?" or "Make sure you remember this situation," or even the converse, "Okay, what just happened never gets printed, capiche?" There would be laughter amongst us as members of the cohort tried to imagine how the tale would be told, full-well believing I would put my own skewed version, maybe hyperbolized a trifle, on the final document but then realizing that there would be no hyperbole needed as the cohort was itself its own farce hardly needing any embellishment. Indeed, the role and responsibility of being the researcher precludes hyperbole, and as such has no place in this study.

My collection of data began very early in my experience with the cohort. I would sit at my computer on Tuesday evenings finishing up homework wondering how the others in the cohort would be trying to outdo one another in our presentations on the next day and wondering if any of them would be memorable enough to "make the cut" for this narrative. The relationships and connections that began to emerge intrigued me, making me want to capture them as they developed.

Research Question: What can we learn from this study that will be beneficial for others?

This cohort worked. Why? Data reveals that the relationships that were created amongst members of the cohort ultimately gave us a feeling of a "Wednesday Night

Family" (Portia, interview, 2017). Reasons for this family-like atmosphere include our personalities jelling quickly into a cohesive unit of the TWELVE vs. the obstacles within the three years of academia (e.g., surviving difficult classes), the structure of the program putting us in a weekly setting that encouraged closeness, and having common experiences for the almost 1000 days of the cohort. The literature reviewed on cohorts suggests that there is much potential for a cohort to exist as a social support network not only during the time the cohort is together, but possibly afterwards (Maher, 2005). Our Wednesday Night Family is in the process of organizing a Christmas party together as of the writing of this sentence – an entire year after our final class ended. Our social support network is strong, and because of this has positively shaped our learning in academic, professional, and personal settings by giving us relationships that nurture the emotional, physical and academic aspects of our lives.

Relationships in a cohort, whether they be family-like, team-like, or acquaintance-like, can fulfill the need for not only support but for affiliation from a group as well (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Maher, 2005; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Maher (2005) suggests this affiliation can create a sense of camaraderie amongst cohort members that meets the "belonging" level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954). Cohort relationships may even fill a need for strong emotional ties (Brooks, 1998; Twale & Kochan, 2000). The emotional component of cohort membership may alleviate the distress that many students experience when they find themselves pulled in several directions at once, including their academic lives versus their social lives (Tinto, 1988). In our cohort's experience, as shown in the narrative, members were under stress for many different reasons, but none dropped out, none allowed the stress to ultimately

overwhelm them, and much of the time the members of the cohort came to the rescue of any one of us who seemed floundering.

Indeed, feelings of isolation might be assuaged by use of the cohort model (Boes et al., 1999) as the model may be able to "create a space" within which a cohort member may find a place to bond with his or her peers in the cohort (Norris & Barnett, 1994, p.30). These bonds can become strengthened through a variety of factors, including time one remains in a cohort, forming relationships outside the academic experience, and shared trials and tribulations (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Reasons given for being persistent in completing doctoral programs while in a cohort abound, including friendships and networking (Provitnik & Foss, 2009), support and encouragement (Cunningham, 1996), shared experiences (Twale & Kochan, 2000), personal motives, belief in the doctoral degree (Holmes et al., 2014), and the tacit priority of keeping the group intact (Lawrence, 2002). For each of these I will make note of how the TWELVE achieved this aspect.

Friendships and Networking that Occur Among Cohort Members

This cohort excelled in this as the TWELVE became more familiar with one another. By the end of the first semester, the cohort had become more than mere colleagues; we were friends. What made this cohort different than unsuccessful ones? I believe it is because we recognized early on the importance of synergy. Some of us had day jobs in building administration in their individual school districts, some had roles in their district's central office, some came in each morning into their own classrooms, and we saw that each of us could bring a unique perspective to the conversation, a synergetic

feeling that we could not have achieved going at the program alone. In addition, all of us

gravitated to forming not only friendships, but professional networks, as shown by our

interactions discussed in Chapter Four. Future cohort participants, whether they be

supervisors or members, might capitalize on this observation by pushing for more "group

activities" early in the program to establish *d'esprit de corps* that this cohort was able to

achieve.

Support and Encouragement Shared by Group Members

As explained in Chapter Four, support within the cohort was described in a

variety of ways, including physical, academic, and emotional.

Shared Experiences

The TWELVE, as discussed in Chapter Four, met each Wednesday evening for

three years, attending class with one another, sharing jokes with one another, and

generally experiencing life with one another. The once a week classes, coupled with the

phone calls, emails, social media posts, and occasional Sunday gatherings at the local

eatery provided a platform to develop the relationships among the TWELVE. This study

shows the importance of establishing such relationships – social, emotional, and

academic - to help make the cohort a success.

Personal Motives, or a Philosophy of Never Quitting what one Begins

The encouragement to "stay the course," to "keep fighting the good fight," to

"keep putting one foot in front of the other" was a constant theme in our conversations

with one another, from day one to day one thousand. This study shows how the

establishment of the strong relationships among the TWELVE and the constant

communication not only during the Wednesday night classes but throughout the week,

primarily initiated by our elected class president, using phone calls, emails, and social media provided the cohort the means, the method, and the opportunity to keep everyone moving forward.

Believing that the doctoral degree will be helpful in achieving career aspirations (Dorn, et al., 1995), the cohort has had, as of the writing of this sentence, several of the TWELVE interviewed for upper-administration jobs around the state, with a few being successful in outcomes.

Tacit Priority of Keeping the Group Intact

As Desdemona put it so eloquently, "None of us wanted to face the wrath of the others had we broken the cohort up."

Several studies have shown that students immersed in a cohort for their doctoral program often cite belonging to the cohort as a significant reason for completing their programs (Holmes et al. 2014). Just by being a part of a cohort, participants believed that their ability to understand the complex nature of methods and designs, to advance themselves in professional learning, and to write higher quality proposals and dissertations was much improved (Burnett, 1999). This was shown in our cohort weekly, with academic and emotional help coming from and to each of us.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed that individuals are part of larger and larger groups (see figure 1.) that emanate outward from the individual at the center; these

groups are, according to
Bronfenbrenner, akin to ecosystems.
According to Bronfenbrenner (2005),
individuals wishing to understand
human development need to consider
the entire ecological system in which
humans operate. Each ring in the
system depends on the contextual
nature of the individual's life, and

Fig 1. - Bronfenbrenner's Systems
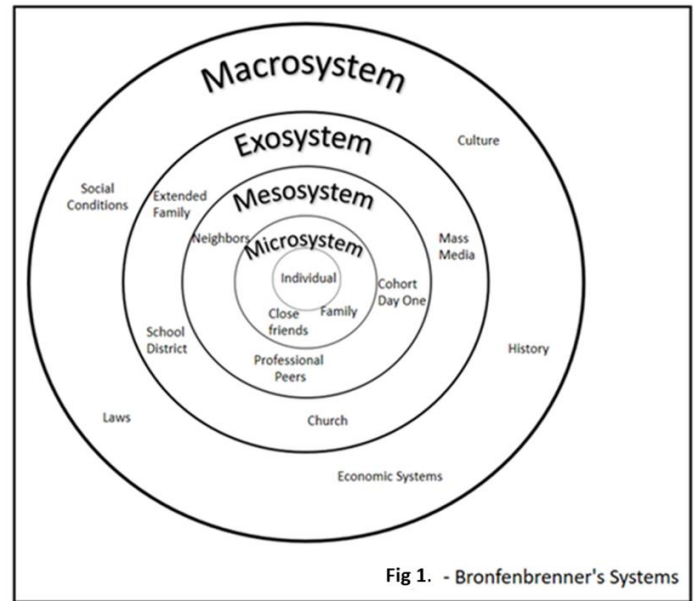
offers an ever more diverse series of options as the rings expand (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Our cohort, the TWELVE, is an exemplar of Bronfenbrenner's proposal. He observes that there are five distinct systems within his ecosystem:

The first system is simply composed of the individual around whom all of the other influences, relationships, and associations revolve. For the purposes of this study's relationship to Bronfenbrenner's theory and the inner most system, the individuals within the cohort, the TWELVE, are all similar enough (advanced degree-seeking educators) that the differences between them (gender, age, race, marital status) are negligible and thus do not make a difference at the inner-most level.

Secondly, there exists a microsystem in which an individual is part of his immediate close friends and relatives. At the beginning of the cohort in the Fall of 2013, almost all members, save the two or three who had previous interactions, existed within separate microsystems. However, as the classes came and went, it became clear that the

TWELVE evolved into its own microsystem of friends. The constant communication not only on Wednesday evenings but also during the week through emails, phone calls, and social media helped to evolve this microsystem. There was not a single individual any more or less involved in this, save perhaps our elected cohort president who kept us in the loop regarding upcoming due dates; we were in it together, a microsystem unto ourselves.

Thirdly, Bronfenbrenner proposes the existence of a mesosystem in which the individual interrelates two or more microsystems. Originally, this was the cohort, but as the cohort became familiar, this mesosystem of relationships changed to the microsystem above, thereby changing the status of outlying elements to the new mesosystem – that of the individual school districts of which we were a part. The existence of the different school districts among the TWELVE was a large bonus when it came to group discussions, points of view, and resources able to be shared. The acknowledgement of the differences of the school districts, however, was not as important as the acknowledgement of the similarities of the school districts, regardless of district population. This mesosystem of similarities included how finances worked (or didn't), how teacher evaluations were successfully employed (or not), and how time management was a premium, among other similarities.

Fourthly, there exists an exosystem that Bronfenbrenner proposes individuals have no control over. The exosystem that our cohort was a part of was the university program itself, which was on an unchanging and unflagging schedule. The program dictated times, places, and high standards for which the cohort was being held accountable. The exosystem was also composed of the faculty members that gave us the learning opportunities in the different fields (finances, research, leadership, et al.). The

faculty's different personalities helped shape our formation as a cohort, especially during the first year, whether that was through team-building exercises in first semester's first week's Ethics and Cultures class, or perhaps a synergistic movement to get a professor, or two, off topic as much as possible. The diversity of assignments and classwork, coupled with the unchanging venue, gave the TWELVE an avenue in which to explore relationships without feeling uncomfortable.

The final system is that of the macrosystem in which exist the "developmentally-instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and pattern of social interchange" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 101). For the TWELVE, the macrosystem was and is the state's requirement for superintendent certification that drove most of us to pursue our Ed. D[7]; it is the goal of which the accomplishment will open doors and "life course options." The macrosystem goal, the advanced degree, was always present in our conversations; how long would it take to reach the goal, how many more statistics problems would we have to do, and how many more posts in REMS class would we need in any given week were all real questions that we asked one another constantly, always striving to reach the goal of the macrosystem.

Findings from this study reveal that the TWELVE believe the cohort model was supremely instrumental in their successful completion of the cohort's three years together, and that the relationships developed in the cohort further allowed for means and opportunities in the form of relationships (microsystem and mesosystem) and contacts

---

[7] Not all began the program wanting to become a superintendent. As discussed in Chapter Four, some just wanted to continue their education and be a lifelong student, while others want to use the advanced degree to open doors for advanced teaching options.

(exosystem) made to help one another with challenges that these leaders faced. Indeed, narrating a story about our cohort as the cohort went about its work is another component at work here. We all told a story about ourselves as a group that is part of our group identity and, of course, life experiences.

As of the writing of this sentence, over a year since the final class together, many of the TWELVE have changed their jobs and moved up in their educational aspirations, with one member of the cohort becoming a superintendent, three others becoming either full or adjunct college professors, and several others moving to larger districts with more demanding titles attached to their names. They are achieving career aspirations in which the doctoral degree program put them on track.

Bair's (1999) research showed over two-thirds of doctoral degree-seeking students will not reach their original goal, with the majority of them falling to the attrition-bug in the first year and a surprising, yet significant, number making the decision to leave after achieving candidacy. Why such high numbers of attrition in these doctoral degree-seeking programs? Several reasons can be listed (below), but more importantly, findings from this study indicate that a cohort-model could be an antidote to some of these reasons:

- Lack of tangible coping skills (Cesari, 1990) - The cohort members in this study helped one another through good times and bad, both emotionally, physically, and academically;

- Lack of adequate financial support (Kerka, 1995)- The TWELVE helped one another in seeking out scholarships and reminded one another when the FAFSA

(Federal Aid) application was due each year, as well as helped in the sharing of textbooks and other incidentals that randomly come up in a university graduate student's life (for example, the popcorn snacks);

- The opportunity cost of a doctorate is too great when weighed against one's family and friends (Cassuto, 2013) – Findings from this study suggest that this cohort may have actually increased the time commitment (ex., meeting on Sunday afternoons to work on statistics homework), but the commitment, it can be argued, contributed to a more solid bonding amongst the cohort, leading to a better understanding of the material, and ultimately greater success in class. This finding is important because of the 100% course completion rate. These findings suggest that the gains provided through cohort relationships outweighed the opportunity cost for members of this cohort;

- Lack of connection with one's advisor (Golde, 2014) - Our cohort members interacted with our advisors on nearly a weekly basis as all the advisors assigned to cohort members were professors of classes that were taken by the TWELVE; however, these findings add to that understanding by suggesting that connection with other cohort members may be just as important as connections with one's advisor in motivation for program completion. Additional research is needed to further investigate this important finding;

- The ethical climate of education (Schulte, 2002) – The TWELVE suggested in individual interviews as well as the focus group that this cohort kept everyone grounded, even during the more rigorous courses. Even when the varied schools/districts of the TWELVE did not perform as well as others in state tests,

or individual cohort members experienced a particularly disappointing decision from higher-ups in their district, the cohort provided a sense of support by acknowledging the problems encountered, commiserating, and generating solutions;

- Not having on-campus directedness (Hughes, 1983) - our cohort was extremely fortunate to have a liaison in the College of Education who tirelessly worked to make sure all members were properly enrolled and aware of upcoming announcements each and every semester for three years. It is important to note that this cohort met on a satellite campus away from the main campus. Therefore, it would have been easy for communication to have suffered from this arrangement. Having an individual assigned to facilitate the progress of this cohort was an important finding that is worthy of additional study;

- And, having a sense of disconnectedness from the larger university community (Glover, et al., 1998) – The university where this cohort took place experiences a great deal of university spirit and devotion from alumni and faculty. Cohort members experienced this devotion and even wore the appropriate school colors during game days. Go (insert favorite sports team mascot's name here)!!

Research Question: What trials and tribulations, anecdotes and accounts, and/or stories and scenarios come to mind when one is asked to describe ones' three-year experience being a member of a doctoral educational cohort?

As shown in Chapter Four, the TWELVE individuals both personally and collectively made a decision to stick together for three years, one night a week. Social network theory shows how members of the group, or network, are able to bring their individuality to the table and share with the others to achieve a goal, to accomplish a task, or to build something unique (Granovetter, 1983). In this study, members of the cohort, all individuals shown to have different backgrounds, different personalities, and different reasons for joining the cohort, worked and shared with one another their abilities to achieve a goal, that of surviving and being successful in the completion of three years in a doctoral cohort. In terms of Bronfenbrenner, the individuals brought their own microsystems together with others and formed a solid exosystem that caused a synergetic movement to overcome the trials and tribulations they faced during those 1000 days of being together.

Social network theory seen through the lens of social capital focuses specifically on the value, whether real or perceived, of collaboration among group members. Social capital was introduced as a way to explain social action and how group involvement serves as a means to enhance group members' life situations (Coleman, 1988). In this study, it has been shown that the resources individuals were able to access through the connections with one another greatly facilitated the stories of our success of the cohort's outcome of finishing the program. As a story example, members were able to call upon one another to cover an unavoidable absence due to the death of a family member.

Another story example shows how cohort members used one another to help put academic practice into action in their respective schools by working with one another to establish protocols for bus routes, energy-reducing strategies, and test-score announcements. Social capital can be described as resources embedded in a social context that are accessed or mobilized in purposeful action (Lin, 1999). Therefore, social capital does not describe the linkages between members of a group; in contrast, it describes the resources that are available to group members through their connections with each other (Coleman, 1988).

The value of telling our stories while looking through the social capital lens of social network theory is seen in our ability to harness resources held by group members and increase the flow of information in a network (Hargreaves, 2004). In turn, the value of networking lies in spanning structural holes where information is lacking (Burt, 1992). In this study, the stories and anecdotes that we told showed the cohort was instrumental in keeping the academic peloton from fragmenting into individuals. Meeting at local restaurants to study ANOVA, calling one another over questions involving theories, and shoring up holes in individual's knowledge of school law were a major part of the dynamics of the TWELVE.

Borgatti & Foster (2003) suggest if group members are unable to cover the structural holes, whether through lack of ability, lack of knowledge, or lack of effort, there may exist a situation in which negative behavior patterns among group members emerge. In this study it was found that there were few, if any, holes that could not be covered by at least one member of the TWELVE. In one of our stories, ANOVA was an extremely difficult class for the majority of the TWELVE, but at least two of the cohort

members had a penchant for math who were able to sit the rest of the group down and explain the intricacies of standard deviation and other more difficult mathematical concepts.

Another lens through which social network theory may be applied to this study is through the Durkheimian theory. Durkheim (1972) concerned himself with anomie, which is the feeling of malaise or ennui in an individual, and its impact on the association of alienation and purposelessness. This study illustrates a converse positive relationship with Durkheim, as it shows how group members used their association to gain emotional and mental strength from one another as well as reminding one another of the purposefulness of showing up every Wednesday evening for three years. Yes, there were bouts of malaise or ennui as the randomness of life threw many obstacles into the paths of the individuals of the TWELVE, but each time the cohort members were able to rally around one another and help the member who was suffering to pull himself/herself up and keep one foot moving in front of the other. This was seen most specifically during the episode of the death of the unborn child. Malaise? Yes. Ennui? Yes. Understandably. However, the group commiserated, empathized, and then emerged as a stronger unit, having shared such a terrible tragedy together as they did.

Social support is an inherent aspect of social networks and may include kinship ties, friendship circles, and collegial relationships (Paredes & Chung, 2012). During that first meeting on that rainy Wednesday evening, the cohort members looked at one another from across the room, sized one another up, and individually asked themselves whether the next three years would be worth the time, the expense, and the stress. Over the next few class periods the stories were told of collegial relationships that were made

through simple interactions before, during, and after class, but there were still members who effected more of a satellite orbit around the slowly-growing nucleus of the group. However, by the end of the first semester, our stories show the TWELVE grew together as friends, allowing for the tighter social network that Paredes and Chung's work (2012) suggested will develop.

Again, as shown in Chapter Four, the TWELVE individuals both personally, collectively, and continuously made decisions to stick together for three years, one night a week. What they did not anticipate was the opportunity to not only learn, but also the opportunity to laugh, cry, become giddy with the highs and devastated by the lows, apply experience, and ultimately form a solidly cohesive group that made a commitment to one another that would persevere. Within this over-arching plot, there existed subplots of suspense (random seating, tornado warnings), chapters of challenge (the death of a child, the grueling schedule), and denouements of destiny (the final class of School Law, the qualifying exams).

How would I, a member of the TWELVE from day one to day one thousand, describe my experience? Two words: Worth It.

Implications

There are numerous types of cohorts in graduate education, and there is value in emphasizing the "belonging" and "stories that cultivate and contribute to cohortness" as being particularly beneficial with the type of student represented in the TWELVE. Wednesday evening classes and numerous hours in homework and learning after a full day of work for three years with families is a different thing than a full-time graduate

student in a cohort who works part-time and does not have family to care for. These twelve professional educational leaders with full time jobs and extremely busy schedules who faced numerous challenges during the day found support and motivation from cohort members. These cohort members all finished coursework in three years. This study shows the stories of the relationships formed within and among the TWELVE which helped motivate the individual cohort members to complete the coursework as a group. We started as individuals seeking an advanced degree, and this study shows how, with a cohort committed to putting effort into establishing long-lasting and healthful relationships, we ended as a group of successful people well on our way towards attaining our Ed. D. This study explains how the relationships that formed helped us both personally (motivation to staying in and finishing the program, time management issues, handling stress-related issues) and professionally (finishing papers, covering one another's district position because of an unfortunate extended absence, giving advice on school-related matters).

Implications for Educational Leaders

Peer support and reassurance are two of the most valued aspects of joining a cohort [8] (Bair, 1997; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Kerka, 1995; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Being a member of a group of individuals with similar goals, including getting one's advanced degree, has shown positive correlation with achieving the goal (Brien, 1992).

---

[8] The implications of this particular study may make one of the choices easier for students who want to become educational leaders. No, "easier" is not the correct word; "More-informed" is perhaps the better way to say it. The question – Should I join a cohort? The answer – if you are an isolationist Ming Emperor from the early 1600s who chooses to do all communication with the outside world through eunuch servants, the answer is that a cohort is probably not for you. If you do not meet the above characteristics, maybe you should give the cohort idea some serious thought.

This is not to say that going after an advanced degree using the more traditional method of individually selecting courses, attending classes with varied and changing peers, and perhaps missing out on a steady diet of emotional and academic help, is not a good way to achieve the goal; it has been working for centuries in this fashion. Findings from this study suggest, however, the cohort model, offered as an option, provided these twelve professional educational leaders who embody the characterization of burning-the-candle-at-both-ends when it comes to their time and work commitments with an opportunity for an enriched educational experience. According to findings from this study, the cohort option was a primary motivating factor for all cohort members to complete course requirements.

Implications for Universities

A timely thought – in the time of COVID-19 and the possibility of mass transmission of the virus as campuses around the country open up, one implication for a university that might be analyzing the benefits of a cohort model would be the contract-tracing issues. One might think that a student in a mid-sized university could come into contact with hundreds of peers and several professors on any given day as they move through the campus on a regular, individualized class schedule. However, with a cohort model, with a limited membership per cohort (example, a group of TWELVE), the contact tracing might be exponentially easier. Although in the fall semester of 2020 many universities are choosing on-line classes to combat the possibility of virus transmission, those that choose a hybrid model, or those that choose to open up their doors status quo may find that assigning students to cohorts to limit the exposure to be an opportunity cost worth considering.

Implications of Theory

  This study has expanded the understandings of the innerworkings of cohorts using social network theory. Social network theory has been used as a lens through which to examine groups of people working together and supporting one another to achieve a goal (Jones & Volpe, 2011). The theory focuses on the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioral change (Liu, 2018). This study has shown that members of the cohort exhibited all of these characteristics and narrated them through their interactions and conversations, in friendly competitions and electric bantering with one another, and in keeping the cohort together emotionally, socially, and physically. The emotional, social, and physical support that each cohort member perceived as being beneficial for persistence in the program has been shown, suggesting that the precepts of social network theory (social relationships are extremely important) are identifiable and recognized as a significant factor in the success of this cohort.

  As the limitations of individual organization become more apparent in our increasingly connected society, social network theory invites future students to think of themselves not as individuals but as part of a collective by providing a lens through which to view possible solutions to these limitations discussed previously by facilitating collaboration, networking, and the building of relationships. Findings from this study suggest that resources embedded in social networking to be a key reason for the ultimate success of the TWELVE, as without the cohort, as discussed in chapter four, the majority of members agreed that they would not have finished the coursework as successfully as they did.

The application of social network theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory help to explain resources embedded in the cohort model, at the individual, micro and macro levels. It was not expected, when this study began, that influences beyond individual influences at the cohort level would materialize in findings. However, application of both theories simultaneously provides a more thorough understanding of how opportunities for relationship building through the cohort model functioned to promote the success of these individuals.

Other Implications

Education is not a one-size-fits-all science by any stretch of the imagination; federal and state governments have attempted to quantify the subjective parts of education and qualify the objective parts. Questions abound. Should people teach to the test? Should there be more math theory and less arithmetic? Should educators be held accountable to national standards while educating students in radically different cultural settings? What makes a good teacher? A good administrator? For that matter, how do we define a "good" student – Classroom Grades? Citizenship? SAT Scores?

Perhaps in the end it is simply enough to learn how to get along with one another on this rather infinitesimal clod of dirt travelling around an equally unassuming star in the backwaters of the Milky Way Galaxy. Learning how to work together, to achieve goals collectively, to synergistically put forth in motion great ideas, maybe humanity is the greatest cohort of all.

Aristotle (c. 330BCE) says it best -

Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

Limitations

Although a major contribution for this study is the uncommon inclusion of the researcher as part of the group being studied, and the narrative focus on a cohort's experiences, there exists an inherent set of limitations because of that point. Having only one perspective from two-thirds of the way back on the right side of the room (my unofficial seating spot for three-years), I am beholden to others to see the relationships developing from other vantage points, and in this study I attempted to give each cohort member one-TWELVTH of the script, although it seemed one or two had more appropriate or germane quotes upon which I relied slightly more than the others, but if so, it was not by much. I listened to each of the other ELEVEN's participant voices to construct a narrative that made sure all voices were represented in a manner consistent with what they wanted to convey in their individual interviews.

However, there were many things I did not include in this study by choice. There were some stories shared with me that were of a personal nature that were not for public consumption and therefore were purposefully left out. Using these stories might have public implications that are not worth the marginal utility of inclusion. Yes, I realize that

121

there are personal stories throughout the narrative, up to and including the story of the death of a cohort member's child, but those particular stories were specifically requested by the individual whose story it was to be included in the narrative; the thought process being that the events were of such an importance nature that to not tell it would be to discount its impact on all of our lives. When in doubt of a personal story being too personal for inclusion in this study, I asked all people involved, and if one person was a bit hesitant on the specific story being broadcast to the world, it was immediately declared off limits and unpublishable.

Another limitation to this study is its retrospective nature. Had I walked in on Day One knowing I was going to do this study for the next three years (and the IRB already in place), I would have been more reliant on in-the-moment texts, doodles, and specific conversations and discussions we had in class versus the interview process that forced the TWELVE to think back over 1000 days of the stories we wanted to tell. Memories fade. Perspectives change over time. People have imperfect recollections.

Another limitation to this study may be that the TWELVE have completed their coursework over the three years that they were together, but the end goal of everyone getting their individual doctoral degrees has not been accomplished as of the writing of this statement; only two of the TWELVE have received their degree, with ten others at various stages in their individual research and dissertations. Would more of us be closer to the diploma if we had stayed together during dissertation-writing hours? This limitation might be minimized in that the individual research that the TWELVE have done (are doing) does not lend itself to the cohort model. Additional research could, perhaps, provide greater understanding of how a cohort model could be utilized to

facilitate dissertation writing or additional data gathering across the entire span of the life of the cohort.

Another limitation to this particular study is the make-up of the cohort, the purposeful sample. The TWELVE are individuals who came together at a precise time (Fall of 2013) in a university classroom. The personalities, characteristics, and traits of the individuals and the combination of these made for a unique situation. Would it be mathematically possible to duplicate a cohort with twelve individuals who have similar backgrounds and titles as the TWELVE possessed? Yes, although it might be improbable to get an exacting match. More importantly, to be able to replicate the personalities of not only the TWELVE, but of the faculty members and situations outside of Wednesday night classes that all went in to the formula that helped to develop the relationships that made this cohort special would be inconceivably improbable. That being said, the doctoral cohort has the means to replicate a cohort with all of the potential to develop a strong relationship among the members, simply for the reason that like-minded, degree-seeking educators are going to be placed in a similar room for a similar amount of time as the TWELVE had been placed.

A few delimitations of this study include who was not involved in the interviewing process as there are other forces that contributed to the success of the cohort beyond the cohort itself, and that these various forces are not the focus of the study, but they would give additional perspective in understanding the forces involved—context, design, faculty, families, or any number of forces. However, my focus here was to narrate the cohort's experience from our perspective only. As a specific example, although the faculty members were with the cohort for three years and served as professors, advisors,

and sounding boards, I determined that the relationships among the TWELVE should be written from the point of view of the TWELVE alone, and not by individuals who, although may having contributed to the building of the relationships through their use of lessons and own interactions of the cohort, were not the subjects of this study. There were also two students who joined in several of our classes and were considered satellite-members of the cohort. I was sorely tempted to ask those individuals what it was like to come in to a class where it was apparent the students in the classroom had already formed a tight relationship with one another, but again, as these satellite individuals were not the focus of the study, they were left out of the interview process, leaving me with a unique group of people and clear parameters of the unit of analysis.

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this study was to tell a narrative of a twelve-member doctoral cohort with the addition of the researcher being an original member of the cohort and not, as has been the case in all other studies found, an outside observer. An interesting coordinating perspective would be to continue this study as cohort members move through the dissertation-writing process and observe the possible successes and failures.

This study's sole focus was on the TWELVE who banded together for three years under the education program. They were obviously not alone in their endeavor as there were upwards of ten different professors who came along for the ride, added a few speed bumps for rigor and relevance, and occasionally turned on the radio to the 60s Rock station just to keep things lively. An interesting accompanying study would be to include the professors' observations of a three-year cohort, especially of professors that double as

advisors or triple as chairpersons. Exploring tensions and stressors would also be useful. As an example, a study could focus on the points of time and reasons in which people wanted to depart the cohort as well as those moments of pure irritation with someone or pure questioning about the degree itself in relation to the work of schools.

This study's participants all came from a single state, and although there were a few classes in which we interacted with others around the country (ex., during on-line classes), the vast majority of the time it was just the TWELVE. Another study that could dovetail from this one might involve taking a new and different cohort that was primarily internet-based and populated by members from several different states and telling their story to see if the distance between the students would result in any differences from this study's outcomes.

Within the three years of classes the cohort was together, non-cohort member live-bodied students, as opposed to those on the internet, took classes with the cohort members on occasion, making for a group larger than twelve. These students came in after the cohort had established itself as the unique assemblage that it was. A possible side-study would be to get the observations and experiences of these few students who came into a situation where they were clearly the "outsider" but stayed with us for at least one semester's worth of classes. Regardless, exploring educational doctoral cohorts, no matter how the studies are done, will continue to sharpen the focus on a subject that is at once a strategy for educational leaders, university administrators, and ultimately a microcosm of humanity.

Summary

This study is a narrative research study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that seeks to understand the experiences and relationships that are formed during a three-year doctoral cohort program. After the three years were completed, the individual members of the cohort, the TWELVE, were interviewed and asked about their experiences and relationships among the other members of the cohort. Thematic categories of joining the cohort, support from the cohort, and the experiences and memories of being a cohort member were used to narrate a thick description of what it was like for the TWELVE to be together in the cohort. The uncommon element to this particular study is that the researcher was a member of the cohort itself from the first day onwards, and as such, is able to tell about his own relationships and experiences as one-twelfth of the whole story. Comparing the experiences of the cohort to Saitel and Russo's (2001) four attributes as to what makes a successful cohort lead the researcher to conclude objectively that the cohort was successful. More importantly, there is now a narrative produced that others can read to gain a little insight into how cohort relationships impact the success of a cohort.

This story is important in that it not only addresses a knowledge problem (what is it like to be in a doctoral cohort), but also addresses a practical problem for students weighing the options of either joining a cohort model or not, as this study gives a concrete example upon which to reflect of one cohort's journey through the process.

This is a narrative inquiry that uses interpretivism as its theoretical perspective. Interpretative studies allow researchers to assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared

meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2008); this study does just this with the cohort members' shared experiences and their interpretations of their experiences.

What makes this study unique, besides its uncommon method of having the researcher be a member of the group being observed, is its story of a particular group of people at a particular time and place that has distinctive personalities, unprecedented plot twists, and unique relationships. Reading our story will introduced you to a cast of characters heretofore unbeknownst to the literary world, and by following our trials and tribulations during the three years we were together as a cohort one may gain an insight not only into the world of graduate-level education, but of the nature of what it is like to be in a school family.

Parting Story

Earlier today my 11th grade AP World History class met with the rest of the juniors in the high school auditorium and listened to first the principal and then the counselors give the "we are half-way through your junior year … you need to make sure you are on track to graduate"-speech. They also gave the "you need to be thinking about looking at various scholarships and internships for next year"-speech. When they were released back to class, my students made the following comments:

"Well, that was a waste of time."

And, "What was the point of that meeting?"

I told them that had they been paying attention…, but was interrupted with,

"We already knew all of that."

Looking around, it was clear that the meeting was not meant for my students. My AP students were certainly on track to graduate; most, if not all, were looking at early graduation. They also were well-ahead of the game with regards to scholarships and internships, with several of my students already landing big monies and/or opportunities for the summer break.

"The meeting was not so much for you guys as for the other students in your cohort," I said to my class. "Believe it or not, educational apathy runs deep around here and many of your peers have not even begun to think about their future, especially what they will be doing in a year and a half."

"Then they are not our peers," came a response.

"They, are, however, forever your cohort, and you will be paired with their names in the yearbook for the (very dramatic pause) rest of eternity," I said.

"That's not fair," said one of my more self-important students. "We should be able to select our own cohort."

A discussion about how LIFE works immediately followed, with the students eventually understanding how the term "cohort" was defined from the point of view of the State Board of Education. However, we did bandy about the idea of setting up a system in society to "select our own cohort." We concluded that there were pros and cons to choosing one's cohort members, and that each situation would need to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Of course, at some point I chose to throw in my own experience with the

TWELVE and this study which focuses on the story of a specific group of doctoral

students at a specific university at a specific time. In a sense, I was able to choose my

own cohort, or at least chose to continue to be a part of the cohort after the first

Wednesday evening class. I will look forward to the time when someone asks me about

the Doctoral Cohort of 2013, and I shall be ready to talk about the relationships we

formed, the memories we have, and the success we enjoyed.

REFERENCES

Ackerman, R., & Mackenzie, S. V. (2006). Uncovering teacher leadership. *Educational Leadership, 63*(8), 66-70.

Aldritch, D., & Meyer, M. (2015). Social capital and community resilience. *American Behavioral Scientist, 55*(2), 442-471.

Adams, T. (2008). A review of narrative ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14*(2), 175-194.

Arends, R.I. (1998). *Learning to teach*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Arregle, J-L., Batjargal, B. & Hitt, M. (2015). Family ties in entrepreneurs' social networks and new venture growth. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 39*(2), 110-124.

Austin, A. (1974). *The research method of fray bernardino de sahagún: The questionaires*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research (11th ed)*. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth.

Badley, G. (2003). The truth of stories. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 8(3),

441-452.

Bair, C.R. (2015). Doctoral student attrition and persistence: A meta-synthesis. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 6*(2), 82-98.

Barnett, B. G., & Muse, I. D. (1993). Cohort groups in educational administration: Promises and challenges. *Journal of School Leadership, 3*(4), 400-415.

Barone, T. (2000). *Aesthetics, politics and educational inquiry*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Barbour, R. (2001). Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: a case of the tail wagging the dog. *British Medical Journal*, 322(7294), 1115-1117.

Basom, M., Yerkes, D., Norris, C., & Barnett, B. (1995). *Exploring cohorts: Effects on principal preparation and leadership practice*. St. Louis, MO: Danforth Foundation. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 387857).

Basom, M., Yerkes, D., Norris, C., & Barnett, B. (2015). Using cohorts as a means for developing transformational leaders. *Journal of School Leadership*, 6(1), 99-112.

Beck, C., & Kosnik, C. (2001). From cohort to community in a preservice teacher

education program. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(8), 925-948.

Bender, T. (2004). *The education of historians for the twenty-first century.* Chicago,

IL:University of Illinois Press.

Bentley, T., Zhao, F., Reames, E., & Reed, C. (2004). Frames we live by: Metaphors for

the cohort. *The Professional Educator, 25*(2), 39-44.

Bianconi, G.; Barabási, A.-L. (2001). Bose–einstein condensation in complex

networks. *Physics Review Letters*, *86*, 5632–35.

Bignold, W. (2009) *Unicycling and identity: Narratives of motivation and achievement*

in young riders. PhD thesis, Liverpool: University of Liverpool.

Birky,V., Shelton, M., & Headley, S. (2006). An administrator's challenge: Encouraging

teachers to be leaders. *National Association of Secondary School Principals,*

90(2), 87-101.

Bochner, A.P. (2011). Authoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research,*

36(138), 273-290.

Bochner, A.P. (2002). Criteria against ourselves. *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader.*

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bochner, A. P. (2001). Narrative's virtues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *7*(2), 131-157.

Bochner, A. P. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self. *Qualitative*

    Inquiry, *3*(4), 418-438.

Boes, S. R., Ullery, E. K., Millner, V. S., & Cobia, D. C. (1999). Meeting the challenges

    of completing a counselor doctoral program. *Journal of Humanistic Education*

    and Development 37(3), 130-144.

Borgatti, S. P., Everett, M. G., & Johnson, J. C. (2013). *Analyzing Social Networks*.

    SAGE Publications Limited.

Borgatti, S. & Foster, P. (2003). The network paradigm in organizational research.

    Journal of Management 29(6), 991 – 1013.

Boylorn, R. (2008). As seen on TV: An autoethnographic reflection on race and reality

    television. *Critical Studies on Media Communication 25*(4), 413-433

Braun, V. (2019). Thematic analysis. *Handbook of research methods in health and social*

    sciences (pp. 843-860). Springer.

Brien, S. J. (1992). The adult professional as a graduate student: A case study in

    recruitment, persistence, and perceived quality. *Dissertation Abstracts*

    International, 53(07A), 112-123.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The bioecological theory of human development. In U.

    Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives*

on human development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brooks, P. A. (1998). Cohort communities in higher education: The best example of adult

education. *Proceedings of the 39ᵗʰ annual Adult Educational Research*

Conference. College Station, TX: Texas A and M University.

Bruner, J, (1993). *The autobiographical process*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University

Press.

Burnett, P. C. (1999). The supervisor of doctoral dissertations using a collective cohort

model. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 39*(1), 46-52.

Burt, R. (2004). "Structural holes and good ideas". *American Journal of Sociology* (110):

349–399.

Bunce, L., Baird, A., Jones, S. (2017). The student-as-consumer approach in higher

education and its effects on academic performance. *Studies in Higher*

Education, 42(11), 1958-1978.

Bursik Jr., R. (1988). Social disorganization and theories of crime and delinquency:

Problems and prospects. *Criminology, 26*(4), 519–539. <u>doi</u>:10.1111/j.1745-

9125.1988.tb00854.x

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., and Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative Marketing*

Research. London: Sage.

Cassuto, L. (2013). PhD. Attrition: how much is too much? Chronicle of Higher

Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/PhD-Attrition-How-Much-

Is/140045

Cauley, D. (2008). Making qualitative research reports less boring: the techniques of

writing creative non-fiction. *Qualitative Inquiry, 14*(3), 424-449

Cesari, J. P. (1990). Thesis and support groups: A unique service for graduate students.

Journal of College Student Development, 31, 375-378.

Clandinin, D.J. & and Connelly, M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in

qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Clandinin, D.J., & Huber J. Narrative Inquiry. (2000). In B, McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P.

Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY:

Elsevier

Clandinin, D.J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, S., Murry Orr, A, Pearce, M., and

Steeves, P. (2006), *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the

interwoven lives of children and teachers.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry:

Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative

inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clough, P. (2003). Things, objects, truths, narratives, and fictions. *Research in post-compulsory education, 8*(3), 16 – 29.

Clough P. (2002) *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Clough P. (2004) *Researching lifestories: Narratives in a biographical age*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self*. London: Sage.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95–120.

Coleman, J. (1990). *The foundations of social theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Conle, C. (1989). *Stories toward an interpretive thesis*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto.

Connelly, M. & Clandinin, J. (2005). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19*(5), 2-14.

Crotty. M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Allen and Unwin. Sydney.

Cuddy, A. (2012). First impressions: The science of meeting new people. *Wired, 11*. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/2012/11/amy-cuddy-first-impressions.

Cunningham, P. (1996*). Ideological space makers: The need in graduate programs in adult education.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (Ed 401415)

Daly, E., Kellehear, R., & Gliksman, R. (1997). *The public health researcher: A methodological approach*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press. 611–618.

Davies, P. C. W. (2004). Does quantum mechanics play a non-trivial role in life?. *Biosystems, 78*(1–3), 69–79. doi:10.1016/j.biosystems.2004.07.00

Devine, S. (2012). *The lived experience of counselor education doctoral students in the cohort model at duquesne university.* Duquesne University. (Doctoral Dissertation).

Didion, J. (2005). *The year of magical thinking*. New York, NY: A.A. Knopf.

Doña-Toledo, L., Luque-Martínez, T., & Del Barrio-García, S. (2017). Antecedents and consequences of university perceived value, according to graduates: the moderating role of Higher Education involvement. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing, 14*(4), 535-565.

Dorn, S. M. (1995). Doctoral student perceptions of cohesiveness and its effects on persistence. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 56*(06), 21-28.

Dorn, S. M., Papalewis, R., & Brown, R. (1995). Educators earing their doctorates:

Doctoral student perceptions regarding cohesiveness and persistence. *Education*,

11(2), 305-314.

Drago-Severson, E. I., Helsing, D., Kegan, R. Popp, N., Broderick, M. and Portnow, K.

(2001). The power of a cohort and of collaborative groups. *Focus on Basics, 5*(b),

15-22. Retrieved from http://dougiamas.com/writing/constructivism.html

Durkheim, E. (1972). *Selected Writings*. Cambridge University Press.

Durkheim, E. (1938). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York, NY. The Free Press.

Elliott, J. (2005). *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative & Quantitative*

Approaches. London: Sage.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*.

Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In

Handbook of qualitative research, 2ⁿᵈ ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Evans, M. R., & Hanney, J. (2015). The evolution of the traffic cue. *Physics. A: Math.*

Generation 38, R195-R239

Frank, A., (2005). What is dialogical research and why should we do it? *Qualitative*

Health Research, 15(7), 77-91.

Freeman, M. (2004). Data are everywhere: Narrative criticism in the literature of

    experience. In Colette Daiute & Cynthia Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis:*

    Studying the development of individuals in society (pp. 63-81). Thousand Oaks,

    CA: Sage.

Foster, E. (2006). *Communicating at the end of life*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbuam.

Gerhart, D., Tarragona, M., & Bava, S. (2007) A collaborative approach to research and

    inquiry. In H. Anderson & D. Gehart (Eds.), *Collaborative therapy: Relationships*

    and conversations that make a difference (pp. 367-390). London, UK: Routledge.

Gesell, S., Barkin, S., & Sommer, E. (2016). Increases in network ties are associated with

    increased cohesion among intervention participants. *Health Education Behavior*,

    43(2), 208-216.

Glave, T. (2005). *Words to our now: Imagination and dissent*. Minneapolis, MN:

    University of Minneapolis Press.

Glenn, N. D. (1997). *Cohort analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Glover, R. J., Morrison., G. S., & Aldrich, J. E. (1998). Graduate student cohorts: How

    well do they function? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 19*(1), 9-

    16.

Golde, C. (2014). Should I stay or should I go? Student descriptions of the doctoral

    attrition process. *Review of Higher Education, 23*(2), 199-227.

Goodall, B.H.L. (2006). *A need to know: The clandestine history of a CIA family*. Walnut

    Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Goodall, B. H.L. (2001). *Writing the new ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira.

Goodall, J. (1999). *Reason for hope: A spiritual journey*. New York: Warner Books.

Goodall, J. & Peterson, D. (2002). *Beyond innocence: An autobiography in letters: The*

    later years. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Gonthier, G. (2008). Formal proof—the four-color theorem. *Notices of the AMS, 55*(11),

    1382– 1393.

Graham, B. (2015). Methods of identification in social networks. *Annual Review of*

    Economics, 7, 465-485.

Granovetter, M. (1983). *The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited*.

    Sociological Theory *1*, 201-233.

Guest, G., & MacQueen, N. (2012). Introduction to thematic analysis. *Applied*

    Thematic Analysis, 18(2), 3-20

Hayes, R. L. & Paisley, P. O. (2002). Transforming school counselor preparation

programs. *Theory into Practice, 41*, 169-176.

Haythornthwaite, C. (1998). *Social network analysis: An approach and technique for the*

    study of information exchange. Library & Information Science

    Research *18*(4), 323-342.

Hargreaves, A. (2004). *Sustaining leadership*. Sage. 84(9). 693-700.

Heikkinen, H., Huttunen, R. & Syrjala, L. (2007). Action research as narrative: five

    principles for validation. *Educational Action Research. 15(1)*. 5-19.

Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In Norman K.

    Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.763-

    791). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holmes, B. D., Bird, K., Seay, A. D., Smith, D . B., & Wilson, K. N. (2014). The proof is

    in the pudding: The power of collaborative cohort learning to propel academic

    success. *Proceedings of the International Applied Business Research & College*

    Teaching and Learning Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Hoskins, C. M., & Goldberg, A. D. (2005). Doctoral student persistence in counselor

    education programs: Student-program match. *Counselor Education and*

    Supervision, 44(3), 175-188.

Huberman, M & Miles, M. (Eds.) (2002). *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*.

    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hudson, L., and Ozanne, J. (1988). Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in

    Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), 508–521.

Hughes, R. (1983). The non-traditional student in higher education: A synthesis of the

    literature. *NASPA Journal, 2*(3), 51-64.

Hunter, F., McHaney, H., Davis, M., Tully, M.A., & Kee, F. (2015). "Hidden" social

    networks in behavior change interventions. *American Journal of Public Health,*

    105(3), 513-16.

Imel, S. (2014). *Adult learning in cohort groups: Practice application brief, No. 24*.

    Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED427604).

Irby, B. & Miller, W. (1999). An inquiry into the exigency of a beginning doctoral cohort

    in educational leadership. *College Student Journal, 33*(3), 358-363.

Iser, W. (2000). *The range of interpretation*. New York, NY: Colombia Press.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F.P. (2003). *Joining together: Group theory and group*

    skills.   Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Jones, B. (2018) Wait, can a dissertation cite itself?

Jones, C. & Volpe, E.H. (2011). Organizational identification: Extending our

understanding of social identities through social networks. *Journal of

Organizational Behavior*, 32, 413-434.

Kerka, S. (1995). *Adult learner retention revisited*. Retrieved from ERIC database.

(ED398880).

Kim, E., Hagan, K., & Goodstein F. (2017). Optimism and cause-specific mortality: A

prospective cohort study. *Epidemiology, 185*(1), 21-29.

Labov, W. (2006). Familiar linguistic variables. *Journal of English Linguistics, 34*(4),

332-351.

Lather, P. & Smithies, C. (1997). *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS*.

Boulder, CO: Westview/HarperCollins.

Lawrence, F. (2017). *Views from the presidency: Leadership in higher education*. New

York, NY: Routledge.

Lawrence, R. L. (1997, June). The *interconnecting web: Adult Learning cohorts as sites

for collaborative learning, feminist pedagogy and experiential ways of knowing*.

Paper presented at the 38th annual meeting of the Adult Education Research

Conference. Stillwater, Oklahoma. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED409460).

Lawrence, R. L. (2002). A small circle of friends: Cohort groups as learning

communities. In S. Imel (Ed.), *New Directions for Adult and Continuing*

Education, 95(pp. 83-92). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lawrence R. L., & Mealman, C. A. (1996). Seizing learning opportunities: Embracing a

collaborative process. In *Proceedings of the 16th annual alliance/ACE Conference*

(pp. 29-51). St. Pete Beach, Florida.

Lerman, K.**,** Yan, X.**,** Wu X-Z**. (**2016**).** The "majority illusion" in social networks. *PLOS*

ONE 11(2): e0147617

Leslie, A. M. (1991). *Natural theories of mind: Evolution, development and simulation of*

everyday mindreading (pp. 63-77). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. and Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: reading,*

analysis and interpretation. Thousand Oaks, CA*:* Sage.

Lin, N. (1999) Building a network through social capital. *Connections, 22*(1), 28-51.

Liu, W. (2018) https://www.researchgate,net/publications/316250457_Social

Network_Thory [accessed Aug 30 2018].

Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of*

departure from doctoral study. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Macionis, J. & Gerber, L. (2011). *Sociology (7th Canadian ed.).* Toronto: Pearson

    Canada. p. 32.

Madison, J., Hamilton, H., & Jay, J. (2005) *The federalist papers of 1787*. Penguin

    Publishing Group.

Maher, M. A. (2001, April). *Professional living situations: Cohorts as communities of*

    living and learning. Paper presented at the annual meeting of American

    Educational Research Association, Seattle, Washington. Retrieved from ERIC

    database. (ED451796).

Maher, M. A. (2004, July-August). What really happens in cohorts. *About Campus*, 9(3),

    18-23.

Maher, M. A. (2005). The evolving meaning and influence of cohort membership.

    Innovative Higher Education, 3(93), 195-211. doi: 10.1007/s10755-005-6304-5

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. Oxford, England: Harpers.

McCarthy, M. (2015). Reflections on the evolution of educational leadership

    preparation programs in the United States and challenges ahead. *Journal of*

    Educational Administration, 53(3), 416-438.

McDonald, M., Kazemi, E., & Kavanagh, S. (2013). Core practices and pedagogies of

teacher education: A call for a common language and collective activity. *The Journal of Teacher Education, 1*(3), 1–9.

McGettrick, B. (2008). Inaugural lecture, Liverpool Hope University. January 30, 2008.

McGregor, S. (2004). *The nature of transdisciplinary research and practice*. Accessed June 16, 2016. http://www.kon.org/hswp/archive/transdiscipl.html

Mealman, C.A., & Lawrence, R. L. (2000). *You've come a long way baby: The roots and renaissance of cohort-based accelerated learning*. Paper presented at the Adult Higher Education Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

Meso, I, (2001). *Phenomenology and ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Mey, G. & Mruck, K. (2010) Interviews. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (pp. 423-435). Weisbaden: VS Verlag/Springer

Meyers, J. (1977). *A reader's guide to george orwell*. Thames & Hudson.

Miller, R. (2000). *Researching life stories and family histories*. London: Sage.

Mongan-Rails, H. (2014). *Guidelines for writing a literature review*. Retrieved from http://www.duluth.umn.edu/~hrallis/guides/researching/litreview.html

Mountford, M. (2005). The journey toward transformational learning in a statewide doctoral program. *Innovative Higher Education, 30*(3), 213-227.

Myers, M.D. (2008). *Qualitative research in business and management*. SAGE

    Publications.

Nelson, K. W., 7 Jackson, S. A. (2000). *Factors affecting the learning environment of*

    doctoral students in counselor education. Retrieved from ERIC database.

    (ED451440).

Neuman, L. W. (2000). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative*

    Approaches (4th Ed.), USA: Allyn and Bacon.

Newman, M. (2004). *The structure and function of complex networks*. Department of

    Physics, University of Michigan.

Norris, C. J., & Barnett, B. (1994, October). *Cultivating a new leadership paradigm:*

    From cohorts to communities. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the

    University Council for Educational Administration, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved

    from ERIC database. (ED387877).

Noteboom, B. (2004). *Inter-firm collaboration, learning and networks: An integrated*

    approach. London: Routledge

Odena, O., & Burgess, H. (2017). How doctoral students and graduates describe

    facilitating experiences and strategies for their thesis writing learning process: a

qualitative approach. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(3), 572-590.

Paredes, W.C. & Chung, K.S.K. (2012). Modelling learning & performance: a social

networks perspective. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on

Learning Analytics and Knowledge*. ACM, pp. 34–42.

Pennington, C., Bates, E., Kaye, L., & Bolam, L. (2018). Transitioning in higher

education: An exploration of psychological and contextual factors affecting

student satisfaction. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(5), 596-607.

Phan, T., & Airoldi, E. (2015). A natural experiment of social network formation and

dynamics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States

of America, 112*(21), 6595-6600.

Phelps, P. (2008). Helping teachers become leaders. *The Clearing House: A Journal of

Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 81*(3), 119-122.

Pinna, R., Carrus, P., Musso, M., & Cicotto, G. (2018). The effects of students. *The TQM

Journal, 30*(5), 458-475.

Polkinghorne, D. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(4),

471- 486.

Posselt, JR. (2016). *Inside graduate admissions: merit, diversity, and faculty gatekeeping.*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Protivnak, J.J., & Foss, L.L. (2009). An explanation of themes that influence the

counselor education doctoral student experience. *Counselor Education and*

Supervision, 48(4), 239-256.

Reissman, C. (2007). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage publications.

Reynolds, K. C., & Hebert, F. T. (1995). Cohort formats and intensive schedules: Added

involvement and interaction for continuing higher education. *Journal of*

Continuing Higher Education, 43(3), 34-41.

Rönnberg, L. (2011). Education governance by marketisation and quality

assurance – introductory notes. *Education Inquiry*, *2*(4), 555-561.

Rosnai, C. (1995). Multiple reflections of child sex abuse. *Journal of Contemporary*

Ethnography, 23(4), 395-426

Ross, D. D., Stafford, L., Church-Pupke, P., Bondy, E. (2006). Practicing collaboration:

what we learn from a cohort that functions well. *Teacher Education and Special*

Education, 29(1), 32-43.

Saltiel, I. M., & Russo, C. S. (2001). *Cohort programming and learning: Improving*

educational experiences for adult learners. Malabar, FL: Krieger.

Sapon-Shevin, M., & Chandler-Olcott, K. (2001). Student cohorts: Communities of

  critique or dysfunctional families? *Journal of Teacher Education*, *52*(5), 350-364.

Schulte, L E., (2002). A comparison of cohort and non-cohort graduate student

  perceptions of the ethical climate and its importance in retention. *College Student*

  Retention, 4(1), 29-38.

Shacklock, G. & Thorp, L. (2005). *Life histories and narrative approaches.* London:

  Sage.

Shields, P. (2013*). A playbook for research methods*. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Seifert, K., & Mandzuk, D. (2006). Student cohorts in teacher education: Support groups

  or intellectual communities? *Teachers College Record, 108*(7), 1296-1320.

Siettos C.I., & Russo, L. (2013). Mathematical modeling of infectious disease

  dynamics. *Virulence, 4*(4), 295–306. doi:10.4161/viru.24041

Smith, J. K. and Deemer, J. K. (2000) The problem of criteria in the age of relativism. in

  Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*.

  Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2nd ed.

Sousanis, N. (2015). *Unflattening*. Harvard University Press

Sparkes, A. (2002). *Telling tales in sport & physical activity: A qualitative journey*.

  Leeds: Human Kinetics.

Teddlie, C. and Reynolds, D. (2000) The international handbook of school effectiveness

School Leadership and Management, 20, 394 – 395.

Teitel, L. (1997). Understanding and harnessing the power of the cohort model in

preparing educational leaders. *Peabody Journal of Education, 72*(2), 66-85.

Thune, T., & Storen, L. (2015). Study and labour market effects of graduate students'

interaction with work organizations during education: a cohort

study. *Education and Training,* 57(7), 702-722.

Tillman-Healy, L. (2003). Friendship as method. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9*(5), 729-749.

Tinto, V. (1998). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of

student learning. *Journal of Higher Education, 59*(2), 438-455.

Tucker, P. D., Henig, C. B., & Salmonowicz, M. J. (2005). Learning outcomes of an

educational leadership cohort program. *Educational Considerations, 32*(2), 27-35.

Twale, D. J., & Kochan, F. K. (2000). Assessment of an alternative cohort model for the

part-time students in an educational leadership program. *Journal of School

Leadership, 10*(2),188-208.

Wasserman, S. & Faust, K. (1999). *Social network analysis: Methods and applications.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Wesson, L., Holman, S., Holman, N., & Cox, D. (1996, April). *Cohesion or collusion: Impact of a cohort structure on educational leadership doctoral students*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New York, NY. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED398809).

Wilkins, S., Moshin, M., Kratochvil, D. & Stephens, M. (2016). The effects of social identification and organizational identification on student commitment, achievement and satisfaction in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(12), 2232-2252.

Wisniewski, M. A. (2016). Leadership education: A constructivist model for continuing higher education. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 51*(1), 31-37.

Witte, J. E., & James, W. B. (1998). Cohort partnerships: A pragmatic approach to doctoral research. In I. M. Saltei, A. Sgroi, and R. Brockett (Eds.), *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 79* (pp. 53-62), San Francisco, CA: Jossey –Bass.

Woolcock, M. & Deepa, N. (2000). Social capital: implications for development theory, research, and policy. World Bank Research Observer *15*(2), 225–49.

Wyatt, J. (2007). Research, narrative and fiction: Conference story. *The Qualitative Report, 12(*2*),* 441-447.

Zeichner, K. (2014). The struggle for the soul of teaching and teacher education in the

USA. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 40*(5), 551–568.

Zhou, L., Lü, K., Cheng, C., Chen, H. (2013). A game theory-based approach for

community detection in social networks. In: Gottlob, G., Grasso, G., Olteanu, D.,

Schallhart, C. (Eds.) *BNCOD 2013. LNCS*, *7968*, 268–281.

References (Literary, Apocryphal, & Non Sequitur)

Adams, D. (1979) *The hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy*. Random House Publishing

Aesop., & Holder, H. (1981). *Aesop's fables*. New York: Viking Press.

Barrie, M. (1904) *Peter pan, or the little boy who wouldn't grow up*. HarperCollins.

Bierce, A. (1911). *The devil's dictionary*. CreateSpace Publishing.

Bulfinch, T., & Martin, R. P. (1991). Bulfinch's mythology. New York, N.Y:

HarperCollins.

Card, O, S. (1985). *Ender's game*. Tom Doherty Associates.

Carroll, Lewis. (1865) *Alice's adventures in wonderland*. Barnes & Noble.

Christie, A. (1926). Murder of roger ackroyd. London: Collins.

Collins, S. (2008). *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Dickens, C. (1859). *A tale of two cities*. HarperCollins.

Goethe, J. (1808). *Faust*. Knopf Doubleday.

Goldman, W. (1973) *The princess bride*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Goodall, J. (1946). *In the shadow of man*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Gygax, G. (1977) *Advanced dungeons and dragons monster manual*. TSR, Incorporated.

Heinlein, R. A., (1961). *Stranger in a strange land*. Penguin Publishing.

Homer. (c. 9th century BCE). *The iliad*. Penguin Publishing.

Kipling, R. (1894). *The jungle book*. Dover Publications.

Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. HarperCollins.

Machiavelli, N. (1532). *The prince*. Dover Publications.

Melville, H. (1851) *Moby dick: or the great whale*. Dover Publications.

Orwell, G. (1949). *1984*. Penguin Publishing.

Orwell, G. (1945) *Animal farm*. Penguin Publishing.

Plato. (380 BCE). *The republic*. Penguin Publishing.

Poe, E. (1843). *The tell-tale heart, and other writings*. Lowell.

Rousseau, J.J. (1762) *Emile, or on education*. NuVision Publications.

Rowling, J. K. (2003). *Harry potter and the order of the phoenix*. Scholastic, Inc.

Salinger, J. D. (1951). *A catcher in the rye*. Little, Brown, and Company.

Shelley, M. (1818). *Frankenstein: or, the modern prometheus*. Oxford University Press.

Sterne, L. (1759). *The life and opinions of tristram shandy, gentleman*. Barnes & Noble.

Stockton, F. (1882). The lady or the tiger?. Create Space Publishing.

The Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2100 BCE). Penguin Publishing.

Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954). *The lord of the rings*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Twain, M. (1884). *Adventures of huckleberry finn*. Dover Publications.

Vonnegut, K. (1969). *Slaughter-house five*. Dell Publishing.

Woolf, V. (1925). *Mrs. Dalloway*. Hogarth Press.

Plays written by the author and performed on stage:

(2005). The Iliad: A Comedy of Epic Proportions

(2006.) Evil on Trial

(2007). The Wizard of WH'oz

(2008). The Opti-Pessimists Guide to History

(2009). Pirates!: A Damsel in Dis-Dress?

(2010). Episode IV: Clark and Lewis' Excellent Adventure

(2011). The Seven Deadly Shadows

(2012). Advanced Avatars and Zombies, Second Edition

(2013). The Squeaky Wheel: A Victorian's Secret

(2014). The Wild, Wild West… ern Heights

(2018). Cause and Affect – A Beowulf Story

(2018). Nora and the Volcano

(2019) The Iliad 2.0

APPENDIX A.

Individual Interview Questions:

Time of Interview _____ Date of Interview _____

Place of Interview _____

Interviewer _____ Interviewee _____

1.) What would you like our audience, the readers, to know about you and your background?

2.) What made you want to join this doctoral cohort?

      2. A.) What other options, if any, did you consider?

3.) What were your initial thoughts (before our first class meeting) about how the program was going to go? Butterflies? Anticipations?

4.) What relationships, if any, did you have with any of the cohort members before we began our first class?

5.) Before getting to the cohort itself, what life events have happened to you in the past three years that you would like our audience to know about you to help them better understand our experience?

6.) How did your membership in this particular cohort help or hurt you in completing the three years of classes?

7.) How might your degree-seeking aspirations have turned out differently had you not been a member of this particular cohort?

8.) Talk to me about your relationships you have and the relationships you see amongst our cohort members.

9.) Outside of class, how often and in what ways did you interact with members of the cohort?

10.) Looking at the dark side… how close were you to dropping out? Why?

    10. A.) What role, if any, did the cohort have in keeping you in the program?

11.) What is your dissertation topic?

    11. A.) Why did you choose that particular topic?

    11. B.) Was this the topic you initially were looking at, or were there others?

12.) Most favorite class? Why?

13.) Least favorite class? Why?

14.) On a Likert scale, one being not enough and ten being too much, rate the program's following features:

A. Amount of required reading	D. Amount of Projects
B. Amount of Writing	E. Amount of help given by professors/staff
C. Amount of Presentations	F. Amount for tuition/books

15.) What improvements to the program might you make if you were in the program director's chair?

16.) If you could talk to your 3-year ago self when you were debating on whether or not to join a cohort program, what would you tell yourself?

17.) From your perspective, what is your role in the cohort/

18.) How have you, if at all, put the needs of the cohort over your needs or beyond your comfort level?

18.5) (for those that strayed from the schedule a little) Talk to me about the times you were taking classes apart from the cohort. How were your experiences similar or different, if any?

19.) Now that classes are over, what relationship or relationships do you see members of our cohort having in the future?

20.) When we all get together for our focus group round table, and it is your turn to speak, what message are you going to want to say to the rest of us?

21.) So, what is your game plan from here?

22.) You now have the floor – what do you want our audience to know about yourself, the cohort, or our experiences?

Thank you for your help in this little endeavor. I will shoot you a copy of the transcript ASAP for your approval/verification.

APPENDIX B.

Focus Group Questions

1.) This study is mostly focused on our collective experiences – the good, the bad, and

the ugly. Starting with the good… who wants to begin?

    1. A. (Follow ups as necessary)

2.) … and the bad and/or the ugly?

3.) I'm looking for specific stories to tell that stick out so that our audience will get a

clearer description of what it was like to be us. I thought about running down the list of

classes in chronological order and if there is a memory you would like to share, jump in –

    Ethics and Culture

    School Improvement

School and Community Collaboration

Research Traditions

School Finance

Human Factor

Qualitative Research

Research Methods

The Superintendency

Statistics

Organizational Theory

Politics in Education

ANOVA

Practicum

Law

Practicum

Internship

Qualifying Exams

4.) What name would you like your alias to be, if any?

5.) In our individual interviews, we were asked about how close you were to dropping out. Our average response was… does this surprise anyone?

6.) During our individual interviews, I asked what you would say to the group when it was your turn to speak… who would like to go first?

7.) Final comments, anyone?

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, July 6, 2017

IRB Application No   ED1774

Proposal Title: Three Years in a Doctoral Cohort

Reviewed and   Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 7/5/2020

Principal
Investigator(s):

Brian Jones   Katherine Curry
                            306 Willard
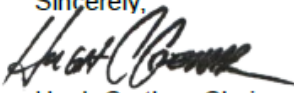Stillwater, OK 74078   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Brian A. Jones

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: THREE YEARS IN A DOCTORAL COHORT – A SURVIVALIST'S
GUIDE

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Educational
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in Dec.
2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2007.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
Education at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1994.

Experience:

Advanced Placement History Teacher/Gifted teacher, Western Heights High
Public Schools from 1997-2018

Fulbright to the American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Greece – 2009
Fulbright to the University of Kakegawa, Japan – 2004

Professional Memberships:

Golden Key 2014-2020