

Fall 2012

The Lived Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Students in the Cohort Model at Duquesne University

Shirley A Devine

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION
DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN THE COHORT
MODEL AT DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Shirley Devine, M.A.

December 2012

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Shirley Devine, M.A.

2012

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Presented by:

Shirley Devine, M.A.

August 30, 2012

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION DOCTORAL
STUDENTS IN THE COHORT MODEL AT DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN THE COHORT MODEL AT DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

By

Shirley S. Devine

December 2012

Dissertation supervised by Dr. William J. Casile, Ph.D.

This was a phenomenologically-oriented inquiry of the lived experiences of counselor education doctoral students in a cohort model. This inquiry sought to explore, describe, and understand students' *everyday* lived experiences in a cohort model in the Executive Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University, where the doctoral program is structured as a three-year, full-time, closed cohort model. The existential framework proposed by van Manen (1990) provided a framework for describing and understanding students' lived experiences in the corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational realms of experience. The strategies used for this inquiry were based on multiple informants and data sources, which included individual and dyad interviews, and focus group discussions. A semi-structured protocol was used to gather phenomenological data from a purposive sample of twenty-six

informants, who were affiliated with seven different cohort groups in the ExCES program. At the time of data collection, seven individuals were involved in an active cohort experience, nine individuals had completed the cohort experience and were working on their dissertations, and ten individuals had graduated from the program. Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive method of analysis was used to illuminate the common themes within the informants' perceptions and experiences in the program. The analysis generated themes that describe the informants' corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational lived experiences in a cohort model. The analysis yielded potential hypotheses and directions for future research, and implications and recommendations for practice. The findings have provided an initial description of students' *everyday* lived experiences in a cohort model, and insight into the contextual influences that bear on these experiences, which will guide educators in their current roles.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation study to the members of the Beta cohort, and to the memory of our doctoral peer, Richard Duncan. Based on my personal experiences as a member of our cohort, you epitomize the spirit of a cohort. It has been an honor being connected with such an awesome group of individuals. Each one of you has had a significant role in my personal and professional development. I carry you in my heart. We are one more closer to *Twenty in, twenty out!*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This dissertation truly is the result of a collaborative effort. I would like to express my gratitude to those individuals who contributed to my success in the completion of this research project.

First, my gratitude is extended to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. William Casile, Dr. Nicholas Hanna, and Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers. Their guidance and support were more meaningful to me than words can express:

Dr. William Casile: As my Dissertation Chair, thank you for consistently providing an environment conducive to growth and learning in the ExCES program, and for providing direction and support as I completed this dissertation. Your belief in the importance and need for a study of this nature from its proposal through its completion was an inspiration and motivation to me. YOU ARE THE BEST! Thank you.

Dr. Nicholas Hanna: For your belief in my competence, pep talks, and faith in my completion of this study, I thank you. You have been invaluable in keeping things moving forward for me, from initiating committee meetings to maintaining an *open door* policy at your office at DU.

Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers: I am grateful for your input and help in reframing the nature of this study by introducing me to qualitative research and Max van Manen. Your expertise and guidance throughout the methodological process was of enormous benefit.

Dr. David Delmonico: While not on my committee, I appreciated your time and suggestions as I prepared my research proposal for submission to the IRB. Your willingness to review my proposal was tremendously helpful.

I am indebted to the students and graduates of the ExCES program, who participated in this inquiry. It is your stories, experiences, and voices that are reflected in this work. Without your willingness to share your time and experiences with me, there would be no dissertation study of this nature. While I cannot mention you individually, you know who you are. I express my deepest thanks.

To my husband, Bobby: Finally! Thank you for bearing with me through the ups and downs of this research, and accompanying me on this journey. Thank you for your steadfast support and patience, and for cheering me on. I love you.

To my daughter, Erin: From the time you could do things yourself, I have watched you devote 100% of your best effort to all things with which you have become involved. You have been an inspiration and motivation to me. Thank you for being you. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and
to know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot

This dissertation is a phenomenologically-oriented investigation of the lived experience of counselor education doctoral students in a cohort model. The inquiry sought to understand and describe the lived world of the cohort model through the eyes of current and former students in the Executive Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University. Central to this inquiry are the common ways students describe and make sense of their experiences in the ExCES program. Key areas of exploration were the corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions of lived experience. Phenomenologically-oriented methodology provided the means to illuminate phenomena in the everyday world of the ExCES program from students' perspectives, including the contextual influences that shape the world as lived. How do students experience the cohort group in which they have experiences in the ExCES program? How can the cohort phenomenon in the ExCES program be described? What is the nature of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations as experienced and known to students in the ExCES program? What contextual influences can be identified, and how do these bear on how students make sense of their lived experiences in the ExCES program? In a broader sense, what might be learned about the cohort experience as a viable pathway for preparing future counselor educators and supervisors?

Background of the Inquiry

As “the crossroad where the social and the academic meet” (Tinto, 1997, p. 599), the design of a learning environment, and the people-to-people encounters that occur therein, are major features of students’ overall educational experiences (Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Sgroi & Saltiel, 1998). However, as a culture traditionally characterized by “a disembodied intellectualism that privileges rationality and separation” (p. 55), the educational system has long emphasized and rewarded the individual over the group (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000), and students have participated in the learning process primarily as individuals, taking little responsibility for the class as a whole (Geltner, 1994; Lawrence, 2002). This is particularly evident at the doctoral level of education, where students frequently are admitted to a doctoral program on an individual basis, and complete a doctoral degree having had few opportunities to interact with peers in the same program (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Hayes, Dagley, & Horne, 1996). Although it is not unusual for a group of students to enter a doctoral program at the same time, historically there has been little programmatic attempt to build community, or organize ongoing, formal interaction and support among them (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993). Consequently, students often are on their own to “meet the requirements outlined in the university catalog, with only a possible serendipitous relationship occurring between students” (Dorn, Papalewis, & Brown, 1995, p. 312).

As a reality for many counselor education students, Hayes et al. (1996) argued that the delivery of a relevant and comprehensive degree program in counselor education demands more than occasional *cognitive trips* to a nearby campus, where students complete a degree program a single course at a time, and move through graduate

education with little opportunity to collaborate with, learn from, and influence fellow learners. Noting the disruption to the potentially meaningful learning relationships caused by students “who come and go as they construct an individually tailored program,” Dryden, Horton, and Mearns (1995) pointed out that “for students to get the most out of professional counselor training, they need to experience a consistent, continuous environment in which they can learn to trust one another and, as a result, use and learn from the dynamics of a stable and developing group and involve themselves in the course at a deeply personal level” (p. 17).

Counseling professionals have had a long standing interest in groups, and group work is an important area of training in a counseling program (Dryden et al., 1995; Hughes, 2001). However, counselor education students’ group training experiences typically have been addressed from a clinical perspective, rather than from an educational perspective (Hughes, 2001). Much of the change and growth in the counseling profession during the last two decades reflects the profession’s “faith in the products of collaboration” (Hayes, et al., 1996, p. 382). However, a collaborative process has yet to be fully embraced, and translated into a preparation model in many counselor education programs (Hayes et al.).

While learner interaction and engagement is “the fluid, dialectical experience that is professional counseling itself” (McNamara, Scott, & Bess, 2000, p. 72), much of the practice of counselor education continues to occur primarily through teacher-centered *talk and chalk*. Consequently, decisions about collaborative learning experiences are often left to the discretion and creativity of individual counseling faculty to make on a course-by-course basis (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Paisley & Hayes, 2000). This

suggests that fellow learners as a source of influence are often underestimated in many counselor education programs (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000). Similar concerns in other disciplines, such as educational administration programs, have brought educators to the beginning of change in the philosophy and design of their doctoral programs (Chenoweth, Carr, & Ruhl, 2002), subsequently redefining the doctoral experience for students.

Fueled by a shifting educational paradigm based on an appreciation of other's value systems and commitment to group success, increasing numbers of degree programs are moving away from traditional educational models to the use of communal, or group, learning arrangements (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). In contrast to an ethos of individualism, which underlies and characterizes traditional educational programming, communal arrangements place students more toward the center of the educational experience, and support the development of community among groups of learners (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Brooks, 1998; Fahy, 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Group learning arrangements share an implicit interest in the social, rather than individual, level of participation and meaning-making (Stein & Imel, 2002), and a belief in the power of peer interaction and support among groups of learners (Fahy, 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Stein & Imel, 2002). By virtue of placing students in situations in which they have to share learning in some positive, connected manner, learning is enhanced (Astin, 1985 as cited in Tinto, 1997). Learner interaction plays a key role in the learning process, where the "relationship is as significant as the knowledge being sought" (Saltiel, 1998, p. 6).

Studies of these types of learning arrangements in undergraduate programs support a

pattern of benefits associated with more frequent student-to-student interaction (Johnson & Hill, 1996; Tinto, 1997). In addition to setting the bar higher for intellectual development while facilitating the development of a social network, ongoing learner interaction has been shown to increase a sense of group identity, uniqueness, and cohesiveness, which encourage continuity through a degree program (Astin, 1985 as cited in Tinto, 1997). Clearly, these are important issues in doctoral education, where student isolationism and stress tend to be the rule, rather than the exception (Brien, 1992; Hughes, 2001), and approximately half of all doctoral students do not complete a doctorate degree (Baird, 1993; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Dorn et al., 1995; Kerka, 1995; Tinto, 1997).

Perhaps because faculty roles have been long regarded as crucial in successfully educating professional leaders (Baird, 1992; CACREP, 1994; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Lipschutz, 1993), comparatively much less research of the influence of peers in the learning process has occurred in doctoral programs. However, a modest but growing body of data suggest that well-developed affiliations among students also matter greatly in shaping a stronger academic program, and meaningful educational experience (Bruffee, 1987; Lawrence, 1996, 1997, 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Sgroi & Saltiel, 1998; Tinto, 1997). The literature reviewed in the following chapter revealed that the emphasis on connection and relationship underlying communal-based learning arrangements contrasts sharply with instruction that is ideologically single-minded, and expert-dominated. This rouses interesting questions that challenge traditional educational models, and the traditional roles prescribed to teachers and learners as *the natural order of things* (Barr & Tagg, 1995). It is within the folds of this changing academic and social

milieu that the cohort model has emerged as a prominent model in some degree programs. By “counteracting the long apprenticeship students have had in transmission pedagogy” (Beck & Kosnik, 2001, p. 25), the cohort structure is assumed to serve as a vehicle for a new paradigm predicated on learner-centered, interactive teaching methodology (Choudhuri, 1999). According to Saltiel and Russo (2001), the cohort model is poised to play a major role in the transformation of the traditional doctoral experience. The discussion of the Apprentice Master Model and the Collaborative Cohort Model for doctoral education that follows elucidates the major differences between the traditional process of doctoral education, and the use of a cohort structure as an increasingly popular alternative.

The Apprentice-Master Model for Doctoral Education

Baird (1993) described the doctoral experience as a process of socialization to an ultimate professional role, which involves learning the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, norms, and interests of a profession. Traditionally, this process has occurred through the Apprentice Master Model (AMM), “whereby the established master inducts the new apprentice into the *mysteries of the craft*” (Yeatman, 1995, p. 9 as cited in Burnett, 1999).

As the “gatekeepers to the scholarly profession” (p. 171), graduate faculty historically have been viewed as essential to doctoral students’ induction into a profession, educational development, and degree progress (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). In addition to stimulating the acquisition of knowledge and serving as role models, the traditional roles prescribed to graduate faculty include providing information, protection,

and sponsorship, as well as guidance and access to resources and opportunities (Jacobi, 1991).

The prominence of faculty in the traditional model has been reflected in a majority of studies undertaken in doctoral programs, where the focus has been on the student-faculty relationship as a significant predictor of student satisfaction and degree completion, to the relative exclusion of focus on fellow learners in the learning process (Baird, 1993; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). A widely held humanistic view of adult learners as self-directed and intrinsically motivated may have further reinforced a view of doctoral education largely as an individualistic process. This may explain, in part, the minimal research attention given to the relationship and influence of fellow doctoral students in the learning process.

While the AMM has served many doctoral students well, the model increasingly has become associated with numerous problems, including high levels of stress and isolationism among students, and between students and the faculty (Brien, 1992), and an “unconscionably high” attrition rate, which has risen consistently during the past three decades (D’Arms, 1994, p. 52). A current national attrition rate of approximately fifty percent, irrespective of institution, academic discipline, and student selection procedures, is repeatedly cited as a major problem in traditionally organized doctoral programs (Baird, 1993; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kerka, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Overall, this suggests a substantial waste of societal, institutional, and personal resources (Kerlin, 1995).

According to Kerlin (1995), doctoral programs have “a profound obligation to pursue . . . changes aimed at increasing student success and reducing doctoral student dropout”

(p. 7). Many counselor education programs designed to bring doctoral students to candidacy in three years are taking as many as seven years or longer (Hayes et al., 1996). The phenomenon of *stopping out and dropping in* has further exasperated these issues (Kuh, 1997). In programs where a doctoral degree can be completed a single course at a time, it is not unusual for doctoral students to “place the student role on the back burner temporarily” while juggling multiple responsibilities (Kerka, 1995, p. 1). While seemingly sensitive to the personal and professional demands of the contemporary doctoral student on the one hand, the single-course-at-a-time practice in counselor education may be flexible to a fault in its potential “to turn the university into a cafeteria and the curriculum into a buffet line” (Hayes et al., p. 379).

Many doctoral programs continue to be organized and implemented in an educational system characterized by deeply entrenched power arrangements, and the transmission of knowledge in traditional ways (Horn, 2001). Growing concerns about student retention and program completion rates have “provided the catalyst for the development of alternatives to the AMM for doctoral education” (Burnett, 1999, p. 47). The assumption that a learning environment can be created to counteract the problems associated with the AMM has provided the impetus behind the contemporary cohort concept.

What is a Cohort?

A cohort is broadly defined as individuals linked as a group in some way for the purpose of learning, engineering change, or to experience an event (Glenn, 1977). In educational programs, a cohort is a unique type of group learning model, and one specific design of a learning community (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Generally, a cohort is conceptualized as an alternative organizational structure through which instructional

programming, or an entire degree program, is delivered to an intact group of students, who are bound by a common purpose or shared educational goal, proceed through coursework and a series of common learning experiences within the context of a program of study, and end the program as a single unit at approximately the same time (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Dorn et al., 1995; Lawrence, 1996, 2002). While earning a doctorate degree is an example of a shared educational goal among members of doctoral cohorts, the common *purpose* of such groups is “a promise among people that they will try to reach a given state of affairs through collaborative effort” (Zander, 1985, p. 34).

Cohort groups have been described in the literature as *collegial communities* (Barnett & Muse, 1993), *learning laboratories* (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1996; Norris & Barnett, 1994), *communities of critique* (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001), *purposeful communities* (Saltiel & Russo, 2001), *professional living arrangements* (Maher, 2001), *holding environments* (Drago-Severson et al., 2001), and *mini societies* for meeting the needs of its members (Lawrence, 1997). Like an ecological system, all learners contribute to the experiences that occur within a cohort group by providing essential matter, which synergistically serves the whole (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

Johnson and Johnson (1987) broadly envision a cohort as consisting of as few as two interactive and interdependent individuals, who share common norms and pursue individual and group objectives. The size of a typical cohort of graduate students enrolled in a degree program in Education is ten to twenty-five students (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 1996; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). While Saltiel and Russo (2001) suggest that the ideal size of a cohort is fifteen learners, cohorts as small as eight

members have been reported in the literature. Paisley and Hayes (1998) recommend no more than ten to twelve students per cohort in counselor education masters programs. No corresponding recommendations for cohort size in counselor education doctoral programs were found in the literature.

Evolution of the Collaborative Cohort Model

The Collaborative Cohort Model (CCM) has received greater attention in recent years, but the cohort concept is not new (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). Professional schools such as law and medicine, and the military, historically have grouped students into lock-step programs for study or training (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). While the term *cohort* was not used per se, the training formats used in these programs reportedly fulfilled the operational definition of cohort-based learning (Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Cohort formats have been used intermittently in other programs in higher education since the 1940s. However, early attempts to institutionalize the use of cohort structures in universities were short-lived, due to the authoritarian climate of the broader academic milieu (Basom et al., 1996). The spirit of collegiality underlying the cohort philosophy was incongruous with the prevailing views of curricular theory, and the university “trend toward rationality, order, and control” (Basom et al., p. 100). The early use of cohorts nearly vanished from mainstream preparation programs until the 1980s, when a boon of interest in the cohort concept re-emerged as part of a postmodern paradigm shift (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al.).

The Contemporary Cohort Concept

The contemporary cohort concept evolved through a study developed by the Danforth Foundation in response to criticisms of the standards used in educational administration programs, which were perceived as lacking rigor and relevant field experiences. In 1986, the Danforth Foundation created the Danforth Program for the Preparation of School Principals (DPPSP), which provided grants to universities for the purposes of revising the curriculum, and improving collaboration between universities and school districts to facilitate meaningful field-based experiences. While not required, all of the educational administration programs associated with the DPPSP chose to use a cohort-based model as part of their redesign efforts (Milstein & Associates, 1993). Ultimately, the cohort model was deemed a successful way to select students, and deliver a coherent curriculum in these programs (Weise, 1992 as cited in Saltiel & Russo, 2001). At that time, the strength of the cohort model in terms of peer support, individual and group development, and knowledge construction had yet to be realized (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

Following the Danforth study, the number of cohort-based educational leadership programs grew significantly, suggesting that cohort-based programs increasingly had become an accepted means to prepare students for certification, and masters and doctorate degrees in these programs (Basom et al., 1995; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Since that time, cohort-based models have expanded in other disciplines and degree programs (Basom et al.; Fahy, 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Types of Cohort-Based Learning Models

There is no single, uniform definition of a cohort model, nor type of cohort arrangement. Instead, there are numerous variations of the cohort model, and the definitions and purposes for which cohorts are formed can vary widely across universities and graduate departments (Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

A cohort program can be structured as a *closed*, *open*, or *fluid* cohort model (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). *Closed* models are marked by one student entry point, with students remaining in a group of unchanging peers for the duration of a degree program (Barnett & Muse, 1993). While students commit to a relatively inflexible schedule of lock-step coursework, a closed cohort also ensures that students have opportunities to develop meaningful learning relationships beyond those that might be possible among *stranger groups* of students in traditional classrooms (Maher, 2001). Contrary to what the term suggests, an *open* cohort model does not admit new members once a cohort has been selected. However, an open cohort model does offer students more flexibility and choice in coursework. For example, while students are required to complete core courses within their cohort groups, they may take additional coursework outside of their cohort groups to fulfill personal agendas or university requirements (Barnett & Muse, 1993). *Fluid* cohort arrangements emphasize voluntary participation and student initiative in group selection, thereby allowing students to enter and leave a cohort at different times in the curriculum (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). An example of a fluid cohort model is a group of dissertation-stage doctoral students, who have voluntarily agreed to participate in a group for the purposes of sharing support and stories

of progress, analyses, and findings while engaged in the process of writing their dissertations (Witte & James, 1998).

The Multiple Purposes of Cohort Arrangements

Cohort structures can be used as informal arrangements as in the case of student-initiated study circles or research groups, or more formally by faculty-initiation, for the purposes of student advisement, or to provide support, structure, and supervision to students at the dissertation phase of doctoral study (Burnett, 1999; Cesari, 1990; Holmes, Bird, Seay, Smith & Wilson, 2008; Witte & James, 1998). Similarly, cohort structures have been formed for short-term purposes, such as to group students for the completion of several courses, or for longer term purposes, as when an entire curriculum is delivered through a cohort structure. Cohort programs are not limited to face-to-face learning situations. Cohort-based programs have emerged in distance learning programs as a means to build community and support among groups of on-line learners, and reportedly are fulfilling these objectives (Frey & Alman, 2002; Lawrence, 1999, 2000).

Irrespective of the format and purpose for which they are used, cohort groups are temporary, finite communities, and though the relationships formed among students may continue after program completion, the lifecycle of a cohort group formally ends once the purpose for which it was formed has been achieved (Lawrence, 1997).

Cohort Programming as Model of Efficiency

At many campuses, cohort arrangements are viewed as efficient models of instructional programming, because they address many of the administrative obstacles commonly encountered in non-cohort programs (Barnett et al., 2000). An intact group of pre-selected students can reduce scheduling problems by streamlining registration, and

guaranteeing course availability in a sequence, which is determined ahead of time. In addition to providing some assurance that program enrollment will be consistent, adequate, and cost-effective, the faculty can regularly predict the courses required for cohort groups (Barnett & Muse, 1993). While students give up some freedom to select courses and the order in which they take them, they gain the security of knowing they will not be closed out of required courses (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Students also gain regular access to faculty, and a *no surprises* program of study with a clearly prescribed pathway to degree completion (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Information of this nature can influence prospective doctoral students, who may be drawn to a doctoral program with a more predictable and specific time frame, and a greater chance of completion (Kerka, 1995).

Cohort Programming as Unique Learning Experience

Expedience notwithstanding, cohort programs often are marketed as comprehensive, pre-packaged educational programs, which offer students a *different kind* of graduate experience (Geltner, 1994; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). From this perspective, a cohort is regarded as much more than an organizational structure (Norris & Barnett, 1994). Cohort programs have been lauded for their potential to create more coherent educational programs, including stronger links between theory and practice, and closer relationships between the faculty and students (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). Cohort programs also have been recognized as having the potential to establish supportive relationships among learners, and for modeling a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, which students can apply in their professional settings (Beck & Kosnik, 2001).

Cohort programs are intentionally designed to allow greater interaction among peers over a longer period than in traditional classrooms (Maher, 2004). Doctoral cohort groups can remain together for as long as three to five years (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). Consequently, a student who enrolls in a cohort program can expect to engage in a process-driven, group learning experience, which emphasizes peer collaboration and activity-oriented approaches to teaching and learning as the primary pedagogy for moving students through the curriculum and program (Maher, 2004; Mealman & Lawrence, 2000; Holmes, Tangney, Fitzgibbon, Savage, & Mehan, 2001).

The Rationale Behind the Cohort Concept

The basic rationale behind the cohort concept echoes classic gestalt wisdom; that is, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Saltiel, Sgroi, & Brockett, 1998, p. 1). The success of the cohort approach lies in members’ beliefs that they can be more effective together than alone in accomplishing shared goals, and in empowering each other to achieve individual goals (Geltner, 1994; Holmes et al., 2008). Moreover, when students with different knowledges, skills, and ways of knowing come together as a community for a sustained period of time, a *collaborative pot* of knowledge is created through their interaction and dialogue, which is greater than the knowledge the individual member brings to the group (Lawrence, 2002).

The concepts of learning from peers and sharing applications for learning are fundamental to the cohort model (Larsen & McInerney, 1997). Characteristically, these concepts are underestimated, undervalued, and underutilized in the traditional educational model. According to Lawrence (1997), embracing the cohort concept is as much a process of unlearning as it is new learning, because participation in a cohort group

involves *letting go* of the notion of universal truths, and being open to what can be learned from *all* others, not just teachers. In contrast to the traditional conceptualization of the *educator as master/expert* and the *student as apprentice*, cohort models support the development of new roles and relationships between faculty and students, and among learners themselves. Given that a majority of current doctoral students are probably “products of traditional educational systems that have emphasized individual learning as defined and controlled by an authority figure . . . to become effective learners in a cohort program, they must unlearn individualism and learn collaboration” (Saltiel & Russo, 2001, p. 19).

The Cohort Philosophy

Academic programs that are structured and delivered through a cohort model are viewed as formalizing a collaborative structure, which supports students to assume more active roles and greater collegial responsibility as *the other socialization agents* in the learning process (Baird, 1993; Goodlad, 1990), and support of their peers. Traditionally, students’ socialization of professional norms has occurred on an individual basis, rather than as a close-knit group (Su, 1990), and was primarily the faculty’s responsibility. Program faculty will always be needed to demonstrate new skills, provide academic and theoretical rigor in the learning process, and guide groups of students for effective learning to occur (Saxe, 1986). However, in a postmodern age, faculty members are challenged to design and facilitate learning in ways that support the development of vibrant discourse communities among groups of learners (Parkyn, 1999).

As a form of relationships among learners, rather than simply a structure, the concept of community is vital to the cohort model (Lawrence, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002; Saltiel &

Russo, 2001). Defined as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98), a *community* implies a common agenda, shared values, and an emphasis on interpersonal concerns (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Consequently, participation in a cohort can influence students’ interpersonal relationships in ways which significantly differ from those of students in non-cohort programs. For example, the idea that students will become interdependent, and engage in behaviors which promote learning and group growth, such as sharing personal resources and instructional and emotional support, implies a new level of commitment as learners encounter experiences not typically found in other learning situations (Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Lawrence, 1996, 1997, 2002; Su, 1990).

The Distinguishing Characteristics of Cohorts

Saltiel and Russo (2001) suggest that four primary characteristics distinguish cohorts from other types of learning groups: a) Defined membership over an extended period; b) common goal and shared purpose that can best be achieved when members are academically and emotionally supportive of one another; c) compressed, intensive class schedule, wherein students meet less frequently, but for longer class sessions, often in three-hour modules during evening, weekend, and summer sessions, and; d) network of synergistic learning relationships, which is developed and shared among members.

The literature also suggests that interdependence, intense relationships, a shared identity and discourse history, and cohort agency further distinguish cohorts from other types of learning groups.

Interdependence

The most striking difference between cohort and non-cohort programs is the interdependent nature of the learning process in cohort programs (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Holmes et al., 2008; Lawrence, 1996, 1997; Maher, 2001; Norris & Barnett, 1994). Interdependence raises the stakes for all members of the group by reinforcing a deep sense of commitment to the growth and well being of all members (Lawrence, 2002; Papalewis & Dorn, 1993; Teitel, 1997). Each member is viewed as having something of value to contribute (Lawrence, 1996). Individual development and group growth are reciprocal processes, with the group simultaneously supporting and growing in proportion to the accomplishments of its individual members (Basom et al., 1996; Lawrence, 1996, 1997).

Intense Relationships

Participation in a cohort group creates an intense learning experience, which students often underestimate (Maher, 2005). In long term, closed cohorts in particular, interpersonal relationships (and students' emotional reactions to them) can be intense (Maher, 2005; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Group members come to know one another on a more personal level than traditional learners, including one another's academic strengths and weaknesses (Barnett & Muse, 1993). While greater familiarity can enhance the development of trust and openness within a group on the one hand, it also can make personal issues and interpersonal conflicts more visible (Lawrence, 1996; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). In a cohort context, everything tends to be magnified and intensified, including the degree of satisfaction with the quality of one's peers, the faculty, and program (Teitel, 1997).

Shared Identity

While cohorts often start out as random groups of strangers (Lawrence, 1996), defined membership over an extended period creates a context for shared experiences, and a shared history (Maher, 2001). In the course of taking the same coursework, working together to complete similar assignments, having coffee and lunch breaks together, and holding the same status in a program (Goodlad, 1990), the group develops a shared identity and discourse history, which is uniquely its own (Dorn et al., 1995; Lawrence, 1996, 1997; Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Wesson, Holman, & Cox, 1996). Rituals, jargon, and other idiosyncracies specific to each group often emerge spontaneously, further reinforcing a shared identity (Brooks, 1998; McKee, Smith, Hayes, Stewart, & Echterling, 1999). A strong collective identity binds members together, and contributes to their completion of a degree program (Dorn et al.). At times, it also can be a cohesive force with which to be reckoned (Basom et al., 1996).

Cohort Agency

By virtue of their common experiences and ongoing nature, cohort groups develop power bases not typically found among learners in traditional programs (Teitel, 1997; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). The discovery of a *group voice* can be used as an united front to challenge the faculty's authority, or influence the agenda of a program (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Barnett et al., 2000; Maher, 2004; Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Teitel, 1997). While students in non-cohort programs can challenge faculty members, they do not tend to have the same organizational ability and cohort agency as cohort groups (Brooks, 1998; Maher, 2004; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

An effective cohort is much more than a group of people who happen to share a common goal, space, time, professors, and assignments (Yerkes, Basom, Norris, and Barnett, 1995). A cohort model alone does not guarantee the effectiveness of a cohort group, nor that students will identify with the group in meaningful ways (Norris & Barnett, 1994). Group norms, dynamics, and other phenomena can develop in cohorts, which have the potential to limit or enhance the cohort experience for group members. The factors influencing group effectiveness are reviewed in Chapter Two.

The Hoped-for Benefits of a Cohort Experience

The extant data suggest that participation in a cohort is beneficial in terms of addressing learners' needs for human contact, affiliation, and community (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000; Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001). A relatively consistent research finding is that the network of social ties developed within a cohort group provides both intellectual stimulation, and a strong base of socio-emotional peer support as movement is made through a degree program (Barnett et al., 2000; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Brooks, 1998; Dorn et al., 1995; Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2001; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Reynolds & Hebert, 1995; Twale & Kochan, 2000). In addition to a richer learning experience, supportive relationships developed among peers in a graduate cohort can be a source of stability in an otherwise chaotic life (Lawrence, 1996; 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Peer support has been linked to motivation and persistence in educational programs (Brien, 1992; Burnett, 1999; Cesari, 1990, Dorn et al., 1995; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Holmes et al., 2008; Witte & James, 1998).

Participation in a cohort group provides students with an experiential model of collegiality, which mirrors how knowledge is generated in the academic disciplines and

professions. Peer consultation and networking are the hallmarks of cohort programming (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Cohorts can connect learners to networks of future colleagues (Boes, Ullery, Millner, & Cobia, 1999; Twale & Kochan, 2000; Wesson et al., 1996), setting the stage for a continuation of these activities in their professional lives (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Bruffee, 1993).

Despite the reported benefits, cohort programs do not purport to be a good match for all students. *Goodness of fit* is an important consideration, and the decision to enter a cohort program should be a fully intentional one, rather than an incidental one (Maher, 2004). Unfortunately, the structure of a program as a cohort model often is not a driving force in students' decision to enroll in a graduate program (Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2001). Students who discover a *mismatch*, or have difficulty adapting to the group learning approach, generally opt out of a cohort program during the first year of study (Maher, 2004), often during the first semester (Lawrence, 1996). Nonetheless, cohort programs do tend to attract and provide an option for students with *different* expectations of faculty and peers, which cannot be met by a traditional academic program model (Lawrence, 1996; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Research-based data of cohort-based programs have yet to be tied directly to counselor education doctoral students. This is surprising given that many counselor education doctoral students' support systems are intransigent to their academic departments, rather than endemic parts of their program models (Boes et al. 1999). Historically and today, opportunities to interact with fellow learners in counselor education programs have been limited primarily to the formation of study groups outside of the classroom, or to membership in peripheral organizations for intermittent interaction

with like-minded peers (Boes et al.). This suggests that there is substantial value in a research agenda which focuses on students' experiences in the ExCES program, where doctoral preparation occurs only through a program-long, program-wide cohort model.

Unpacking the *Black Box* of the Cohort Experience

What is it like to be in the world of a cohort? One conclusion drawn from the literature is that more research is needed to “unpack the black box” (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001, p. 633) of the cohort experience. Barnett et al. (2000) reported that the faculty in educational leadership programs tend to believe that cohort participants realize the importance of collaborating and supporting each other, and view their participation in a cohort as an opportunity to develop important group process skills. Other findings suggest that the cohort model is a *mixed blessing* (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2003), representing some of the best efforts in education, and some of the worst encounters (Tom, 1997). As students' experiences in cohort programs have become more of a focus of research of the cohort model, some data suggest that there are far more complex issues associated with positive cohort experiences than first realized (Maher, 2004).

As is characteristic of productive groups of any nature, cohorts “develop over time and with intention” (Lawrence, 2002, p. 83), and require initial structuring, effective leadership, and vigilant maintenance to evolve into thriving learning communities (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Maher, 2004, 2005). Without the development of a sense of community and norms supporting group performance, or when simply left to chance, the cohort model is less effective as a learning tool (Maher, 2004; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Tom, 1997). As Maher (2004) observed, “A poorly implemented and maintained cohort can quickly become a liability for everyone involved” (p. 20).

Emerging issues in a modest body of research-based data of students' experiences in cohort programs suggest that cohorts are subject to a collection of personal, interpersonal, and programmatic influences, which interact and operate within the space of cohorts. Students' experiences in cohort programs can be highly variable with respect to these contextual influences (Saltiel & Russo, 2001; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). While much remains to be gleaned about the cohort phenomenon from students who have had a cohort experience, this suggests that understanding contextual influences is tantamount to understanding students' experiences in cohort programs, and how they make sense of their experiences.

Everyday Experience From a Lifeworld Perspective

At the heart of the phenomenological research tradition is the primacy of *lived experience*, the everyday situations and events through which life is assigned meaning. Derived from the German word, *Erlebnis*, which literally means *living through something*, lived experience refers to a person's immediate experience of a phenomenon as the phenomenon is occurring (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) explained lived experience as the sensory domain of experience, which occurs in our direct acquaintance with things; that is, "the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it" (p. 9). Lived experience often goes unnoticed, because it lies beneath our conscious awareness.

The *Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, is a core concept in phenomenology, first formulated by Husserl, and further explicated by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The lifeworld is the realm of our everyday engagements, where we participate in activities, encounter other people, and go about our everyday lives. The lifeworld is the symbolic world of

everyday life and relationships as directly experienced, or *lived* by a person (van Manen, 1990). The human lifeworld is complex, because individuals typically move between several lived worlds in their daily or weekly lives, such as the lived world of the parent, work, teacher, or student (van Manen, 1990; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). Lifeworlds can be related, but there often are very disjunctive spheres of experience between them. Each lifeworld has its own knowledges and practices; consequently, we engage in different discourse in different contexts. Things happen in one lifeworld, which never occur in the others (van Manen, 1990).

Everyday lifeworlds are characterized by a vast, fundamental inventory of preconscious webs of meanings, including unquestioned assumptions, feelings, and emotions (van Manen, 1990). While these enable us to go about business as usual, executing daily activities in a routine-like, “almost unthinking manner” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 167), the webs of meanings among individuals inhabiting a lifeworld are tacit and taken-for-granted, and easily elude us (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

It is a paradox that the lived world of everyday life is so *commonplace* that the realness of the things we encounter is seldom questioned (van Manen, 1990). Instead, there is *duree* (p. 167); that is, a continuous coming-to-be and passing-away of phenomena, with little attention to their meanings (Bergson 1923/1965 as cited in Jarvis, 1987). To become aware of the significance and meaning in everyday lived experience, people have to separate one experience from another, reflect upon it, and give it expression and coherence through dialogue (Jarvis, 1987; Mezirow, 1991). Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij (1985) remind us that it is in the stories and re-counting of lived experience that “one names the world” (p. 69). Casting experiences in language

and stories is the interpretive process (Barritt et al., 1985; Jarvis, 1987; Mezirow, 1991; Usher, 1993; van Manen, 1990).

Interest in lived experience as a focus for human science research in education emerged through the work of Max van Manen. van Manen's (1990) book, *Researching Lived Experience*, has been influential in providing a model for phenomenological research in education, and more recently, in the nursing profession. My particular interest is in students' everyday worlds in the ExCES program, where learning occurs through a cohort model.

As the descriptive study of phenomena (lived experience), phenomenology gives a voice to taken-for-granted experience. Phenomenological inquiries rely on subjective experiential accounts, which systematically describe what is *real* for individuals from the *inside-out*, and allow a phenomenon to be understood in a fresh and conscious way (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) spoke about the "unique, particular, and irreplaceable" (p. 152) aspects of the lifeworld as *essences*; that is, the *facts* that are *already there* in experience. Phenomenology provides a means to capture these in language, bringing into nearness the feelings, values, meanings, and contexts of our experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

The counselor education doctoral student historically has been a neglected area of attention within the counseling profession. In recent years, there has been a greater response within the profession to address this gap in the research and literature, generally. However, while we have gradually accumulated a modest body of data on the contemporary counselor education doctoral student, phenomenological data on the

counselor education doctoral student's lived experiences in a program-long, program-wide cohort model are absent in the literature. Consequently, the faculty involved with doctoral programs structured as cohort models has operated without the benefit of research-based descriptions of students' experiences in cohort-based programs to guide practice.

The Inquiry

In this inquiry, I sought to describe how ExCES students describe and make sense of their cohort, and other university, experiences; that is, how they think and feel about their experiences. The focus of this inquiry is on experience from the *emic* points of view of current and former ExCES students, rather than on the academic program, *persons* having the experience, or a problem to be investigated per se (van Manen, 1990). The information I was after relied on an exploration of *phenomen*, the experience of things as they appear to individuals, as opposed to *noumen*, the concrete, physical things as they exist in the material world (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). I did not attempt to evaluate learning, nor describe activities that occur in cohorts. My intent was to gain an in-depth understanding of the common ways students collectively experience and perceive their everyday situations and relationships in the ExCES program.

Phenomenologists use the term *intersubjective world* to describe the common meanings that exist within a plurality of subjectivities among individuals sharing a world, and having a common experience (Barritt et al., 1985; Cohen et al., 2000; van Manen, 1990), including their socially agreed-upon ideas about the work they do together in the world (Rogoff, 1990). As Lawrence (1996) noted, while the articulation of lived experience might be viewed as precluding *the facts* in an experimentally-constructed

study, the priority of first-person experience is exactly what I hoped to capture. I attempted to access a range of subjective data in the form of students' reflections, stories, and first-hand experiences as members of different cohort groups in the ExCES program, with the goal of revealing the "common bonds among individual experiences" (Barritt et al., p. 36).

Crafting an understanding of lived experience is not a matter of manipulation and control, but one of openness and dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It is through language that individuals consciously bind their subjective experiences together, and express their interpretations of reality (Barritt et al., 1985; Cohen et al., 2000). Dialogue was the means of accessing and moving experiential material from the background to the foreground, where it could be seen with *fresh eyes* (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). To illuminate phenomena in students' lived worlds, I needed to understand how students encountered and understood their experiences, and then re-construct and express my understanding of students' understandings. In this sense, I served as a kind of conduit between the lived world and the readers of this research.

Conceptual Assumptions Underlying Inquiry

The conceptual assumptions guiding this research are based in phenomenology, and also complement a constructivist worldview. In many ways, phenomenology and constructivism are congruent philosophies insofar that they both deal with the fundamental question, *What is real?*, and focus on the subjective nature of reality to answer it (Schwandt, 1994). Common to phenomenology and social constructivism is a recognition of an inseparable meaningful relationship between people and the phenomena of their worlds, in which context is an important consideration. These were important

points in approaching this inquiry from the epistemological stance of social constructivism.

At the core of phenomenology is an emphasis on returning *to the things themselves*; that is, to the meaningful ways things are subjectively experienced, made sense of, and enacted in everyday life. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), we are “condemned to meaning” (p. xxii); that is, things do not exist in and of themselves, but through the meanings we attach to them. While this does not deny the existence of an external physical world independent of our perceptions, it does suggest that “all knowing is at one level subjective since it is always related to, and constructed by, the person engaging in knowing” (Willis, 2004, p. 2). The important information lies in how everyday experiences present themselves meaningfully to individuals, “and not behind in a set of internal rules, or before, in underlying causes” (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 25). As a context-bound inquiry into a situation, rather than of pre-selected variables, “there are no such things as stimuli, responses, or measurable behaviors; instead there are encounters, lifeworlds, and meanings which invite investigation” (van Manen, 1977, p. 214).

The phenomenological notion of *worlds of meaningful experience* found in everyday, ordinary life was central to this research. In everyday life, “the ordinary is full of the extraordinary which we never see until we look What was background to the important movement of our lives becomes on second look, on re-search, to be quite wonder-ful” (Barritt et al., 1985, pp. 24-25). I was not in pursuit of extraordinary experience, but the meaningful experience that can be found in the routine, mundane aspects of ordinary, daily life. To this end, I tried to forget preconceived ideas about what I was likely to find in order to see the world through students’ eyes. I used the

language of the everyday world as a tool to craft this research into a *living language*, where the readers and I have the possibility of meeting and agreeing (Barritt et al.).

From a phenomenological perspective, consciousness is an *intentional* activity, always directed toward something, and inseparable from the world. All perceptual activities *intend* toward something, and all thinking is thinking about something. Consciousness cannot exist unless it is reaching out into the world, and finds itself alive there (Barritt et al., 1985). While the total meaning of a phenomenon is always more than what is given in a single perception, my understanding began with an exploration of individual perceptions. It was through an exploration of multiple first-hand, subjective experiences and perceptions that I achieved an understanding of participants' lived experiences.

Purpose of the Inquiry

The central purpose of this inquiry was to describe and understand students' lived experiences in the ExCES program, and how they make sense of their university and cohort experiences. This was accomplished by: a) Engaging participants in reflection and dialogue about their subjective experiences in the ExCES program; b) describing lived experiences as subjectively given by participants; c) illuminating the common themes in participants' experiences, and; d) describing the everyday world in the ExCES program as collectively known and understood by the participants. As an inquiry carried out in an educational program, the lifeworld perspective proposed by van Manen (1990) provided an existential framework to explore, describe and understand phenomena in the differentiated modalities of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations.

Additionally, I was interested in unraveling contextual influences, which bear on

students' lived experiences, and the meanings of those experiences. Perceptions of phenomena are layered with personal, social, cultural, and disciplinary meanings and interpretations (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). Woven tightly like a rope, these contextualize participants' experiences throughout the program's timeframe (Mealman, 1991b). The contextual influences deemed worthy of consideration in this study were the students themselves, group influences, programmatic influences (including program faculty), and the influence of the counseling discipline and culture on students' perceptions and interpretations of everyday phenomena in the program.

Rationale for the Inquiry

Much of what we know about cohorts is still limited to descriptions of the cohort model (what it is), than to descriptions of the cohort experience (what it is like). A modest number of qualitative studies have illuminated different aspects of the student experience in cohort groups (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Holmes et al., 2008; Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2001; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997; Wesson et al., 1996). According to Maher (2001), research has yet to adequately capture the phenomenological significance of what the cohort experience is like for the students who are *living* it.

Our current understanding of the cohort model remains limited in three ways: a) Research-based data on the cohort experience has developed without reference to the counselor education doctoral student; b) there is a paucity of data on cohort-based programs in counselor education generally, and references to counselor education programs designed as a cohort model have been limited to masters programs, and; c) counselor education doctoral students' lived experiences in a cohort model have not been

an explicit focus of inquiries to date. Research in these areas seemingly has gone on in parallel without crossing. This is a liability to the profession, where a call for research to “define a pedagogical center for counseling” (Sexton, 1998a, p. 69), and to identify alternative formats and program models to guide the dissemination of the profession’s core knowledge and values, has been ongoing (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Nelson & Jackson, 2000; Sexton, 1998a). As a rich line of inquiry that has yet to be pursued directly in the ExCES program, or any other counselor education doctoral program, this inquiry is a beginning step to bridge this gap in the literature.

This inquiry is unique in that it is the first exploration of ExCES students’ lived experiences in the cohort model since the program’s inception in 1997. ExCES students are rich sources of data, and much can be gleaned about the cohort experience from the perspectives of former and current students in the ExCES program. There is a concomitant need to understand lived experiences from students’ perspectives if we are to learn how the program model is serving students in meaningful ways, and how it can be improved. Current trends in counselor education and the contemporary workplace also provide cogent rationales for this inquiry, highlighting the inquiry’s value in relation to the broader contexts connected to the ExCES program.

Trends in Counselor Education

As is characteristic of many professions, “history and tradition have been the primary pedagogical guides for counselor educators” (Sexton, 1998a, p. 69). Unfortunately, these may no longer be adequate to accommodate the contemporary counseling student’s training needs (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Hayes et al., 1996), nor the changes in society’s cultural and workplace systems, where counseling professionals are

likely to be employed (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998).

The appropriateness of the traditional educational model for counselor education has been challenged with allegations that the model can be insensitive to female and minority students, who may face unique issues in their degree progress (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998). While Nelson and Jackson (2000) previously identified the cohort model as worthy of exploration to determine its efficacy for counselor education, a research response at the doctoral-level has been slow to emerge. If the quality of counseling students' preparation ultimately is reflected in the contributions and impact they make in their professional careers (Paisley & Hayes, 2000), then research focusing on doctoral students' training experiences potentially would be as informative for the profession as for counselor education (Hughes, 2001; West, Bubenzer, Brooks, & Hackney, 1995). Experiencing a cohort process may be especially relevant for doctoral students, who will become the future faculty in counselor education programs.

Trends in the Contemporary Workplace

In much the same way that the hierarchical structures that have characterized the traditional academy have increasingly moved toward more process-oriented structures, the workplace also is changing. In recent years, there has been a rising need for competent individuals who can meet the demands of the professional, ethical, legal, multicultural, and supervisory aspects of the counseling field. The need for educational models designed to meet these demands has never been greater (Association of American Universities (AAU), 1998; Horn, 2001; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). As previously mentioned, traditional pedagogical models for counselor education no longer apply universally, rendering them inadequate to accommodate the change and growth in

cultural systems in the United States (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Increasing diversity in society and the workplace has intensified the need for counseling professionals to possess interpersonal and multicultural skills, which enable them to function as competent collaborators, rather than simply as individual experts (AAU, 1998; Hayes et al., 1996; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000). The complex challenges created by an increasingly interdependent world are more effectively met by groups of people than by individuals working alone (Marsick & Kasl, 1997). Cohort formats are considered one means of facilitating the changes needed to ensure that these challenges are met.

Researchers have garnered some support for the idea that learning to work collaboratively may require *learning to learn* collaboratively (Brown, 2001). The experiential nature of cohort-based learning reportedly supports the development of the types of skills needed to work effectively as a team member, and with diverse groups of individuals (Brown, 2001; Hayes et al., 1996; Hill, 1995). The impact of a cohort experience on subsequent workplace practices and job performance remains speculative (Barnett et al., 2000; Reynolds & Hebert, 1995; Twale & Kochan, 2000). However, some data suggest that students are more likely to incorporate the knowledge and skills gained through a cohort experience into their workplace practices (Basom et al., 1996; Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Geltner, 1994; Goodlad, 1990; Hayes et al.; Mezirow, 1991; Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 1997; Norton & Sprague, 1997; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Norton and Sprague (1997) found that teachers who had participated in a cohort group for teacher education assumed greater leadership roles in the schools in which they were employed, served on more committees, presented at more professional conferences,

and conducted more workshops, compared to teachers who were not trained through a cohort model. The researchers concluded that the education of educators matters, because

education is a self-replicating system. New teachers entering the system bring with them the same beliefs as their predecessors. . . . Thus, teachers continue to teach the way they were taught. It is possible that teachers need to experience alternative teaching strategies as part of their own learning. These experiences may then precipitate changes in the perception of the teaching/learning process. (p. 3)

In what has become known as *transformational learning* (Mezirow, 1991), this suggests that counselor education doctoral students who aspire to professorships, and have been exposed to non-traditional models such as the cohort model, may be more committed to creating collaborative learning environments when they assume teaching positions than those students who were trained in a non-cohort model (Goodlad, 1990).

Theoretical Framework for the Inquiry

It should be noted that in phenomenological inquiries, the interest is in *original* experience, rather than in interpretations of human phenomena within the context of theories (van Manen, 1990). Explorations of lived experience are intended to broaden our understanding of what *is* to individuals, rather than *why* it is what it is. For this reason, greater consideration is given to contextual influences than to theoretical explanations to understand lived experiences. However, in addition to an examination of contextual influences, I also attempted theoretical triangulation in this inquiry.

The theoretical framework consists of a set of theories and related literature, which inform the psychological, social, and contextual aspects of participation in a cohort group. The theoretical framework includes Bandura's (1977a, 1977b, 1986) social cognitive learning theory, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of cognitive development, Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 2005) bio-ecological systems theory. As a relevant construct, literature on social support also was reviewed. A brief overview of these theories, and their relevance to the inquiry, follows. A detailed discussion of each theoretical perspective, including the construct of social support, is provided in Chapter II.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b), later renamed *social cognitive learning theory* (Bandura, 1986), assumes a view of human agency as involving subjective consciousness, deliberate action, and the capacity for self reflection as individuals observe and learn from others, assess personal competence relative to a model, and regulate their behavior accordingly. Through its contribution of the influence of observational learning, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and reciprocal determinism, social cognitive learning theory suggests that participation in a cohort group exposes students to a range of interpersonal processes and competent models, which impact learning and socialization. The theory has the potential to inform the spatial, temporal, and interpersonal aspects of lived experience.

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of cognitive development is relevant in terms of illuminating the spatial and relational realms of lived experience in this inquiry. The concepts of the *More Knowledgeable Other* (MKO) and the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) are particularly applicable. Given that peers possess a range of

shareable knowledge and skills, capable peers may serve as *expert others* and *scaffolds* to new areas of learning. The theory also acknowledges cultural influences on learning and development, which can inform aspects of group participation and students' interpretations of their experiences in cohort groups.

Given that the goal shared by the inquiry's participants is the completion of a doctorate degree, Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) is relevant to examine psychological development and well-being in relation to the affordances and obstacles in the learning environment. The theory suggests an important relationship between the attributes of the learning space, and the fulfillment of the human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. SDT provides an understanding of lived space and lived relationships in the ExCES program from a motivational and contextual perspective not addressed by the aforementioned theories.

According to bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 2005), development is the result of the dynamic interaction of the developing person and all levels of his or her ecological environment. The theory provides a model to examine psychosocial development in relation to the physical and social environment of the cohort group and doctoral program. An examination of lived experiences from a systems perspective is useful to get a picture of the risk and protective factors and processes operating within students' learning environments. The theory has applied significance insofar that interventions at any level of the ecological system can enhance the capacity of the system.

The Research Questions

The question at the heart of the inquiry is: What are the lived experiences of doctoral students in the cohort model in the ExCES program at Duquesne University, and how do they make meaning of their university, and other *world*, experiences?

Related, subsidiary questions provide a context for guiding and informing the central research question. The subsidiary questions posed are: 1) How can students' lived experiences in the ExCES program be described in the differentiated dimensions of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relationships? 2) What are the common ways students make sense of their lived experiences in the ExCES program? 3) What contextual influences can be identified, and how do these bear on students' experiences in the ExCES program, and the meanings of those experiences?

Delineation of the Research Inquiry

The existential framework proposed by van Manen (1990) provided a conceptual structure to enter students' everyday world in the ExCES program, and illuminate phenomena in the world. According to van Manen (1990), all phenomenological research is an exploration of a lifeworld, with the goal of apprehending the meanings of individuals' lived worlds.

Regardless of a lifeworld's historical, cultural, or social context, all lifeworlds consist of four basic themes, or *structures*, which can be used to describe any lived experience (van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) referred to these themes as "existentials" (p. 101), which he identified as *corporeality*, *spatiality*, *temporality*, and *relationality*. Together, the existentials form an intricate unity, which are always part of a given phenomenon. While research provides an opportunity to explore and understand

lived experience in the differentiated dimensions of these four modalities, in reality, the existentials are not separate. They are over-lapping and interconnected, and “one existential always calls forth the other aspects” (van Manen, 1990, p. 105).

Corporeality, or lived body, refers to the phenomenological fact that “we are always bodily in the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 103); that is, we are already in the world as bodily subjects before becoming aware of ourselves as separate from the world we inhabit (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002). According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), the body is the ontological ground of experience; that is, the way we are in the world. Given that experiencing and knowing are *embodied*, sensory experience is an important component of lived experience.

Spatiality is *felt* space as opposed to physical space, or space pertaining to distance or mathematical dimensions. According to van Manen (1990), “we do not ordinarily reflect on it. . . .yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. . . [we may] become the space we are in” (p. 102). Perceptions of *place* can be part of lived space.

From a phenomenological point of view, “Events do not take place as much as they take time in a place” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 49). While time can be experienced as a linear succession of hours and days, we also are oriented to time in terms of a past, present, and future; that is, what has been, what is, and what has yet to be (Ricoeur, 1988). Lived time, or *temporality*, is subjective time, as opposed to time measured objectively by clocks and calendars. Temporality is the component of awareness that remains after the frequency and regulation of time is removed. Lived time can be experienced as definable moments, as when temporal shifts in events, or incidents, cause

us to pause, and take notice of where we have been and where we are headed, or more seamlessly, as when events seem to flow smoothly, one into another. van Manen (1990) explained temporality as “the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious, as in the dentist’s chair. Lived time is our temporal way of being in the world past, present and future constitute horizons of a person’s temporal landscape” (p. 104).

Relationality refers to the existential experience of *the others*; that is, “the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). Relationality was illuminated through students’ descriptions of social interaction within a cohort, including the relationships developed with doctoral peers and the faculty in the ExCES program.

Significance of the Inquiry

As the first inquiry of students’ lived experiences in the ExCES program, the data generated by the inquiry increase our understanding of the cohort phenomenon in the ExCES program, because it brings to light aspects of what it is like, and what it means to be part of a group on the journey to complete a doctorate degree in the ExCES program.

The inquiry is significant to the participants and all ExCES students, because the data were generated by students like themselves. As key stakeholders of their educational experiences, there is inherent value in students having the opportunity to reflect and give voice to experiences, concerns, and perceptions. Doing so brings the cohort experience into view in ways which otherwise may have escaped their awareness.

From a pedagogical point of view, the significance of this inquiry lies in bringing the faculty closer to understanding the lives of those for whom they bear pedagogic

responsibility (Tesch, 1990). Understanding how students encounter and construe the world tells us something about our impact as educators from a perspective beyond our own skin. This is important, because in order to function well, “cohorts need guidance from educators who understand the specific concerns of the students as individuals and as members of a group” (Maher, 2004, p. 23). Phenomenological data inform us about common occurrences, and how students may be inclined to think, feel, and act. This information empowers and guides the faculty to interact with students in ways that may differ from educators who lack such understanding. Program faculty can apply this understanding in their daily interactions with cohort groups, and respond meaningfully when difficulties arise. Similarly, an awareness of contextual influences can enlighten the faculty regarding phenomena which is, and is not, within their control. Equipped with such knowledge, faculty members are in better positions to address how time, space, and relations can be allocated and developed to maximize the cohort experience throughout the lifecycle of a cohort.

The findings of this inquiry are significant to others outside of the ExCES program. Research-based data on students’ lived experiences in a counselor education doctoral program designed as a program-long, program-wide cohort model provides faculty and students in other counselor education doctoral programs access to data which was previously unavailable. Individuals in similar programs can consider the usefulness of the findings in relation to their particular programs and educational experiences.

The findings of the inquiry also are significant to individuals who are considering applying to the ExCES program. The findings can assist prospective students in deciding

if the cohort structure of the program is congruent with their expectations and learning preferences.

While qualitative findings do not allow prediction, they can be used to complement the findings of research dominated by quantitative designs by giving them fuller, richer meaning. This research can be used for such a purpose, potentially contributing to the development of new theoretical constructs.

Last, this research may be of interest to the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), which currently does not maintain data on the formats of accredited doctoral programs as cohort or non-cohort (N. Bayster, CACREP, personal communication, January 27, 2003).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in the inquiry:

1. ABD: The acronym for *All But Dissertation*, which designates a doctoral candidate as having completed all required coursework with the exception of a dissertation.
2. Candidate: A doctoral student who has successfully passed comprehensive exams, and achieved status as a doctoral candidate in a doctoral program, but has not yet completed and successfully defended a dissertation.
3. Cohort: A group of students who share a common time of entry into the ExCES program and remains together as an intact group for a three year period to complete required coursework.
4. Cohort model: An instructional format designed to move intact groups of learners through a degree program in lock-step fashion.

5. Precandidate: The status held by first and second year doctoral students, who have not yet achieved candidacy in the ExCES program.

Summary

As is characteristic of many disciplines, the traditional process of counselor education has been implemented from a position that a growing body of research on learning fails to support. In a postmodern era, the focus of the learning process has broadened to include groups of learners, who are joined together to create working goals and relationships (Marsick, 1988). Restructuring counselor education in a manner which is consistent with postmodern imperatives necessitates that counselor educators re-examine their visions and program objectives, and the educational structures, processes, and experiences that best match and meet these (Hayes et al., 1996; Paisley & Hayes, 2000). Thinking *outside the lines* to develop creative approaches to problems is partly what counseling professionals do (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). However, the transfer of this *know how* into innovative program models for counselor education has been the focus of little research attention by the profession to date (Hayes et al.; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). At this time, little is known about the experience of being a counselor education doctoral student (Boes et al., 1999; Choudhuri, 1999; Hughes, 2001; Hughes & Kleist, 2005), and even less is known about the experience of being a doctoral student in a counselor education program structured as a cohort model.

Given that we are part of a profession which honors and celebrates the diversity of human experience, it is surprising that the cohort model has received so little research attention as a means to prepare doctoral students. If the story of counseling during the

21st century will be *counseling in community* as Allen (2002) suggested, relevant training may require more than curriculum-driven concerns. Adequate preparation also may require the “retooling of program philosophy and resources . . . and rethinking academic course structures and delivery” (Chenoweth et al., 2002, p. 7) to provide students with greater opportunities to participate and learn in community.

As a program-long, program-wide cohort model, the ExCES program is a living alternative to traditionally organized counselor education doctoral programs. Former and current students in the ExCES program are poised to cultivate our understanding of the cohort phenomenon in the ExCES program. This inquiry marks a beginning step in narrowing this gap of understanding in both the ExCES program and profession, and the extant literature, generally.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as five chapters. In each chapter, an introduction, followed by chapter sections and sub-sections, have been used to create an organized flow for presenting the material, and to facilitate ease of reading.

Chapter I is an introduction and overview of the inquiry. The chapter addresses the conceptual assumptions underlying the inquiry, and the purpose, rationale, theoretical framework, research questions, and significance of the inquiry.

Chapter II is a review of the literature related to the topic of this inquiry. The theoretical concepts used for the inquiry, and the findings of previous research relevant to this inquiry, also were examined to bring context and meaning to the inquiry.

Chapter III provides a thorough discussion of the research design and methods used to select participants, and to gather and analyze data. The procedures used for data

gathering and data analysis are presented in a detailed, sequential manner to show consistency between the research process and the methodologies used.

The findings of the inquiry are presented in Chapter IV. A demographic description of the purposive sample used for the inquiry is provided. Then, the findings of the analyses of the informants' subjective lived experiences are presented, followed by the presentation of the emergent themes common to the informants' lived experiences.

Chapter V is a fuller discussion of the emergent themes, contextual influences, and theoretical concepts used for this inquiry, including the conclusions drawn from the findings, the implications for research and practice, and recommendations based upon the findings. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the inquiry. The chapter concludes with my closing reflections.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this inquiry was to describe and understand the lived experiences of doctoral students in a cohort model in the Executive Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University, and how students make sense of their university, and other *world*, experiences in the program. Considering the absence of research-based data on students' experiences in counselor education doctoral programs structured as a cohort model, the literature reviewed in this chapter is relevant in terms of bringing context and meaning to the inquiry.

Following a brief overview of my search for previous scholarly work on the specific topic of this inquiry, the literature examined in this chapter is structured according to the following main headings: Review of the Theoretical Perspectives Used for the Inquiry, Social Support as a Relevant Theoretical Construct, The Phenomenological Traditions, Paradigms: The Evolving Nature of Human Belief Systems, The Romantic Paradigm: The Centrality of the Individual, The Modern Paradigm: Knowledge and Truth as Objective, Modern Discourse Models, The Postmodern Critique, The Postmodern Paradigm: Knowledge as Consensual and Tentative, Radical Constructivism: The Autonomous, Self-Organizing Knower, Social Constructivism: The Relational Knower, Social Constructionism: The Contextually-Embedded Knower, Teaching and Learning Under a Postmodern/Constructivist Paradigm, Social Constructivist Discourse, Counselor Education in a Postmodern Era, Counselor Education Doctoral Programs, Stress and the Counselor Education Doctoral Student, Factors Influential in Attrition and Persistence, Counselor Education and the Cohort Model, The Cohort Model and Social Support, The

Cohort Model and Student Persistence, The Role of the Faculty in Cohort Programs, The Influence of Group Norms and Dynamics on Group Life, Characteristics of Effective Cohorts and Group Processes, and The Student's Phenomenological Experience in Cohort Programs.

The Search for Previous Scholarly Work

Turning to the counselor education literature revealed no previous scholarly work on the specific topic of my dissertation. I found only one study directly linking counseling doctoral students with a cohort model (Burnett, 1999). However, the study was limited to the use of a cohort model with a group of school counseling students at the dissertation stage of doctoral study, rather than for the duration of an entire doctoral program.

The profession's major journal, *Counselor Education and Supervision*, was helpful in generating several articles which mentioned cohort-based programming. However, these were limited to counselor education masters programs, and cohorts were not the explicit focus of the article. The book, *Preparing Counselors and Therapists: Creating Constructivist and Developmental Programs*, published by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (2000), was a helpful source of information. Unfortunately, as was characteristic of my search of the literature generally, attention to the cohort model was cursory at best, with descriptions of some cohort-based counselor education masters programs only.

Advanced searches of the counselor education literature using a variety of search engines, databases, and combinations of key words, was equally disappointing. For example, while a search of UMI/ProQuest digital dissertation abstracts between the years 1990 and 2006 yielded a range of dissertation topics in Counselor Education, none of the

dissertation titles included the term *cohort*. Moreover, I found only two dissertations (Hoskins, 2002; Hughes, 2001), and a modest number of studies (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009) in which the terms *Counselor Education* and *Doctoral Student* appeared together in the title. In light of a paucity of literature and phenomenological data on the topic of my inquiry, the literature on cohorts reviewed in this chapter has relied mainly on findings generated in undergraduate and masters programs, but highlights findings relevant to doctoral programs. Research-based phenomenological data on counselor education doctoral students' experiences in a program-long, program-wide cohort model are absent in the literature.

The Theoretical Perspectives Used for the Inquiry

Theories and literature on groups (Forsyth, 1990; Lewin, 1951; Tuckman, 1965), and adult education theory (Knowles, 1970) have been frequently referenced when studies of the cohort model have been conducted (Maher, 2001). A major assumption guiding the development of adult programming is that adult learners are experience-rich, having accumulated *funds of knowledge* and *stocks of experiences* through interactions in the different contexts in which they have experiences (Mealman & Lawrence, 2001). The literature portrays adult learners as self-directed, pragmatic learners, who prefer to be actively involved in the learning process, where they can influence decision making, focus on problems relevant to practice, use personal experience as a foundation for learning, and build strong relationships with peers (Knowles, 1970). Much of the adult education literature advocates restructuring the educational environment and process in a manner that is consistent with the attributes of adult learners. Learning in community is a defining feature of adult educational programming, and cohorts arrangements are viewed

as compatible with adult learners' academic and social needs (Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

A majority of literature on groups has evolved in non-educational contexts. Until recently, the literature did not distinguish the unique features of learning groups from other types of groups, such as support groups, task groups, or process groups (Johnson & Hill, 1996). In many respects, cohort groups have been assumed to have similar developmental needs, processes, and dynamics as non-educational groups. While theories of group development and group dynamics may explain the possible developmental trajectory of a cohort group, and some phenomena related to how a cohort works together, Kasl, Dechant, and Marsick (1993) alleged that these do not fully capture the uniqueness of cohorts in their totality, where the focus needs to be on *learning* processes. According to Kasl et al. (1993), students' identification with a cohort as a learning group bears significantly on the types of experiences that occur within cohorts; that is, "Deliberate consciousness of a group's identity as a learning group is critical in the dynamics of group learningWhen a group frames itself as a learning group, its experience and effectiveness is changed qualitatively" (p. 153). According to Kasl et al., there is a need to examine cohorts from a perspective beyond the existing group literature.

The following sections address the theories used for this inquiry in greater detail. Common to this set of theories is a recognition of the social dimensions of learning and meaning, which are, at least, partially constructed through relationship with others. Additionally, an inter-related set of literature on social support was examined to augment the theoretical framework for the inquiry. Social support is a relevant theoretical construct insofar that it is a pervasiveness theme in findings of inquiries of cohort

models, helping to further debunk the idea that the goal of learning and development rests on individual autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Social Cognitive Learning Theory

With roots in behavioral and cognitive theories, social cognitive learning theory is concerned with how individuals operate cognitively on their social experiences, and how these cognitions influence behavior and development (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b, 1986). According to Bandura (1977b), individuals not only learn directly from their own experiences, but also indirectly from other's experiences as they observe behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes in a given context. Cognition plays a role insofar that awareness and expectations of future consequences have effects on behavior. The cognitive component moved social learning theory away from its roots in stimulus-response theory, and into the realm of information-processing theories.

Bandura (1977b) believed that vicarious learning, or modeling, played a dominant role in socialization, which he explained as behavior acquired by witnessing the consequences of other's actions. The capacity to learn by observation enables one to accumulate rules for initiating and controlling different behavioral patterns without having to acquire these gradually through individual experiences, or through a process of trial and error. Vicarious learning is critical for human performance, wherein the more complex the learning, the greater the tendency to rely on competent models (Bandura, 1977b).

Observation, modeling, and reinforcement through feedback are requisite conditions for social learning. However, to be effective (i.e., to reproduce the modeled behavior in the future), attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation also are necessary. The

attention given a model is influenced by several factors. In addition to similarity of status between learner and model, affective valence, and the functional value of the modeled behaviors also are important. Individuals are more likely to attend to, and adopt, behaviors which result in outcomes they value. Retention serves as a guide for future action, and depends on the learner's ability to remember a pattern or mental image of the behavior, and then proceed through some mental rehearsal of it. For example, coding an observed behavior by using words, labels, or images tends to result in better retention, such that when confronted with a similar situation in the future, the behavior can be reproduced. Learners can be motivated to assess their performance against a mental model, and "regulate their own behavior to some extent by visualizing self-generated consequences" (Bandura, 1977b, p. 392). In this sense, modeling processes serve a self-regulatory purpose; that is, behavior that is influenced by external sources is maintained by prescribing self-evaluative standards against which the individual judges his or her own behavior.

Bandura (1986) later extended his social learning framework as social cognitive theory. From a social cognitive perspective, the person, environment, and behavior are mutual influences. Within this triadic formulation, an individual's thoughts and beliefs (the cognitive part of the theory), are simultaneously determined and modified by social influences and structures in the environment. In turn, thoughts and beliefs influence behavior. Similarly, behavior can modify aspects of one's environment, and consequently, one's beliefs. Bandura (1986) described the process of mutual influences as *reciprocal determinism*, and noted that the strength of the influences varies, depending on the activity, individual, and circumstances.

Self-efficacy is an important concept in social cognitive learning theory, which Bandura (1977a) explained as the degree to which people *believe* they can use resources to successfully execute a task, or to develop a new skill, or behavior. Beliefs about self-efficacy are influenced by one's history of achievements, and observations of what others are able to accomplish. Individuals develop domain-specific beliefs about their abilities. These beliefs guide not only what they try to achieve, but also the effort they put into their performances. While vicarious learning suggests that a capacity for self-mastery and empowerment can emerge from observing others with these proclivities, self-efficacy addresses the cognitive component involved in self-mastery and empowerment. Unless people *believe* they have an influence, they will tend to dwell on the formidable aspects of a situation, rather than exert effort to produce a desired outcome. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of proximal determinants of human motivation, self-regulation, and action (Bandura, 1989), insofar that they mold the individual's experiences in a way that they are maintained. In this sense, Bandura believed that individuals are influential in constructing their life circumstances.

Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, described a socio-cultural model of development, which relied largely on social interaction. His views often are regarded as the springboard for the fuller articulation of the social constructivist perspective on teaching and learning (Palincsar, 1998). Although Vygotsky was developing his theory during the 1920s and 1930s, communist censorship negated the publication of his work until after his death. Consequently, his work remained unknown to most Americans until its publication in 1962.

Early applications of Vygotsky's (1978) work were mainly in the context of language-learning in children. Later applications of his model have been broader, including use of the model to facilitate the development of cognitive skills in novices, regardless of their age. In contrast with the prevailing view of learning at the time (i.e., Piaget's view), which considered learning an external process, and cognitive development an internal process, Vygotsky was concerned with the unity and interdependence of learning and development. Critical of Piaget's view of maturation "as a precondition of learning but never the result of it" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 80), Vygotsky (1978) proposed that developmental processes are awakened in the child through interaction with people in his or her environment; that is "Learning is not development; however, properly organized learning. . .sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions" (p. 90).

Central to Vygotsky's theory are the constructs of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The More Knowledgeable Other. According to Vygotsky, learners acquire increasingly more complex cognitive skills through social interaction with a skillful tutor, or More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Social interaction is necessary for childrens' *elementary* mental functions to develop into sophisticated mental processes and strategies, or *higher* mental functions. A MKO spurs cognitive development and the construction of new ideas through *expert scaffolding*, a process of helping a novice master a task, skill, or concept through supportive assistance and *collaborative dialogue*.

Typically, the MKO is a mature individual, such as a teacher, coach, or older, more accomplished person. However, an advanced peer, who possesses a better understanding, or higher ability level than the learner, also can serve as a MKO.

Early in the process, the MKO may perform and model behaviors while the novice learner observes. As the novice takes over the task, the MKO is instrumental in providing verbal instructions and feedback. Collaborative dialogue assists in the internalization of strategies, which the novice will use to monitor and regulate his or her own performance in the future. As the novice becomes increasingly proficient at self-monitoring and performing the new task correctly, the MKO becomes more of an observer, who is available to provide support and assistance when needed.

The Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky introduced the idea of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to counter Piaget's notion that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's level of development. To Vygotsky (1978), "The only good learning is that which is in advance of development" (p. 89).

To understand the relationship between development and learning, Vygotsky (1978) believed that there is an *actual* level of development and a *potential* level of development. The level of actual development refers to tasks an individual is capable of accomplishing by oneself, whereas the potential level is the level of accomplishment achieved with assistance. Vygotsky (1978) explained the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 85). While the ZPD demands skills that exceed those the learner can perform autonomously, Vygotsky regarded the

ZPD as a better, relative indicator of cognitive development than a child's *actual* level of development (Palincsar, 1998). Accordingly, learning objectives should be oriented toward the learner's ZPD, geared slightly above one's current level of knowledge, thinking, and intellectual performance. Appropriate assistance and instruction stays *ahead* of development, moving individuals forward in the ZPD, where new learning occurs. The MKO fulfills a mentoring role by providing *just enough* help and guidance so that the learner is increasingly challenged, but not frustrated.

Given an emphasis on the significance of social relationships on individual cognition and development, Vygotsky situated learning in broader social contexts. Fundamental to Vygotsky's model is the premise that full development of the ZPD depends upon full social interaction; that is, higher cognitive functions start with actual relationships. As Vygotsky (1978) noted, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57). Even tasks that are carried out alone have been contextually-influenced, insofar that the individual has internalized the beliefs, values, and *tools* of intellectual adaptation, which characterize the culture of the developing person.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) advanced an explanation of motivation from an organismic-dialectical perspective. While the theory acknowledges the role of individual competencies in goal attainment, the obstacles and affordances in the environment also are viewed as having a key role.

According to SDT, humans are endowed with growth tendencies, which form the basis for intrinsic motivation and self-determination. The optimal development and expression of intrinsic motivation and self-determination rest on the satisfaction of *autonomy, competence, and relatedness* needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although individuals are likely to express these needs differently within cultures that hold different values, these three needs are compelling, because they are “innate and life-span tendencies toward achieving effectiveness, connectedness, and coherence” in our lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). Given that these needs influence the processes that direct goal pursuits, their satisfaction is related to psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The satisfaction of only one or two of these needs is not enough, and could be expected to result in some impoverishment, or diminishment, of self-determination and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The expression of self-determination and intrinsic motivation can be thwarted when environmental structures, including key people, fail to provide the proximal relational support needed to satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Proximal relational supports may be especially important in situations involving extrinsic motivation.

While many theorists consider motivation a single concept, Deci and Ryan (1985) conceptualized motivation as lying along a continuum, with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation at opposite ends. Individuals are intrinsically motivated by activities that hold the appeal of novelty, challenge, aesthetic value, or other particular interest for them. Extrinsic motivation comes into play when activities or behaviors are not experienced as intrinsically motivated. However, people can be extrinsically motivated to engage in them when they recognize a meaningful rationale to do so. An example is

when an individual synthesizes a meaningful rationale with goals and motivations which already hold intrinsic value for them.

Nearly all social settings, including work and educational environments, implicitly or explicitly espouse certain values, and prescribe certain behaviors. While these may not always be consistent with individual values, nor spontaneously adopted by all members of a particular social group, socially-held values and behaviors can be transformed into personal values when they are promoted, modeled, and valued by significant others. In this respect, extrinsically-motivated individuals can be as authentically committed to a goal as intrinsically-motivated individuals, and can carry out culturally-valued activities in a self-determined manner, when their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are satisfied.

Bio-Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989, 2005) proposed that development is the result of the complex interaction between the developing individual and four environmental systems, or ecosystems, which he identified as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. A fifth system, the chronosystem, was added later to account for time as a broad ecological influence on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner conceptualized the ecological environment as a series of successive layers, or spheres, with the developing individual in the center like “a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). As the proximal and distal contexts of human development, each ecosystem emphasizes a different level of influence. However, the direction of influences in development is multidimensional. The characteristics within one system, including those of the

individual, can influence the other systems, and have a mediating effect on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecology of development involves the progressive, mutual accommodation between a developing person and the changing properties of the immediate setting in which he or she lives. More recently, Bronfenbrenner (2005) recognized biological influences as a primary environment, and referred to his theory as *bioecological*.

At the heart of the bio-ecological theory are *proximal processes*, which are played out in the microsystem. As the engines of development, proximal processes are the reciprocal interactions between “an active, evolving biopsychological organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996), including sources such as movies, books, and other media. The content, direction, and power of proximal processes on development vary systematically, depending on the interplay between the particular developing individual and the surrounding environment. For example, proximal processes are modified by more distal processes, such as the influence of culture, or one’s genetic makeup (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Central to Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) model is the idea that within each dimension of the ecological environment there are *developmentally instigative characteristics*, which provide more or less protection against negative influences; that is, the quality and effectiveness of the developing person’s immediate environment depend on the risk and protection within the environment, and the larger systems surrounding the individual. Protective factors exist as the perceived strengths within the person or environment, which promote psychological well-being. The absence of protective factors are risk

factors. The presence and use of self-protective factors are believed to offset negative influences, or emotional risks, and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.

The Microsystem. The microsystem is the innermost circle surrounding the individual, and is the person's immediate environmental context. The microsystem contains the informational structures and principal relationships "experienced by a developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 227). The way a person perceives these relationships is important. The term *experienced* in Bronfenbrenner's definition acknowledges that the most influential aspects of a microsystem are those perceived as having meaning to the person. Early in life, one's parents typically are most influential in development. However, as the individual's social world broadens, development occurs in conjunction with different sets of social partners, such as those in one's school, peer group, neighborhood, and religious group. The adult's microsystem typically includes relationships developed in the workplace, and other groups with which the person is actively involved.

The Mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) referred to a mesosystem as "a system of microsystems" which interact interdependently (p. 227); that is, a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person is an active participant. Each time the individual moves into a new setting, a new link, or mesosystem, is formed between the person's microsystems. An adult's mesosystem typically includes a set of linkages between home and work, or in the case of the doctoral student, between home and school, and work and school. Mesosystems exist within an exosystem, the larger social system, or community.

The Exosystem. An exosystem consists of two or more settings, or social networks, in which the developing person does not have an active role, but in which events occur that influence the person's experiences in the microsystem. The exosystem can be thought of as the important environments and social networks for significant others in the person's microsystem. For example, the exosystem for a child is "the relation between the home and the parent's workplace, for a parent, the relations between the school and the neighborhood group" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 227). For the doctoral student, the exosystem can be the relations between fellow doctoral peers' homes and workplaces, or the relations between the program faculty and university administrators.

The Macrosystem. The macrosystem is the outermost sphere, and most abstract system of influence. While not a context per se, Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the macrosystem as "a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or broader social context. . . .the developmentally-investigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange" (p. 228). Macrosystemic influences endow meaning in particular social networks, and influence the consistencies in the inner circles of the ecological system as reflected in the social order, norms, and rituals of everyday life.

The Chronosystem. Given the inter-relatedness among the ecosystems, the ecosystems change over time through dynamic interaction. The chronosystem refers to the patterning of significant events, socio-historical conditions, and transitions that occur over the individual's life course. Given that the chronosystem develops over time as result of life experiences, the chronosystem reflects changes in the developing person,

systems, or both. Accordingly, growth and change in the individual or environment can modify relationships and proximal processes.

Social Support as a Relevant Theoretical Construct

Social support is an interpersonal phenomenon, arising within the context of relationships, and accessible to individuals through their affiliations and social ties to individuals, groups, and the larger community (Hirsch, 1981). There is no consensus in the literature regarding the definition and operationalization of social support.

Historically, social support has been understood as an intuitive, subjective concept, because it has been studied primarily from the perspective of *perceived* support, rather than as a more objective measurement of the actual support provided, or *received* (Dalgard, 2009).

Cutrona (1996) defined social support as the “fulfillment by others of basic ongoing requirements for well-being . . . and the fulfillment of more specific time-limited needs that arise as the result of adverse life events or circumstances” (p. 3). Social support makes an individual feel cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and that he or she is a member of a network (Cobb, 1976). Social support can be continual, provided through enduring relationships with family members or long term friends. Similarly, social support can be developed in response to a need, such as a crisis-related situation (Caplan, 1974), including the support provided through formal professional intervention, such as counseling. The common thread throughout the literature on social support networks is the connection between support and the augmentation of the individual’s ability to draw upon his or her own strengths and resources (Caplan, 1974; House, 1981). Whether verbal or nonverbal, “proffered by social intimates or inferred by their presence”

(Gottlieb, 1983, pp. 28-29), social support helps individuals mobilize psychological resources, and master emotional burdens by sharing tasks, or providing tangible supplies, skills, and guidance (Caplan, 1974).

Types of Social Support

House (1981) identified four broad types of support as: a) emotional support; b) appraisal support; c) informational support, and; d) instrumental support. Often, these types of supportive behaviors are dynamically-related (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983).

The most commonly recognized form of social support is emotional support, which comes mainly from family and close friends (House, 1981). Emotional support is characterized by listening, empathy, concern, caring, and trust. Appraisal support is characterized by the perception that one is capable of getting feedback about behavior, thoughts, or feelings, and often is evaluative. Appraisal support typically is provided by family, friends, co-workers, or community sources. Informational support takes the form of advice, suggestions, or directives, while instrumental support consists of concrete sources of aid, such as money, time, physical assistance, or other explicit interventions made on a person's behalf. Based on their review of the support literature, Barrera and Ainlay (1983) also identified positive social interaction for the purpose of recreation, relaxation, or companionship, as a form of social support.

Social support is most effective when it is under the individual's control to decide whether, and how, to access it (Brewin, 2003), and when it matches and fulfills the individual's need (Cohen & McKay, 1982). For example, if material resources are needed, assistance provided through advice, or emotional support, may not necessarily be perceived by the individual as helpful.

Social Networks

The system through which social support is available is called a social network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). As mentioned previously, social networks include natural kinship ties, friendship circles, and more informal relationships, such as those maintained with neighbors, colleagues, and community groups with which one is affiliated. Social networks provide individuals access to resources, opportunities for social influence, social engagement, meaningful social roles, and intimate one-on-one contact (Berkman & Glass, 2000). With the exception of social support provided through professional intervention, exchanges of support within a network often are mutually influenced by an expectation of reciprocity, wherein seeking assistance is done with the understanding that the recipient will grant assistance back at another time.

While social support is provided *through* a social network, all social networks are not social *support* networks, and all members of a social support network are not necessarily supportive. Supportive and nonsupportive ties frequently coexist within a given social network (Wellman, 1981). In some cases, social networks can encompass certain characteristics (and individuals), which are perceived as a source of problems (Halle & Wellman, 1985). For example, counseling practitioners have long recognized the potential of their clients' social networks to weaken, or support, the efforts of professional help. Barrera (1981) used the term *conflicted support* to describe the effect of social support when it is provided by individuals, who are perceived as unsympathetic, disparaging, or as sources of interpersonal conflict within a social network. Decreasing interpersonal conflict in a social network is important, because seeking and obtaining positive forms of support not only increase the perception of the availability of support

(Barrera, 1981), but also strengthen social ties and future help-seeking behaviors within a network (Wheaton, 1985).

A social support network is a complex, multidimensional construct, involving both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitative dimensions include the structural characteristics of a network, such as network size, resources, diversity, and types, duration, and frequency of interaction and supportive exchanges among members. The qualitative dimensions of a social network generally are reflected in individual perceptions of the availability of support, attitudes toward seeking assistance, and skills in accessing and maintaining relationships within the network (Heller & Swindler, 1983).

A majority of research on social support networks has focused on *personal* networks; that is, the relationships surrounding a specific person, who is considered the primary unit of analysis (Barrera, 1981), such as a client in a treatment program (Scott, 2000). By contrast, a *whole* network focus is concerned with the structure and pattern of social relationships, and supportive exchanges that occur among members of a defined network (Scott, 2000). In addition to the nature of the social bonds among members, the researcher's interest is in the flow of information and resources through network ties, including how cleavages affect the system. The extent of trust developed between members, and their shared understandings regarding how they should care for and behave toward one another, are examples of whole network foci, which Putnum (2001) described as *social capital*.

Generally, the interconnected relationships within a social network provide durable patterns of interaction, nurturance, and reinforcements for coping with daily life (Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983). With regard to coping with stressors, a stronger

correlation has been found between the qualitative dimensions of social support and adjustment, than between the quantitative dimensions of a network and adjustment to stress (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985). This suggests that the size of a social network, for example, may have little to do with the availability and quality of support within a network; that is, the more members there are within a network does not necessarily mean more, or better, support is available.

The Functional Role of Social Support on Stress and Coping

The term *stress* was introduced into the health sciences in 1956 by Hans Selye. According to Caplan (1974), stress arises when there is a discrepancy between the demands made on an organism, and the organism's capacity to respond. A stressor is any stimulus that gives rise to a stress response (Selye, 1956). As an embedded aspect of everyday life, some stress is essential to daily functioning. In moderate amounts, stress can facilitate performance (Selye, 1956), whereas excessive stress can be debilitating (Selye, 1983). Coping is a response to manage the demands of a situation, including stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141).

The Buffering Effects of Social Support

The implications of social support have received much scholarly attention, particularly in conjunction with the negative consequences of stress. The research suggests that social support is a significant resource, and key to well being for those experiencing major life events, transitions, and crises (Caplan, 1974; Cobb, 1982; McCubbin & Boss, 1980). Compared to life events that were considered major

disruptions, Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, and Lazarus (1981) found that daily *hassles* also can have a detrimental effect on health and well being. The negative effect of hassles tends to be cumulative, because hassles occur more frequently than major life events, and across multiple settings such as home, school, workplace, and community. Individuals with strong social supports handle daily stressors more successfully than those who lack social supports (Caplan, 1974; House, 1981).

The social support provided through social networks may afford some protection against the negative consequences of stressful experiences by acting as a buffer (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House, 1981; McCubbin & Boss, 1980). The buffering hypothesis suggests that social support moderates stress by lessening a perception of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Following a review of stress-buffering literature, Cohen and Wills (1985) consistently found buffering effects in studies that assessed confidante relationships, in which the presence of support bolstered self esteem, and from measures of the perceived availability of support. Brewin (2003) stated that the main value of support may be to shield an individual from “unhelpful influences” (p. 189). Given the interplay between a social network, social support, and psychological health, Halle and Wellman (1985) conceptualized a social network as a *mediating construct*, which helps people manage the routine ups and downs in everyday life by moderating their reactions. However, as Kawachi and Berkman (2001) pointed out, feeling supported, cared about, and valued may not only buffer the negative effects of stressful life events, but also are beneficial aspects of belonging to a social network whether or not an individual is experiencing stress. There is no consistent corresponding evidence for a buffering effect of personality dispositions (Cohen & Lazarus, 1973). This has led researchers to conclude that close

social ties may fulfill a basic human need, whereas the absence of such ties can lead to distress (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Subjective Appraisal and Stress

Lazarus (1991) proposed that the subjective appraisal of the significance of an event for a person's goals and commitments is a critical determinant of its stressful impact. In the literature, these appraisals have been referred to as *stakes* (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Some of the common stakes threatened in stressful situations are a basic sense of physical safety, control, self worth, and social relatedness (Sandler, Ayers, Suter, Schultz, & Twohey, 2004). The key factor in mitigating the negative outcomes of stress seems to lie in a perception of the availability of support; that is, an individual may appraise an event as less stressful when others are *perceived* as available to help (Lahey & Cassidy, 1990).

As the literature reviewed later in this chapter revealed, stress is an inherent aspect of doctoral study, and a cohort group may serve as a social support network for individuals involved in pursuing a doctorate degree.

I turn next to a discussion of the phenomenological traditions. The discussion of phenomenological philosophy that follows is by no means an exhaustive review. Rather, my intent is three-fold: a) To provide the reader with a broad understanding of phenomenological philosophy as articulated by key figures in the phenomenological movement; b) to appreciate how phenomenology has evolved and broadened over the years, and; c) to highlight the key phenomenological ideas, which are reflected in the methodologies used for this inquiry.

Many of the ideas originally proposed by Husserl and Heidegger laid the foundation

for van Manen's (1990) contemporary lifeworld perspective, which provided conceptual structure, and a method for data gathering in this inquiry. Existential elements also are incorporated within van Manen's approach, such as those articulated in his lifeworld perspective. Similarly, the descriptive principles underpinning the method of analysis used for the inquiry (Colaizzi, 1978) emerged largely from Husserl's philosophy (Koch, 1995).

The Phenomenological Traditions

Early forms of phenomenology were philosophical in intent, with roots in the early 20th century work of a group of European philosophers. Phenomenology has had several versions, or traditions, which have been adopted and modified by philosophers over the years (Spiegelberg, 1982). Key figures in the phenomenological movement include Edmund Husserl, and his follower Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The phenomenological traditions share the belief that every human has a unique life of consciousness, which cannot be fully understood through natural science methods. Phenomenology emerged to reclaim what was perceived as having been lost through the use of empirical scientific explorations in the human realm (Lavery, 2003).

Phenomenological philosophers argued that human experience cannot be objectified, because it has no such certainty (Tesch, 1990). Consequently, phenomenological philosophers advocated a human science model of understanding, which emphasized *subjective* experience; that is, the world as it is experienced by people.

Earlier, Wilhelm Dilthey had already made the epistemological distinction between *Naturwissenschaften*, or natural sciences, and *Geisteswissenschaften* (meaning

knowledge as embodied spirit), from which the term *human science* was derived (van Manen, 1990). Dilthey (1989/1923) promoted the idea that subject matter in psychology should be studied from a human scientific position with the goal of *Verstehen*; that is, grasping an understanding of how things present themselves meaningfully to individuals in everyday experiences. In contrast to *Erklaren*, which has as its goal scientific explanation (Spiegelberg, 1982), *Verstehen* is spoken of as an abiding concern for the lifeworld.

In contrast to the Cartesian view of the human mind as a passive interpreter of sense data, phenomenologists perceive humans as intentional beings, who actively configure meaning to impose order on the world (von Eckartsberg, 1986). The world and the objects we perceive exist to us through the meanings we give to them, and these meanings form the basis for statements about reality (Karlsson, 1993). In taking this position, philosophers believed phenomenology could overcome the Cartesian view of the mind and world as separate. Despite common interest in understanding experience from a perspective other than a Cartesian one, differences in philosophy arose, and phenomenology continued to develop in different directions (Lavery, 2003).

Within the realm of phenomenological research, there are diverse methodologies for understanding human phenomena. Phenomenological research draws mainly on ideas originally developed by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, who represent the two broad fields of phenomenology discussed in the literature—descriptive and hermeneutic (Spiegelberg, 1982). Husserl's philosophy was concerned with epistemology (the theory and validity of knowledge), and his phenomenology emphasized the description of lived experiences. By contrast, Heidegger's philosophy was ontological in nature, and focused

on the nature and relations of *Being*. Accordingly, Heidegger's phenomenology was more concerned with hermeneutics (interpretation), and what it means to be in-the-world (Lavery, 2003; Spiegelberg, 1982).

Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology

As the major early force and impetus behind the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is regarded as the first person to search systematically for an adequate scientific foundation for human science (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Early in his career, Husserl was a mathematician, strongly influenced by Cartesianism and its division of the world into consciousness and matter. However, he increasingly found the prevailing scientific method epistemologically flawed (Lavery, 2003) in its concern with operational definitions and contingent measures, rather than actual human experience (Colaizzi, 1978). Husserl (1962/1913) objected to dealing with living subjects as if they simply reacted automatically to external stimuli, and argued that the scientific method missed important variables. As intentional beings, he regarded humans as co-creating phenomena in interaction with the experiential world, rather than passively registering what *is there*.

The period from 1884-1886 proved to be a pivotal one in Husserl's career. During this time, he abandoned his plans to teach science, and completed his formal education in philosophy. Husserl studied under Franz Brentano, whose goal was to reform philosophy so that it could provide answers that organized religion could no longer supply.

Ultimately, Husserl launched the development of phenomenology, which he believed would allow the nature of contact between people and science to focus on deeper human concerns (Spiegelberg, 1982).

Husserl's purpose was not to reject science. Rather, he hoped to find a universal foundation of philosophy and science, and to make psychology truly scientific by . situating science in the study of the everyday world of ordinary experience, and basing it on descriptive psychology. As understood by Husserl, this should begin with the *natural attitude*, which was Husserl's foundation for exploring subjectivity. Natural attitude reigns in the private set of experiences in one's mind, or lifeworld. Things perceived and encountered in the lifeworld are typically accepted as they are experienced; that is, their existence is not doubted. His admonition to *go to the things themselves* was grounded in an unbiased understanding of phenomena as given in experience, and presented in consciousness. Consciousness is inherently intentional in that it is always aware of something. Accessing phenomena was only possible by treating consciousness as a process, rather than as an object. This opposed the Cartesian view of reality as being something *out there*, completely separate from the individual.

Central to Husserl's phenomenology was the belief that human experience contains a meaningful structure, or essence, which gives form and meaning to an experience, making it unique from other experiences. We are able to find order in our experiences, and recognize a meaningful world of things *because* our experiences are grounded on such essences. Husserl believed that description was necessary to achieve contact with the fundamental structure of the lifeworld (Cohen & Omery, 1994).

In seeking a holistic appreciation of all conceivable aspects of an experienced phenomenon, Husserl (1913/1962) proposed phenomenological reduction as the means to distill essences from experience. Reflection on one's beliefs, and then putting them aside, would allow unadulterated phenomena, or an *understanding of understanding*, to

be obtained. Husserl claimed that the prejudices that result from interpreting phenomena through established scientific theories and a priori assumptions could be avoided by remaining purely descriptive. His *epoch*, commonly referred to as bracketing, involves suspending assumptions, theories, and preconceptions about the world and its objects, and intentionally focusing on phenomena *as experienced*. By attending to the subject's pure description of *what is*, and bracketing the contingent aspects, the qualities of immediate reality (which humans recognize as their experience before attaching prefabricated conceptions to them) could be distilled. In this way, Husserl believed it was possible to transcend subjectivity, and ground science firmly in philosophical understanding. Husserl's contribution to phenomenology was significant, but phenomenology was changed significantly by those who came after him (Lavery, 2003).

The Hermeneutic Tradition

The word *hermeneutic* is derived from the Greek god, Hermes, who is believed to have interpreted and conveyed messages from the gods to mortals (Mavromataki, 1997 as cited in Cohen et al., 2000). Originally, hermeneutics was used in reference to the interpretation of ancient texts by theologians, most notably the Bible. Interpretations were believed necessary, because the language of Holy Scripture was understood to be rich in hidden meanings, and had to be studied to uncover its deeper symbolic, mystical meanings. As a research method, hermeneutic phenomenology began around the year 1960, and also emphasized textual interpretation.

From a hermeneutical perspective, the way to overcome the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity is to accept the hermeneutical, or interpretive, character of

human existence. Hermeneutics likens the everyday world of experience to a text which must be read. In *reading* the world as in reading a text, the intention, situation, desires, needs, and the social world of the person are of utmost importance, and interpreters must place themselves in a position similar to the individuals they wish to understand. This represents the province of the hermeneutic phenomenologist; by placing oneself in the context one wishes to understand, the investigator is a *hermeneut*, who seeks to understand the significance and meaning in the everyday world. While hermeneutical researchers in different disciplines ask different questions, they share the larger goal of understanding how people interpret the world. Martin Heidegger, and his pupil, Hans Georg Gadamer, are harbingers for the hermeneutic point of view in phenomenology.

Heidegger's ontological phenomenology. Like Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was born in Germany, and began his career in a field other than philosophy. Heidegger became acquainted with hermeneutics through his background in theology. While teaching at Freiberg, Heidegger encountered Husserl, who served as his tutor in phenomenology. Initially, Heidegger shared Husserl's concern for the everyday life world, and was committed to his transcendental approach. However, he disagreed with Husserl about the aim of phenomenology, and how an exploration of phenomena should proceed. To Heidegger, interpretation was necessary to find truth, and see the meaning in everyday life. He eventually disassociated himself from Husserl, and took phenomenology in another direction (Lavery, 2003).

Dilthey had a significant influence on Heidegger's work. In an earlier phase of hermeneutics, Dilthey had extended an interpretation of texts to include all human

behavior and products, rather than only what was in written form. The purpose was to understand the recognizable and meaningful patterns of lived experience. While Heidegger repeatedly paid tributes to Dilthey in his writing for bringing the field of hermeneutics into prominence (Spiegelberg, 1982), Heidegger developed hermeneutics further.

Heidegger's hermeneutics included the following ideas: a) The attempt to understand the phenomena of the world as presented to us; b) the attempt to understand how it is we go about understanding the world as it is presented to us, and; c) the attempt to understand *Being* itself. While Heidegger viewed everyday experience as the starting point, he was more concerned with the meaning of *Being*. As perhaps the most universal concept of his philosophy, Heidegger (1962/1927) described the human being as a *being-in-the-world*. In his landmark book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962/1927) stated that hermeneutics is "an interpretation of *Dasein*'s being" (pp. 37-38), or *being there* in the world. He proposed that phenomenology should go beyond description to inquire about what being-in-the-world means. His aim was to illuminate the seemingly trivial aspects within experience as a means to apprehend their meanings. He believed this was possible by probing pre-reflective awareness.

Heidegger was critical of Husserl's belief that experiences rely on transcendental essences to make sense, and of bracketing as a means to reach true understanding. To Heidegger, this perpetuated the Cartesian tendency to treat the world as a world *for* consciousness, rather than *of* consciousness. Given that we are already in-the-world, our primary interaction with things is purposeful. Accordingly, *Being* could be better

explained through *referential totality*, Heidegger's term for the historically-learned practices, and background understandings we have of the world.

The notion of *historicality* refers to a web of ways of understanding the world, which is handed down to a person from birth. This pre-given set of *forestructures* grounds knowing by providing a context for understanding one's situatedness in the world. Interpretations of meaning reside *in* that web (Lavery, 2003). This directly opposed Husserl's view that bracketing affords access to true knowledge.

Heidegger is credited with endowing phenomenology with greater significance than it had experienced previously. Given his concern with existence and meaning in the world, Heidegger is often acknowledged as the harbinger of the existential movement (Lavery, 2003).

Gadamer's hermeneutics. Hans Georg Gadamer extended Heidegger's work into practical application. Whereas Heidegger viewed hermeneutics as a process to explicate the meaning of *Being*, Gadamer was interested in *how* people make sense of their experiences.

In place of personal reflection as a way to access the meaning of human experience, Gadamer (1989/1960) believed hermeneutics "must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which it speaks" (p. 295). This occurs primarily through the study of texts, and includes what is verbalized, written, and the symbolic activities in which people engage. The interpretation of texts depends upon insight and the use of language to convey meaning, and provides the basis for an ongoing dialogical encounter between

individuals, and between individuals and the text. From Gadamer's (1960/1989) perspective:

Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting (p. 389). . . . Understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject. . . . To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (p. 375)

Like Heidegger, Gadamer saw humans as intrinsically historical beings, whose interpretations of existence are framed in terms of their historical consciousness. Gadamer was not opposed to bracketing to overcome a limited perspective, but he believed that this method could never be totally objective, or value-free. Gadamer challenged the pejorative connotations attached to the concept of bias as unwarranted, because all understanding involves some bias as a condition of what we find intelligible in any situation; that is, "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being" (p. 95). Given that historicity is an inescapable part of understanding, one's immediate perspective can never be fully abandoned simply by adopting an unbiased attitude. Interpretation is significant in the search for meaning.

Gadamer (1989/1960) explained interpretation as bringing about a fusion of *horizons*, wherein one's past informs the present; that is, we bring and transpose our whole beings, including our pre-understandings, into every situation. From this

perspective, the researcher's experience is important to the interpretations of a study, and complete bracketing and definitive interpretations are likely never possible.

The Existential Phenomenological Perspective

The philosophy commonly known as existentialism is more formally called existential phenomenology (Spiegelberg, 1982). French philosophers, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) were major figures in the development of existential phenomenology. In many ways, existential philosophers de-mystified the previously difficult terminology of Husserl and Heidegger, making the phenomenological form of inquiry more accessible (Lavery, 2003).

While there was a general consensus among French philosophers that Husserl was correct in his recognition of consciousness as a process, which had to be studied whole, and in his idea to ground philosophy in ordinary experience (Spiegelberg, 1982), existential philosophers considered existence a more important concept than essence. The goal was not to transcend subjectivity, but to illuminate the everyday world with its subjectivity and meanings intact. Existential philosophers stressed the inseparability of the physical self and consciousness, and argued that experience involves both an active consciousness, and the embodied organism's relationship to the environment. While existential philosophers also emphasized the social world, where experience takes place in an elaborate world of social interrelationships, the centrality of the body to existential philosophers brought to light aspects of consciousness, which previously had been neglected.

Merleau-Ponty's perspective. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945) argued that people are, first and foremost, a body in time and space; that is, we inhabit the world as bodily

subjects. Embodiment is a permanent condition of experience. Given that consciousness is embodied in the world, and the body is infused with consciousness, all experiences and interpretations are made from the perspective of *self-in-relation*. Things that are seen, heard, tasted, touched, and smelled are part of the ordinary world of experience, and should be part of the realms of experience explored in different contexts. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945) stated that time is essential to experience: “I am myself time” (p. 421). . . . Subjectivity (experience) is not in time because it takes up or lives time and merges with the cohesion of a life” (p. 422).

To existentialists, what we overlook in the background of ordinary experiences is exactly what makes them significant for study. In his book, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945) explained his position with respect to the way understanding happens in experience. He proposed that in experience, an object and the meaning of the object are one; that is, when we perceive an object, we experience it as a meaningful object. The essence of existence, which resides in unanalyzed experience, also lies in undoubted meaning. Language is the vehicle to access meaning, and therefore, is centrally important in understanding how the *whole* of the world appears to a person.

Sartre’s contributions. Jean-Paul Sartre was instrumental in elaborating how existential philosophy is integrated in phenomenological investigations. Existential investigations are simultaneously deeply personal and universal, because they are rooted in the experience of what it is like to exist as a human. Starting from a consciousness of personal experience, phenomenology elucidates possible human conditions and experiences. Phenomenology apprehends human concerns about existence, and

meanings about things such as personal authenticity, and relationships with the world and other people. Satre's (1956/1943) magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, became the philosophical foundation for his philosophy of existentialism, and laid the groundwork for the concept of *The Other*. Satre believed that *being* is fundamentally value-laden; that is, "truth is subjectivity, with the phenomenological message that we must return to our "lived" experience in order to rediscover an intentional and creative relationship with the world" (Kearney, 1994, p. 53).

The contemporary development of phenomenology is somewhat diverse, and has taken place mainly in nursing (Benner, 1994), pedagogy (van Manen, 1990), and as a general methodology in psychology (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; van Kaam, 1966; von Eckartsberg, 1986). Various North American psychologists, such as Colaizzi (1978), have developed research procedures to explore the specific qualities, or meanings of various phenomena. Contemporary phenomenological researchers have relied largely on these procedural research guides as a bridge between complex philosophical ideas and a systematic approach to phenomenological research.

In much the same way that phenomenology has evolved over the years, the counseling discipline also has been characterized by different themes throughout its development as a profession. One way to conceptualize these historical themes is by considering the impact paradigm shifts have had on the epistemological foundations underlying counselor education.

Paradigms: The Evolving Nature of Human Belief Systems

Paradigms, or world views, enable people (and disciplines) to make sense of the world by identifying what counts as legitimate information in a particular system or

context (Barr & Tagg, 1985). Gaddy, Hall, and Marzano (1995) explained the concept of a paradigm as the primary manner in which beliefs are organized and integrated with experience, culture, and traditions. As belief systems, paradigms profoundly influence the socialization of those living during a particular period of time, and form the basis for how individuals understand themselves, and the world around them. A prevailing, or dominant, paradigm supports certain ways of knowing, understanding, and behaving, while discouraging others. According to Barr and Tagg (1995), the structure of an educational system itself is the concrete manifestation of the abstract principles of the organization's governing paradigm. As discussed later in the chapter, paradigms also have had an appreciable influence on the research community's perceptions of legitimate research methodologies.

According to Kuhn (1970 as cited in Sexton, 1997), a paradigm cannot lead us to *the truth*. Rather, the usefulness of a paradigm lies in its adequacy to perform better than another paradigm with respect to explaining phenomena, and answering a particular set of questions (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Paradigm shifts challenge existing views of knowledge, and force us to ask different types of questions.

Three historical periods, or eras, provide a contextual backdrop to examine the influence of paradigm shifts on a discipline. Mahoney (1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997) identified these eras as the premodern/romantic, modern, and post-modern/constructivist periods. As paradigms for the counseling profession (Monk, 1997), romanticism, modernism, and post-modernism have had a significant impact on counselor education.

Within each period, there is a dominant view of reality (ontology), a model for how knowledge is developed, which is consistent with a particular view of reality

(epistemology), and a set of accepted practices and psychology (methodology), which grew from those assumptions (Mahoney, 1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997).

The Romantic Paradigm: The Centrality of the Individual

As part of a larger period of change in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment provided a context for the eventual emergence of modern science. During this period, psychology also was undergoing the early stages of transition from its ancient status as a branch of theoretical philosophy to its new place among the sciences.

The Enlightenment held the promise of improvement for premodern society by advancing rationality as a means to establish a new, modern system of ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge, and to move people out of the long period of irrationality and tyranny, which dominated life during the Middle Ages. The idea that truth could be discovered through careful reasoning challenged many widely held assumptions about the natural world, particularly people's beliefs in the mystical and supernatural. The romantic movement emerged primarily as a philosophical reaction against the rise of rationalism, and the institutionalization of civilization, which were seen as corrupting influences.

The Romantic Movement

The romantic movement originated in Germany in opposition to the Industrial Revolution, but quickly spread to other parts of Europe, where it thrived until approximately the mid-1800s, or the beginning of the Victorian era. Key figures in the romantic movement included Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Central to their philosophies was a belief in the centrality and freedom of the individual, the value of inner experience over reason, and an appreciation of the aesthetic aspects of life. As humanity's distinguishing characteristics, emotions and inner

senses were considered more reliable guides to living than reason and intellect. Living with heart, passion, intuition, and imagination was vital (Schneider, 1998). Rather than something to eliminate, inner experience was viewed as something to be embraced and understood.

Rousseau believed rationalism distorted natural wisdom, filled man with unnatural desires, and seduced him away from his original freedom. He denounced the reason-based accomplishments of civilization as materialistic and detrimental to the important cultural roles of spirituality and philosophy. To Rousseau, the ideal human was a *noble savage*, who had avoided being corrupted by the spoiling effects of civilization. Rousseau demanded a return to naivete and innocence, which he viewed as greater virtues than intellect. In *Social Contract*, Rousseau (1762) described a contract between individuals and the state, wherein individuals would give their rights to the state to represent the common good. In turn, this would maximize the freedom of each person, and allow natural nobility to flourish.

Kant was instrumental in promoting the belief that the external world is somehow created by our minds, and reality is mediated by human consciousness. To idealists such as Kant, the mind actively organizes the world, rather than simply absorbing an external world; that is, a mind does not know things-in-themselves. *Geist*, or one's inner realities, is *most* real. Geist was equated with a mode of knowledge and freedom that connected people harmoniously with nature, and opened the universe to the possibility of salvation (Cunningham & Jardine, 1990). Man was considered a harmonious part of nature, and the manipulation of nature and its phenomena in the quest for knowledge was deeply opposed. In turning away from rationalism, the idea of individual freedom emerged, and

new ways of expressing what was in one's heart and imagination were sought. Art, music, and writing flourished as creative mediums, which allowed Geist to come to full awareness.

The primacy of human subjectivity, and a desire to understand experiences before tainted by intellectualization, paved the way for the eventual development of phenomenology and humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology has been an influential cultural force, shaping a contemporary view of *selfhood*, and a definition of what it means to be human (Schneider, 1998).

The Humanistic-Existential Movement

The emergence of humanistic psychology, and the humanistic-existential movement in the United States during the 1950s, gave new impetus to Rousseau's original ideas regarding personal freedom. Led by a new generation of humanistic psychologists, including Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, the humanistic-existential movement challenged the deterministic views of Freudianism and behaviorism, which had dominated psychology during the first half of the 20th century (Mahoney, 1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997; Schneider, James, Bugental, & Pierson, 2001).

The humanistic education movement developed in the United States in response to criticisms that the American educational process was impersonal, and stifled the child's developing sense of self. To humanize classrooms, humanists proposed that reforms should include greater attention to the whole being of the student, which included attention to the affective aspects of learning, freedom to be creative and self-directed, and the opportunity to develop human relations through open and free discussion with others in an educational setting (Maslow, 1956; Rogers, 1959). The goal of humanistic

education was stated as the development of *self-actualizing* persons, a term used by Maslow (1970) to describe “the full use and exploitation of talents, capabilities, and potentialities, etc.” (p. 150).

While the literature frequently refers to humanistic education as a philosophy of education developed by Carl Rogers, Rogers did not use the term humanistic to describe his view of education (Patterson, 1977). However, Rogers’ ideas about education provided a psychological foundation for humanistic education. Rogers (1959 as cited in Patterson, 1977) believed that education should be an experience *in* living, rather than a preparation *for* living. He proposed that education should be based on the same principles he had incorporated into his approach to counseling and psychotherapy; that is, education should be person-oriented, and acknowledge the importance of personal relationships. Rogers regarded empathy and *unconditional positive regard* as necessary attitudes to facilitate learning and development. At the height of the humanistic movement during the 1970s, Rogers’ ideas were the guiding principles behind the use of the encounter group to prepare psychologists and counselors. In the encounter group training approach, a small group of students learns to relate to one another via experiences which spontaneously emerge within the group, rather than through a pre-determined agenda (Patterson, 1977).

After the 1970s, the academy distanced itself from its romantic roots in favor of greater objectification and quantification, and the humanistic education movement in the United States gradually dissipated (Schneider et al., 2001). However, the impact of romantic ideology on psychology and education has been longer lasting. For example, throughout most of the history of psychology and counseling, the focus has been on the

individual (Hansen, 2005). The subjective, intuitive, reflective, and interpretive sources are considered the distinguishing roots of psychology itself (Schneider, 1998). Similarly, the long-standing tradition in education of valuing individualism, and the individual ethos that lies at the heart of most learning models (Marsick & Kasl, 1997), have roots in romantic ideology. Historically, psychological theories have served as the foundation for learning models, and a majority of these theories construe the learner to be an individual, rather than a group (Schneider, 1998). Many of the assumptions underlying adult education also are based on a humanistic model, which conceptualizes self-directedness as the *theological foundation* of adult education (Knowles, 1970). From a broader perspective, romantic philosophy is reflected in the language of agency, autonomy, and selfhood, which underlie and characterize many western cultural values (Gergen, 1985; Rudes & Guterman, 2007; Sexton, 1998b).

The Modern Paradigm: Knowledge and Truth as Objective

While the early foundations of modern science were being laid during the Enlightenment, the modern era continued to evolve throughout the scientific revolution. Characterized as the Golden Age (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), one of the major consequences of the modern era was to “solidify scientific and professional knowledge as *the* legitimate source of understanding the world. Through the logical process of science we could discover that which was true. . . . Scientific knowledge was assumed to be a mirror image of objective reality” (Sexton, 1997, p. 7).

The appeal of modernism was its commitment to an ontological position which viewed truth as stable and objective. The belief that there was a clear path to knowledge and truth, which could be discovered and used to explain and predict the natural and

psychological world, filled a void that had been created by a decline in traditional religious values during the earlier era (Sexton, 1997). Modernism argues from an epistemological position which perceives duality between the knower and the world (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000); that is, “Modernism was deeply committed to the view that the facts of the world are essentially *there* for study. They exist independently of us as observers, and if we are rational we will come to know the facts as they are” (Gergen, 1991, p. 91).

In its espousal of causal explanation and prediction as the paths to revealing the fundamental principles of the world, Monk (1997) likened the modern paradigm to the *scientific approach*. However, the promise of discovering a universal and stable truth in human science has been far from reconciled (Gergen, 1985). As Giorgi (1970) observed, research methodologies based on logical positivism are not necessarily valid indices for inquiries into human experience. The influence of modernism can be seen in traditional counseling theories and therapeutic models based on circular causality, such as behaviorism, traditional family therapy, and general systems theories. Gergen (1985) referred to the dualist foundation underlying traditional theories as having either an exogenic or endogenic orientation; that is, “the exogenic theorist is likely to focus on the arrangement of environmental inputs necessary to build up the internal representation. In contrast to this emphasis on the environment, the endogenic theorist often places chief emphasis on the human being’s intrinsic capacities for reason, logic, or conceptual processing” (pp. 18-19).

While the modern era is considered to have ended at the end of the 19th century (Mahoney, 1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997), modern ideals continue to dominate much of

the thought and practice in science and education today (Raskin, 2002; Sexton, 1997). Much of the extant literature on teaching and learning reflects a modern epistemology, which assumes the existence of a singular truth, which must be taught and learned, and an objectivist view of knowledge as a copy of the external world (Gergen, 1985). A modern epistemology also is reflected in the behavioral and cognitive views of learning.

The Behavioral Perspective of Learning

Behaviorism has roots in philosophy, but comes more directly from psychology through the pioneering work of B. F. Skinner (Arends, 1998). As the first psychological theory applied to educational contexts, behaviorism is based on scientifically-generated findings. Learning is viewed as a mechanistic process, which is conditioned or shaped through the use of environmental contingencies, namely reinforcement and punishment. Behaviorists were unwilling to acknowledge *the act of knowing* and covert mental operations, because they are not observable behaviors. Instead, they adhered to the idea that nearly all behavior and learning is contingent, and could be explained without consideration of internal mental states or consciousness.

As Jonassen (1991) explained:

Objectivists believe in the existence of reliable knowledge about the world. As learners, the goal is to gain this knowledge; as educators, to transmit it. . . Learning therefore consists of assimilating an objective reality. The goal of teachers is to interpret events for them. Learners are told about the world and are expected to replicate its content and structure in their thinking. (p.28)

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) criticized discourse of this

nature as “the banking concept of education, in which education then becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 53). As depositors of information, the teacher’s role is to fill the student with deposits of information, which the teacher deems to constitute the *truth*. Students, on the other hand, are likened to little more than empty receptacles, or depositories. The student’s job is simply to absorb and store deposits of information until a later time when needed. Freire argued that without the opportunity for dialogue or critical thinking, students risk becoming disposed to accepting externally-provided information with absolution. He alleged that this form of teaching is oppressive, because it treats students as passive recipients of knowledge, and the educator is regarded as the only one with knowledge. Consequently, students often are unaware of what they know, and what they have learned in relation with the world.

The Cognitivist Perspective of Learning

Cognitive psychology was meant to promote a psychology focused on *meaning making* (Bruner, 1990). Cognitivists were interested in internal mental models, information storage and retrieval, and cognitive structures as representations of knowledge in memory. Learners were viewed as *information-processors*, rather than as *stimulus-responders* (Mayer, 1996). Cognitive psychology had a tremendous impact on teaching, particularly the discovery that if learners are to retain new information and find it meaningful, it must be related to what the learner already knows (Mayer, 1996). This idea is fundamental to constructivism.

While cognitivism initially appeared to represent a move toward an internal, or endogenic, view of learning and knowledge (Gergen, 1985), knowledge was still viewed

as external to the knower in the form of *input*, which had to be transferred from *out there* to inside the learner for processing. From an epistemological perspective, both behaviorism and cognitivism are exogenic, contingent forms of learning, because they rely on *received* ways of knowing (Daley, 1999; McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000).

Modern Discourse Models

Under the modern paradigm, teaching and learning were assumed to be the same thing, and the literature did not distinguish between the two terms (Facemeyer, 1999). Discourse was based on the assumption that if teachers teach, learners learn (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Learning was a matter of coming to know the facts and the world as it *is*, not the world as it is individually-cognitized (Gergen, 1985). Modern educational models regard teachers as disciplinary experts, the purveyors of knowledge, and the administrators of consequences (Renzulli, 1998). The role of the modern educator is to expose learners to truths, which are organized into useful frameworks to transfer to students. The effectiveness of the transfer is then evaluated by means of some objective assessment, such as a test or other instrument. The emphasis is on *correct* performance and *best* responses, which are achieved through a stimulus-response cycle of learning with pre-determined answers (Mayer, 1996).

In a review of discourse in education, Peters and Armstrong (1998) identified modern classrooms as relying largely on teacher-directed oral discourse, as conveyed through *Teaching by Transmission*, *Learning by Reception*, or *Teaching by Transmission*, *Learning by Sharing*. *Collaborative Learning* discourse is more characteristic of

postmodern classrooms (Peters & Armstrong, 1998), and is discussed as part of the postmodern paradigm later in this chapter.

Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Reception

Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Reception employs the discourse models that enable the educator to impart knowledge to learners. Teaching is primarily didactic, and relationships in the classroom are predominantly between the teacher and students (Peters & Armstrong, 1998). According to Fischer and Grant (1983 as cited in Tinto, 1997), learning resembles a *spectator sport* in which faculty-talk dominates, and students have few roles beyond reading, note-taking, and listening to lectures. The direct instruction, or lecture model, often is entirely appropriate when used for simple training, or to introduce students to a particular discipline (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). However, when used in the absence of other discourse, didactic instruction exemplifies the banking concept of education described earlier.

There is some support among counselor educators for the use of didactic instruction as a developmentally-appropriate method for teaching beginning masters students (Granello & Hazler, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005). For example, didactic instruction can contribute to the efficiency of instruction and the sequencing of a curriculum, thereby providing a foundation for future learning in more advanced counseling courses (Granello & Hazler, 1998; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1999 Paisley & Hayes, 2000). Didactic instruction also can reduce student anxiety by providing clear learning objectives, and introducing class exercises in scaffolded formats (Guiffrida, 2005). Acquiring certain fact-based information didactically, such as counseling theories, may be ideally suited for preparing counseling students to pass licensure and certification exams (Guiffrida, 2005).

Many students appear to be comfortable with the modern approach, perhaps because the process is one with which they are familiar (Cranton, 1994).

As is characteristic of many programs in higher education, modern principles continue to dominate much of the discourse for counselor education, with counselor educators using direct instruction to impart ideas and theories about the world (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000). The dominant form of discourse in many adult education programs remains the lecture, with discussion used as an augmenting discourse (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006).

Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Sharing

Discussion is more effectively employed as an intended form of discourse in *Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Sharing* (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). The discussion format is favored by educators who believe that individual learning is supported by group participation (Marsick & Kasl, 1997). The learner's existing knowledge, achieved through life experience, also is important (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). Discussion represents a major shift from the lecture, especially when it is student-centered, because it is intended to break things up for students to analyze, sort through, problem-solve, or reach a collective conclusion in response to an open-ended question posed by the teacher (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). While discussion provides more opportunities for students to share their ideas and personal experiences, the teacher often is still regarded as the primary source of information (Peters & Armstrong, 1998).

The Postmodern Critique

In the Enlightenment tradition of the academy, “teacher-centered, disembodied abstraction-oriented information-giving” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993 as cited in McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000) was viewed as pure and objective. However, information acquired didactically is not always integrated well by students, nor useful beyond the immediate demands of the classroom (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Fong, 1998; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Postmodernists have been quick to point out that excessive *teacher talk* tends to support replication, rather than understanding, and is an avoidance of the *sensorium of experience* (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000).

Practical, use-oriented knowledge is compelling in service-oriented disciplines such as counseling, where professionals must make decisions about how, when, why, whether, and for whom to act in an immediate context (Sandelowski, 2004). Counseling professionals rely on practical knowledge to engage in complex thinking and reflection, and to exercise sound judgement when considering strategies to solve complex problems, make decisions, and evaluate outcomes, including those related to ethical and legal issues (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Knowledge of this nature develops from having opportunities to engage in self-reflection and critical thinking, and to explore new solutions to complex problems (von Glasersfeld, 1984). Teacher-centered discourse provides few opportunities for students to translate declarative knowledge into practical, use-oriented knowledge (Edens, 2000; Ryan & Cooper, 1998).

Despite having led to important discoveries in many fields, as well as providing the first educational model for Counselor Education, modern assumptions may have inadvertently narrowed our understanding of the world (Sexton, 1997). As behavior has

become more complex, and society more diverse, the application of educational models and counseling theories based on modern assumptions have not fared well with some groups (i.e., females and ethnic/minority students), rendering them less effective to prepare counseling students (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Sexton, 1997).

Many counselor educators have claimed that we now live in a post-modern world, which is better explained by theories and concepts different from those of the modern world (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; McAuliffe & Erikson, 2000; McNamara et al., 2000; Paisley & Hayes, 2000; Sexton, 1997, 1998b; Sexton & Griffin, 1997). Under a post-modern paradigm, greater consideration is given to the influence of broader meaning systems and contextual factors, which underlie multiple views of reality. These types of influences have been neglected by the modern paradigm and scientific method (Disque et al., 2000).

The implications for research activity under a postmodern paradigm also are significant. Throughout the last century, the scientific method and quantitative research have dominated the research community. Within this framework, one accepts the language and methods of positivism, namely objectivity, neutrality, and validity. In the quest for universal truths, modern science intentionally has ignored subjectivity, and minimized the influence of cultural and contextual factors in the name of controlling extraneous, confounding variables (Raskin, 2002). Ironically, these are the factors of most interest to the postmodern researcher (Burr, 1995).

Due to the reluctance of mainstream psychology to accept qualitative, phenomenologically-based research, few studies of personal experience were undertaken

during the modern period (Giorgi, 1970). While the second part of the 1960s were the gestation years for qualitative methodologies, it was not until the appearance of the publications, *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology*, beginning in 1971, that the tenets of eidetic description began to be illuminated (Tesch, 1990). As a research method, phenomenology is set within the wider context of a postmodern paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970 as cited in Sexton, 1997), where “personal experience is part of the postmodern project” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 356).

The Postmodern Paradigm: Knowledge as Consensual and Tentative

Sexton (1997) referred to the present era as the post-modern/constructivist era, although post-modernism and constructivism are not synonymous terms, nor is constructivism a new concept (Arends, 1998; Hayes & Oppenheim, 1997). However, constructivism has received greater attention as a relevant paradigm for counselor education during the post-modern period (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000).

Post-modernism is unique its knowledge claims, suggesting that a participatory epistemology replace the modern notion of an independent reality apart from an observer; that is, “The perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative; phenomena are context-based, and the process of knowledge and understanding is social, inductive, hermeneutical, and qualitative” (Sexton, 1997, p. 8).

Under a postmodern paradigm, reality is viewed as consensual insofar that the ways the world is known reflect perspectives, or point of views. In Neimeyer’s (1995) words, reality is “*noumenal*—that is, it lies beyond the reach of our most ambitious theories,

whether personal or scientific, forever denying us as human beings the security of justifying our beliefs, faiths, and ideologies by simple recourse to objective circumstances outside ourselves” (p. 3). *How people know* is of as much interest to postmodern educators and researchers as *what* people know.

An inherent challenge in post-modernism is reframing the question of what passes as legitimate knowledge in human affairs (Gergen, 1985). Kilgore (2001) wrote:

. . . knowledge is tentative and multifaceted. Truth claims are always subject to challenge, and knowledge is always kept in play rather than concluding on a particular emancipatory note. . . . Learning is a process of continuous deconstruction of knowledge, of playing with contradictions, and of creatively and productively opening the discourse of a field to an eclectic mosaic of many truths. (pp. 59-60)

Foucault (1980) referred to culturally-created ideas of truth and reality as *Discourse*. According to Gee (1996), Discourse is:

Ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking . . . that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles. . . by specific groups of people. . . . Discourses are ways of being ‘people like us.’ They are ways of being in the world; they are ‘forms of life.’ They are thus always and everywhere social and products of social histories. (p. viii)

Discourse “plays a part in producing the social world, including knowledge, identity, and social relationships, and thereby also has a role in maintaining social patterns” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 5). Discourse shapes perceptions and those aspects of experience believed to have legitimacy, thereby offering people positions from which to

negotiate subjective experience (Davies & Harre, 1990, as cited in Disque et al., 2000). From a disciplinary perspective, people often act in accordance with the definitions and standards of the dominant discourse, unaware of the ways common practices and preferred ways of knowing may privilege certain voices and knowledges, and the power relations that maintain them (Monk, 1997). For counseling professionals, the risk of operating from such an anticipatory position is the potential to devalue, or diminish, other voices (Disque et al.). Outside of the language of the dominant culture, there are different ways of knowing and talking about the world. The requirements of post-modernism demand a new professional, who is sensitive to the relational, constructed nature of knowledge and reality, and honors a plurality of discourse, rather than only what is in the language of the dominant group (Barbules & Rice, 1991; Gergen, 1994).

Constructivism is a way of thinking about knowledge, and the activity of knowing, which incorporates reactions against an objective basis for knowledge claims, and the empiricist paradigm of knowledge generation (Gergen, 1995). As a referent for building models of teaching, learning, and curricula, constructivism offers teachers and learners multiple ways of thinking about multiple ways of knowing (Tobin & Tippins, 1993). At the core of constructivist thought is a concern with epistemology, and a shift in the way knowledge is created. From such a perspective, truths which are assumed to be self-evident actually are the products of complex discursive practices, with knowing intricately connected to experiences (Schwandt, 1994).

The Constructivist Perspective: Knowledge as Constructed and Provisional

Constructivism is a broad umbrella of dialogues, or robust metatheory, rather than a single theory or approach, and is informed by a number of fields, including psychology,

sociology, and philosophy (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Constructivism has made inroads into mainstream counseling as a loosely confederated theoretical orientation, as evidenced by its recognition and support by the American Counseling Association (ACA) as a foundation for understanding counseling practice, inquiry, and professional training under the postmodern paradigm (Mahoney, 1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997).

Constructivism is limited to the set of theories and approaches that have adopted “the metatheoretical assumption that the structure and organization of the known—the knower as known included—are inextricably linked to the structure of the knower” (Chiara & Nuzzo, 1996a, p. 178).

Constructivists view knowledge as actively constructed by individuals, rather than as a disembodied entity, which is found by the individual (Rogers, 1983). Derived from the Latin word *construere*, meaning to interpret or analyze (Mahoney, 1991 as cited in Sexton, 1997), constructivism has been equated with *meaning making* (Bruner, 1990). Individuals are viewed as constructive agents, or *sense-makers* (Mayer, 1996), who intentionally create knowledge as a means to meaningfully understand the world, and one’s experiences (Gergen, 1985; von Glasersfeld, 1984). Truth and knowledge are viewed as constructions within the mind of the individual, and therefore, are inherently subjective and provisional (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000). Meaning-making and valuing are based on one’s constructions (Paisley & Hayes, 2000).

Cooper (1993) pointed out, “Constructivists view reality as personally constructed, and state that personal experiences determine reality, not the other way around” (p. 17). Schwandt (1994) further explained, “We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in

the light of new experience” (pp. 125-126). Constructions serve a practical purpose in helping individuals navigate life and adapt in a world, which is not directly knowable (von Glasersfeld, 1984). Constructions do not necessarily have to be accurate to be useful (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996b; Driscoll, 1994). People cannot know for certain if their constructions correspond to an independent reality; they only know if their constructions work well for them (von Glasersfeld, 1992). Consequently, a construction is regarded as more or less *viable* “as far as it responds to the individual’s world of experience” (von Glasersfeld, 1992, p. 30). As such, constructivists consider the relationship between knowledge and reality as instrumental, rather than verificative, in nature.

Versions of Constructivism

There are numerous and overlapping versions of constructivism. Different theorists articulate the knowledge construction process differently by emphasizing different components (Gergen, 1998). Versions of constructivism found in the literature include personal constructivism (Kelly, 1955), radical constructivism (Piaget, 1954/1937; von Glasersfeld, 1984), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), critical constructivism (Kinchiloe, 1993), weak, strong, and pragmatic versions of constructivism (Watts & Bentley, 1991), and more recently, communal constructivism (Holmes et al., 2001). Within the literature, most comparisons have been made between radical constructivism and social constructivism (Raskin, 2002), the two broad interpretations of constructivism in the literature.

Constructivism is not the same as constructionism, although use of the terms in the literature is confusing at times. Seymour Papert used the term constructionism to refer to the idea of projecting the meanings and ideas constructed in one’s head outward in some

tangible form, such as through the creation of artifacts, or *objects-to-think-with*. Papert (1991) described the difference between constructivism and constructionism as follows:

Constructionism—the *n* word as opposed to the *v* word—shares constructivism’s connotation of learning as ‘building knowledge structures’ through progressive internalization of action . . . It then adds the idea that this happens especially felicitously in a context where the learner is consciously engaged in constructing a public entity; whether it’s a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe. (p. 3)

While the philosophical roots of constructivism can be traced back to the earliest philosophical arguments over a rational foundation for knowledge (Hawkins, 1994), there has been increasing interest in constructivism under a postmodern paradigm. Nelson Goodman is credited as being the contemporary philosopher most responsible for defining the contours of a constructivist philosophy of reality and cognition (Schwandt, 1994).

In his writings, Goodman (1978) sought to overcome the debate between realism and idealism by reconceptualizing philosophy. While realism holds that “material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience,” idealism maintains that “no such material objects or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them, the whole world being dependent on the mind” (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996b, p. 166). In Goodman’s (1978) words, the point is “Never mind mind, essence is not essential, and matter doesn’t matter” (p. 96).

Goodman’s Constructivist Philosophy

Goodman (1978) acknowledged the creation of many versions of the world, and stated that “worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the

making is a remaking” (p. 6). The remaking Goodman referred to belongs both to the world and to a system of interpretation. With respect to knowledge claims, Goodman proposed replacing the terms *truth* and *certainty* with the more pragmatic notions of *rightness* and *adoption*, because the cognitive endeavor is not a pursuit of knowledge that seeks to arrive at an accurate description of a real, ready-made world. Rather, knowledge is an advancement of understanding, which begins from what happens to be currently adopted. From there, an individual proceeds to construct something that fits together and works cognitively. The goal is to achieve a credible level of understanding, which is modifiable to accommodate new experience (von Glasersfeld, 1984).

The first constructivist theories of learning generally are attributed to European psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, whose theories have served as exemplars of radical constructivism and social constructivism, respectively. Radical constructivism and social constructivism arose from different intellectual traditions, and reflect opposite ends of the constructivism continuum (Hruby, 2001), primarily with regard to the degree of influence social interaction is viewed as having on the knowledge construction process (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Palincsar, 1998).

Radical Constructivism: The Autonomous, Self-Organizing Knower

Radical constructivism puts forth two main claims: “a) knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognitizing subject; b) the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality” (von Glasersfeld, 1989, p. 162). The radical constructivist assumes that knowledge is in the hands of the individual thinking subject, who has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience (von

Glaserfeld, 1984). The emphasis is on individual autonomy in knowledge construction. The knower is conceptualized as a cognitively-closed, self-organizing system (von Glaserfeld, 1984, 1989). The intra-personal world is the source of meaning (Gergen, 1985, 1998), and knowledge construction is primarily an individual, internal event (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Other terms for radical constructivism used in the literature include *auto constructivism*, *psychological constructivism*, and *cognitive constructivism*.

From a radical constructivist view, learning is a process of constructing meaningful representations to make sense of one's experiential world by internalizing and reshaping new information (Piaget, 1954/1937; von Glaserfeld, 1984). In von Glaserfeld's (1995) words:

Constructivism, thus, does not say that there is no world, and no other people, it merely holds that insofar as we know them, both the world and the others are models that we ourselves constructThere is no doubt that these subjective meanings get modified, honed, and adapted throughout their use in the course of social interaction. But this adaptation does not and cannot change the fact that the material an individual's meanings are composed of can be taken only from that individual's own subjective experiences. (p. 137)

Piaget: An Exemplar of Radical Constructivism

Over a period of decades, Jean Piaget, a developmental psychologist, conducted naturalistic research, which has profoundly influenced our understanding of child development. Piaget's (1954/1937) theory of cognitive development begins with the premise that humans are innately curious. Beginning in infancy, the need to understand the environment motivates children to act like mini scientists as they investigate the

world around them. While doing so, children construct representations in their minds of the senses and impressions they experience. As children acquire greater language and memory capacity, their representations of the world become more sophisticated and abstract. By the time they enter school, children's physical and mental knowledge about the world is organized as *schemes*. Schemes are central to Piaget's theory insofar that they are both a composite of past learning, and a framework for ongoing cognitive development, and future schemes.

In his book, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, Piaget (1954/1937) explained how children build mental models of the world and develop cognitively through a series of four, universal developmental stages: Sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. During each stage, knowledge construction is regarded as a self-regulated activity, which is best understood in terms of the interplay between two adaptive processes—*assimilation* and *accommodation*. Experiences or concepts that are encountered for the first time undergo an adaptive process.

Assimilation takes place when new information is adapted to current experiential understandings by fitting it into an existing scheme. Accommodation occurs when new information does not easily fit with a pre-existing scheme, necessitating the creation of a new scheme to accommodate the unique characteristics of the new information.

In his later work, Piaget (1985) acknowledged social interaction (and the social situatedness of the individual in an *immediate* time and place) as having a role in cognitive development, but relegated it to a secondary role only (von Glasersfeld, 1984). Piaget viewed social interaction as having the potential to arouse cognitive conflict, or *disequilibrium*, in the learner, which he defined as an internal state arising from a

contradiction between a learner's pre-existing understanding and his or her current experience. Disequilibrium "forces the subject to go beyond his current state and strike out in new directions" (Piaget, 1985, p. 10) to reach new understandings. While social interaction can spark disequilibrium, it is disequilibrium, rather social interaction, which underlies and drives the development of the individual.

Criticisms of Radical Constructivism

Critics have argued that radical constructivists do not consider anything existential beyond the reality of the individual (Hruby, 2001); that is, the concern lies with the ways the individual represents the outer world within oneself, with little regard for a wider socio-cultural context, and the social aspects of meaning-making (Gergen, 1985). The individualist logic inherent in radical constructivism recognizes only the cognitive limits imposed by the child's natural abilities. While Piaget's theory captured what is common in children's thinking at different developmental stages, and described how it evolves over time, he overlooked the influence of context, including the child's cultural biography, on one's constructions the world (Gergen, 1985). In Schoenfeld's (1999) words, "the cognitive community has failed to make substantial progress on issues of self and identity, of social interactions, of what it means to be a member of a community—and of how all of that relates to who we are, what we perceive, and what we do" (p. 5).

Social Constructivism: The Relational Knower

The early contours of a social constructivist perspective were influenced by sociologists, Berger and Luckmann (1966), who introduced the term *social construction* in their text, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Berger and Luckmann (1966) viewed

reality as a social artifact or invention, which is institutionalized into social practice through “an ongoing dialectical process” (p. 149).

The central concept of the book is that individuals and groups interacting together within a social system do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and played out in roles over time. This reinforces an ongoing dialectic, which embeds a common knowledge and shared view of reality in a society. In this sense, reality and knowledge are seen as socially-constructed.

Much of the interest in social constructivism in educational circles has been informed by Vygotsky’s theory (Palincsar, 1998), which was reviewed earlier in this chapter. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that “the social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary” (p. 30). Cognition is considered a social phenomenon, which involves a collaborative process, and is simultaneously a process and a product (Palincsar, 1998).

While the term *social* clearly distinguishes social constructivism from radical constructivism, the distinction between social *constructivism* and social *constructionism* initially is more subtle. Context is centrally important to both perspectives, because the exercise and transformation of knowing always go on in some context (Drago-Severson et al., 2001; McMahon, 1997). Similarly, *languages* are critical to both perspectives, because shared activities, including words and dialogue, reflect the knowledge and meanings held by members of a community; that is, accounts of the world “take place within shared systems of intelligibility—usually a spoken or written language. These accounts are not viewed as the external expression of the speaker’s internal processes, but as an expression of relationships among persons” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 78).

Beyond these similarities, there are some important epistemological differences between social constructivism and social constructionism. Given an emphasis on the development of subjective, or *intra*-personal, phenomena relative to a social context, social constructivism sometimes is regarded as a *psychological* theory of knowledge construction (Wikipedia, 2007), because it accounts for phenomenological leanings in a social context. By contrast, social constructionism has been called a *sociological* theory of knowledge construction, because its emphasis is on the development *interpersonal* phenomena (Wikipedia, 2007). Social constructivism has been widely applied and studied in educational contexts, whereas social constructionism has been applied as an interpretation to a broader range of psychological issues, including personality, identity, and gender (Gergen, 1985, 1999) as part of a growing trend in social psychology (Ernest, 1999).

Despite these differences, McAuliffe and Eriksen (2000) believed that social constructivism and social constructionism are complementary epistemologies, insofar that the *sand of truth* shifts, depending on the context one is attempting to understand. From this perspective, the two epistemologies may provide different lenses for viewing phenomena from different angles.

Social Constructionism: The Contextually-Embedded Knower

Kenneth Gergen, a social psychologist, has been a major figure in elaborating a social constructionist epistemology. Gergen (1989) suggested that, “The invitation [of social constructionism] is, that . . . [we] treat social relatedness (as opposed to isolated minds) as a reality of preeminent significance” (p. 478).

Social constructionists dismiss the notion of the centrality of private experience, and the ideology of the self-contained, autonomous knower (Gergen, 1999; Raskin, 2002). Social constructionists argue that social constructivism continues to locate learning in the cognitive (rather than social) realm (Crotty, 1998; Scribner, 1990), where the individual student, rather than groups of students, is the ultimate reference point (Ernest, 1994), and the goal is “helping one another achieve individual cognitive objectives“ (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994, p. 202).

Social constructionism rests on a relational theory of meaning and socio-historical epistemology (Gergen, 1994). Truths are based in the interpersonal world, rather than in the intrapsychic world of the individual (Gergen, 1998). Social constructionists view knowledge as “an interpretation that is historically founded rather than timeless, contextually verifiable rather than universally valid, and linguistically generated and socially-negotiated rather than cognitively and individually produced” (Chiara & Nuzzo, 1996b, p. 174). Knowledge is understood as something people do together; it is a fluid, evolving framework of ideas, or “shared consciousness” (p. 266) among members of a community (Gergen, 1994). Consequently, the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts—products of situated interchanges with others in the world, and negotiated forms of understanding (Gergen, 1985). In this respect, knowledge is contextual and relational, because it is negotiated and transmitted between people in a given social context and time frame (Crotty, 1998). Social constructionists categorically dismiss the notion of a stable way of being or knowing (Raskin, 2002). In place of the idea of enduring qualities, such as a personality, identity, or coherent selfhood, there is the development of a social reality and a socially constructed identity relative to each

context in which an individual lives and moves about (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985, 1991, 1994, 1999).

According to Gergen (1994), “the critical divide between what we roughly distinguish as the modern versus the post modern . . . would be the abandonment of the traditional commitment to *representationalism*” (p. 412). This suggests a shift in focus from individual representations of the world to descriptions of the world formed through relatedness, and the day to day process of social interchange. Gergen (1985) conceded that this can be a difficult epistemological shift given its “conceptual dislocation” (p. 271) relative to traditional western cultural values. However, he also believed this was the way to overcome the limitations in exogenic and endogenic theories. Several authors have criticized the social constructionist perspective as anti-humanistic in its deconstruction of long-standing psychological concepts, such as the primacy of human subjectivity and agency (Burr, 1995; Raskin, 2000; Hansen, 2005).

An educator’s epistemological stance holds profound pedagogical implications, because his or her beliefs about knowledge construction influence beliefs about teaching and learning, the structure and types of activities emphasized in the classroom, the roles assumed by the instructor and learners, and the learning goals established (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Teaching and Learning Under a Postmodern/Constructivist Paradigm

According to von Glasersfeld (1995), constructivism does not claim to have made earth-shaking invention in the area of education, but it does provide a solid conceptual basis for some of the things inspired teachers did without benefit of a theoretical foundation. Given that there is no single constructivist theory of instruction (Driscoll,

1994), constructivist approaches contrast sharply with modern approaches in that they tend to be more circumspect and flexible.

According to Hayes and Oppenheim (1997), a constructivist teaching and learning approach encompasses six principles: a) Development and knowing are contextual; b) individuals are producers of their own development; c) cognition is an active relating of events; d) meaning-making is self-evolution; that is, “development can be seen as the natural outcome of attempts to make stable sense of a changing world” (p. 24); e) reality is multi-form, and; f) language constitutes reality, meaning that there are as many language systems and meanings as there are groups discursively negotiating them.

Constructivist educators understand learning as an organizational process, which enables students to make sense of their worlds (Sexton & Griffin, 1997; von Glasersfeld, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). In place of the role-bound model of the modern educator as the *sage on the stage*, who imparts knowledge to students, the constructivist educator is responsible for “the creation of environments and experiences that bring students to discuss and construct knowledge for themselves” (Barr and Tagg, 1995, p. 15). Accordingly, the educator is viewed as a *guide by the side*, whose knowledge does not supercede the learner’s knowledge (Stimson & Milter, 1996 as cited in Edens, 2000).

Constructivist educators are described in the literature as mediators between the knower and the known (Palmer, 1987), facilitators of the learning process (Brooks & Brooks, 1993), midwives in the birth of understanding (von Glasersfeld, 1995), coordinators, resource advisors, tutors, and coaches (Gergen, 1995), guides and sense-makers (Mayer, 1996), and architects of the learning environment (Paisley & Hayes, 1998).

Teachers and students alike are *co-constructors* of knowledge in a collaborative venture, where everyone is a learner and a teacher at different times (Geltner, 1994; Norton & Sprague, 1997). While the constructivist educator may introduce students to a new perspective or professional meaning system, such as when a counselor educator contributes the rationale behind a theory or model, the primary focus is on the development of dialogue. Consequently, participation in a constructivist endeavor involves co-considering, questioning, reflecting on previous understandings, evaluating ideas, and inventing knowledge collectively (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). In place of attempting to build similarities and consensus among students, constructivist educators celebrate the differences among students by welcoming diverse perspectives and dissenting views in the classroom (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000).

Building on the basic assumptions of constructivism, Driscoll (1994) identified five conditions of constructivist learning: a) Authentic activity; b) social negotiation; c) multiple perspectives or modes of representation; d) nurturing reflexivity, and; e) student-centered instruction.

Authentic Contexts

Learning is enhanced in authentic contexts, which provide students the opportunity to engage in meaningful *real world* activities, and to experience the complexity of the types of issues they are likely to encounter in real life (Driscoll, 1994). Social interaction itself is an authentic context in which to develop and practice the skills necessary to solve real world problems.

Earlier, Dewey (1916) proposed that education should be purposeful, and that the classroom should function as a laboratory for inquiry into real-life social and intellectual

problems. There has been a renaissance of interest in Dewey's ideas, and their relevance in a postmodern/constructivist age. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1963/1938) described his view of school as a democratic, social institution, where individuals could develop their talents through interaction, or *associated life*, with others.

The use of relevant assignments and projects, which reflect the practices of authentic contexts, allows students to apply their skills and understandings (Driscoll, 1994). When learning activities are directly relevant to the applied setting or disciplinary culture, everyday and educational knowledges converge, and become more meaningful (Jonassen, 1991). Ackerman (1996) used the term *cognitive apprenticeship* to describe interactive learning activities designed to enculturate students into authentic practices. Merriam and Brockett (1997) referred to real life learning experiences in which others play a key role as *social cognition*.

Group work is an authentic context for counselor education, because it involves "collaborative problem solving and role-taking opportunities, and helps students to test their perceptions of self and others" (Paisley & Hayes, 1998, p. 6). Rather than educate in *anticipation* of practice, engaging students in group experiences projects the expectation that counseling professionals ought to collaborate, and reflects the type of practices in which counselor education students can expect to engage in the workplace. Other *real world* learning experiences in counselor education programs include case analyses, role plays, collaborative projects, research, and practicum and internship experiences. According to Lawrence (1999, 2002), cohort-based programs also provide an authentic, experiential context for students to develop, refine, and practice skills, including those needed for communication and conflict resolution.

Social Negotiation

Social negotiation is an integral part of the social construction of knowledge (Driscoll, 1994). As learners interact and navigate learning situations, knowledge does not remain static. Social interaction allows learners to share and develop their understandings in relation to one another. New knowledge is stimulated by examining complex phenomena from other perspectives, which enables a negotiation process between students. Knowledge is constantly evolving and changing as learners confront new experiences and perspectives in interaction and dialogue, forcing them to build on, or modify, prior knowledge to reflect their new understandings (Driscoll, 1994). Through an iterative cycle, a group comes to make sense of challenges by integrating perspectives, which leads to the mutual construction of new knowledge. The sharing of individual perspectives lays the groundwork for dialectical thinking by challenging learners “to listen, hear, accept, and integrate viewpoints to construct a shared view” (Marsick et al., 1991 as cited in Kasl et al., 1993, p. 151).

Multiple Modes of Representations

Access to perspectives other than the instructor’s allows students to view learning material through multiple lenses and conceptual modes, which can lead to a new *sea of ideas* (Gergen, 2006). Exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences challenges learners to grow beyond their current ways of knowing (Hayes & Paisley, 2002). Frequently, this occurs through small group activities, where learners serve as powerful resources to one another, and alternate points of view are readily available. Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant (1997) found that in group learning situations, individuals will

cross boundaries to gather new ideas, information, and mental models, which can lead to reframing by individuals, subgroups, or the entire group.

Nurturing Reflexivity

Constructivism is based on the premise of a participatory and resursive critique of the very process of knowing (Arends, 1998), and reflexivity is a critical attribute of learners involved in a constructivist learning process. Reflexivity refers to an awareness of one's own role in the knowledge construction process (Driscoll, 1994); that is, *how* one creates meaning, or arrives at a particular point of view. Reflexivity is essential to reasoning, understanding other's points of view, and committing to a particular position or belief, which can be articulated and defended (Driscoll, 1994). One way instructors nurture the development of reflexivity is by ensuring that there are sufficient periods of both confirmation and contradiction of students' understandings as they engage in knowledge construction (Paisley & Hayes, 2000). Dissonance is an essential condition of the knowledge construction process, because experiencing doubt and uncertainty regarding the efficacy of one's knowing renders one more open to other perspectives, and possible explanations (Lovell & McAuliffe, 1997; McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998).

Student Centered

Curricular decision-making in constructivist classrooms does not revolve around the mechanical use of the curriculum, nor an attempt to determine the best way to get information inside learners' heads. Instead, curricular practices build on the existing knowledge and experiences students bring to the learning situation, allowing the learning process to become student-centered. Student-centered discourse is regarded as producing

greater conceptual development, better internalization, and deeper understanding than discourse which is predominantly teacher-centered (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Richardson, 1997; McMahon, 1997; Palincsar, 1998).

Social Constructivist Discourse

When the goal is to support students to construct knowledge, and create their own understandings through social interaction, the discourse models used are predominantly collaborative, dialogical, and reflective in nature (Guiffrida, 2005; Sexton & Griffin, 1997). Knowledge and skills relevant to counseling are not likely to develop in *instructivist* environments. Social constructivist discourse models aim to engage learners “in knowledge construction through collaborative activities that embed learning in meaningful context and through reflection on what has been learned through conversation with other learners” (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haaq, 1995, p. 13).

Collaborative Discourse

The relevance of peer collaboration in higher education dates back to Theodore Newcomb’s work with college students during the 1960s. Newcomb (1962) identified peer influence as a powerful, but wasted, resource in higher education, because the prevailing assumptions about the nature of knowledge disregarded the fact that humans are social. Newcomb’s work led him to conclude that one of the reasons people learn well in groups is because they tend to talk each other out of unshared biases and presuppositions.

In his work on academic research, Wildavsky (1986) noted the difference between cooperation and collaboration. While cooperation is necessary to get a job done, collaboration rests on the idea that expertise does not rest with any one individual (such

as the teacher), but is spread throughout a community. Learners use tools, information, resources, and people in the surrounding culture to build knowledge and enable insights, which otherwise would not come about.

Bruffee (1993) discussed collaborative learning as a means to foster active learning in small group settings. Collaborative learning is defined in terms of learner-to-learner, learner-to-group, and group-to-learner interaction, and is a significant change from the hierarchical relationships typically found in traditional classrooms (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). Collaborative learning is related to social constructivism “by virtue of the fact that it assumes learning occurs among persons rather than between persons and things” (Bruffee, 1987, p. 44). Social constructivist assumptions enhance collaborative discourse, by providing educators with a theoretical understanding of what it is they are trying to do, and a better chance of doing it well (Bruffee, 1987).

According to Bruffee (1987), students have internalized long-prevailing academic prohibitions against a *collaborative frame of mind*. Reacculturation is necessary to challenge students “to define their individuality not as starkly and lonesomely independent, but as *interdependent* members of their new. . . community” (Bruffee, 1987, p. 46). Bruffee (1993) believed the best way to prepare students for the *craft of interdependence* in the real world is for students to practice reaching shared understandings through collaborative activities throughout an educational program.

Effective collaboration depends on learners’ willingness to grant authority to peers, and to exercise authority through the giving and receiving of feedback (Bruffee, 1987). In many cases, there can be considerable resistance on the part of students to do so (Bruffee, 1987). Similarly, instructors can inadvertently thwart a collaborative process

by sitting in, hovering, or otherwise maintaining students' dependence on their presence, resources, or expertise (Bruffee, 1987). Students must have the freedom to negotiate agreements about "what they're going to do and how they're going to go about doing it (Bruffee, 1995, p. 13) . . . once tasks are set . . . instructors step back, leaving peers to work in groups or pairs to organize, govern, and pace their work by themselves and to negotiate its outcomes" (Bruffee, 1987, p. 46).

Collaboration encourages connections among peers, which can raise the level of students' social maturity as exercised in their intellectual lives (Bruffee, 1993). Regular opportunities to collaborate also can improve students' appreciation of diversity (Cunningham, 1996). Given that collaboration is intended to challenge students' current assumptions, inclinations, and understandings (Drago-Severson et al., 2001), ideally, collaboration should occur between learners with different skills and backgrounds (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991).

Collaborative learning can empower students beyond the classroom, because it draws forth levels of ingenuity and inventiveness many students never knew they had, nor had the opportunity to exercise (Bruffee, 1987). Collaboration achieves its full pedagogical potential when student-centered dialogue is the principle form of oral discourse (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006; Peters & Armstrong, 1998; Shor & Freire, 1987). Knowledge is socially constructed through the dialogue of the collaboration (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006; Lawrence, 1996; Lawrence & Mealman, 1996). In many respects, collaboration is a natural precursor to the effects of modeling, in which dialogue is an important component.

Dialogue as Discourse

Howe (1963) stated that dialogue “is both the relationship between persons and the principle that determines the nature of their communicationThe partnership of persons in dialogue is so indispensably important” (p. 67). While dialogue is a fundamental precondition of meaningful communication, authentic relationships, and human meaning-making (Sexton, 1997), historically, dialogue was not considered essential in learning contexts. Within the traditional structure of higher education, the teacher was viewed as the voice of universal authority and knowledge (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). Critical pedagogists, Shor and Freire (1987), advanced dialogue as a pedagogy, stating that dialogue is “a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it (p. 98) . . . we each stimulate the other to think, and rethink the former’s thoughts . . . dialogue belongs to the nature of human beings, as beings of communications” (p. 3). Freire (1993) used the term *conscientization* to describe a process in which experience is understood by examination with others in a dialogical encounter. Freire (1993) discussed dialogue as a central requirement of the democratic learning enterprise: “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teacher” (p. 62).

Dialogue is essential to socially construct knowledge and shared meanings, because thinking takes place in communication (Sexton, 1997; Sexton & Griffin, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). As the dominant oral discourse in postmodern/constructivist classrooms, dialogue differs from conversation (Peters & Armstrong, 1998). Dialogue is *real talk* inasmuch as

the emphasis is on the reciprocal nature of the relationship between learners (Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison, 2006).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) explained the importance of real talk as follows:

Constructivists make a distinction between ‘really talking’ and what they consider to be didactic talk in which the speaker’s intention is to hold forth rather than to share ideas. In didactic talk each participant may report experience, but there is no attempt to join together to arrive at some new understanding: ‘Really talking’ requires careful listening, it implies a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can grow. (p. 144)

According to Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison (2006), three conditions support dialogue as discourse: a) intent; b) dialogical space, and; c) shared sense of the other. Intent involves understanding what is *on the mind* of those interested in achieving some goal. Creating a dialogical space provides room for students to make sense of one another’s understandings. Activities intentionally designed to familiarize students with one another provide a dialogical space for students to reach a shared understanding. Dialogue also promotes participation, which can only be understood in terms of the relationship, or shared sense of *the other*.

Dialogue is required to challenge egocentric thinking, and helps students negotiate their own positions more effectively (Drago-Severson et al., 2001), as when explaining one’s position to another, or conceding one’s position to a better argument (Driscoll, 1994; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1989). When engaged in dialogue, learners cross

boundaries to gather fresh perspectives, and can check whether others hold the views one assumes to be true. Understanding how others understand helps learners judge the quality of their own understandings. For this reason, disagreement, debate, and disclosure in the form of feedback are regarded as necessary components of the dialogue that occurs in adult education programs (Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison, 2006). When dialogue is reflective in nature, it opens up space for new possibilities, invites critique, and encourages a shift in perspective (Armstrong/Hyslop-Margison, 2006).

Reflection as Discourse

In the literature, reflection is discussed from a variety of points of view. Dewey (1933) understood reflection as a form of intelligent action, in which *open-mindedness*, *responsibility*, and *wholeheartedness* are necessary “attitudes” (p. 57). Dewey referred to open-mindedness as being prepared to explore other points of view, responsibility as applying what was discovered to other situations, and wholeheartedness as the ability to critically evaluate information, and to make meaningful changes when faced with uncertainties. As Dewey (1933) stated, “Reflection is an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and the further conclusion to which it tends . . . it includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality” (p. 9).

The contemporary concept of reflective practice is usually attributed to Schon, who contributed to our understanding of reflection as something professionals do. In his book, *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schon (1983) argued against *technical rationality* as the dominant model to inform and train practitioners. The technical rationality model equates intelligent practice with the application of scientifically-produced findings, or

truths, to inform decision-making and practice. While there is value in technical knowledge, Schon (1983) argued that technical knowledge “is insufficient to deal with complex human situations and ‘confusing messes,’ which are incapable of technical solution” (p. 42). As an alternative, Schon suggested an epistemology of practice, which advocated training reflective practitioners who could use reflection as a tool to improve practice by informing more complex processes and judgements.

Schon (1983) described reflective practitioners as capable of evaluating their actions, questioning their assumptions, recognizing their biases, and considering the “potential for transformation” (p. 166) when situations of uncertainty are encountered. In the book, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schon (1987) described reflection as occurring when the knowledge on which professionals depend to do their work results in the unexpected. We turn back to examine the process of our knowing through either *reflection-in-action* (thinking immediately during an activity), or *reflection-on-action* (thinking that follows or interrupts an activity). Throughout the reflective process, the practitioner’s focus is on one’s influence on events, and is future-focused with the goal of using one’s insights to improve future practice. In this way, goals are set for the future (Schon, 1987),

Irving and Williams (1995) viewed the reflective practitioner as aware of the implicit assumptions he or she brings to an endeavor, so that his or her thoughts, feelings, ideas, and actions can be brought to the surface and examined. Counseling professionals rely on reflective practice to develop sound intellectual and emotional judgement, and the conceptual skills needed for abstract reasoning and problem solving (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Hayes & Paisley, 2002). In addition to viewing reflective practice as a means to

promote the socialization of professional behaviors (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001), critical self-reflection for the purpose of self-awareness is an ethical imperative for counseling professionals (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998).

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992a, 1992b) found an important relationship between critical self-reflection and the development of counseling expertise. Critical reflection “consists of three essential aspects: ongoing professional and personal experiences, a searching process with other within an open and supportive environment, and active reflections about one’s experiences” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992a, p. 141).

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992a, 1992b) reported that critical reflection is a *central development process* insofar that it was found to be the most important distinction between counselors who continued to develop and grow professionally, and those who ultimately stagnated, and burned out.

According to Neufeldt, Karno, and Nelson (1996), critical reflection can enhance the experiential learning process in counselor education, because the process of reflection demands that people work from a model of free, informed choice in a safe relational space, where they can reflect on their emotional and cognitive experiences, and struggle with ideas in dialogue with one another.

As the literature reviewed later in this chapter revealed, group reflection is an attribute of effective cohort groups (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). Group reflection supports the integration of learned material in meaningful ways, while also providing a group with a means of managing the quality of life in their shared space (Lawrence, 1997).

Counselor Education in a Postmodern Era

Counselor education is “the act of passing along our shared knowledge, conceptual models, legacies, traditions, and histories from one professional generation to another” (Sexton, 1998a, p. 67). Usually, this occurs through the formally prescribed curricula of masters and doctoral programs in counseling (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Over a decade ago, Sexton (1997) referred to the impact of constructivism on counselor education as “a quiet revolution underway that has the potential to dramatically change the face of counseling practice, supervision, and training” (p. 3). Since that time, constructivism increasingly has been viewed as a relevant and empowering framework for counselor education, because it allows students to struggle with the edge of knowledge from the beginning of their studies (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998), and embodies the goals of educational reform in a postmodern period (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Guiffrida, 2005; Hayes et al., 1996; Hayes & Paisley, 2002; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Paisley & Hayes, 1998; Sexton, 1997, 1998a; Sexton & Griffin, 1997). A *constructive capacity* is essential for the development of counselor attributes such as empathy, ethical sense, multicultural awareness, and coherent multi-theoretical application (McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000; Paisley & Hayes, 1998). Consequently, a constructivist inclination may be an epistemological requirement for effective professional work in counseling (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000). However, transforming counselor education from an objectivist-based enterprise to a constructivist-based enterprise process is a *lens-correction* process (Anderson, 1997).

The adoption of a constructivist paradigm necessitates the dismantling of long-standing modern beliefs and common practices in counselor education (Sexton, 1997,

1998a). A constructivist world view challenges some of the profession's most treasured ideas and time-honored truths, including ideas about what constitutes good counselor education (Disque et al., 2000). Counselor educators are compelled to deconstruct some of their favorite instructional methods, and reconstruct them in community by sharing meaning systems, honoring many voices, and putting oneself forth to learn from others, including students (Disque et al.; Sexton, 1997).

Within the counselor education literature, references to constructivist-based counselor education programs are limited to masters programs. Some of these programs reflect a growing trend toward a “new pluralism” (p. 20) through the use of combined epistemologies within a program model to reflect the philosophy of a particular counselor education program (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). For example, some counselor education programs have embraced a constructivist-developmental framework to ground learning in the developmental experiences of students (Granello & Hazler, 1998; McAuliffe & Eriksen; 2000; McAuliffe & Lovell, 2000; Paisley & Hayes, 2000), while other programs have incorporated constructivist models for the purposes of producing reflective practitioners (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998), training students to see themselves as collaborators (Hayes et al., 1996), and to sensitize students to issues of social power as part of their training experiences (Winslade, Crocket, Monk, & Drewery, 2000).

Despite programmatic differences, constructivist-based counselor education programs share a philosophy, vision, and commitment to discourse models designed to ground students in the content of a professional counselor education, while challenging their ways of knowing (Disque et al., 2000). Typically, pedagogy is infused with themes

of active listening, sharing ideas, and offering feedback (Sexton, 1997), and group process is an important component (Paisley & Hayes, 2000).

Descriptions of constructivist-based counselor education doctoral programs were not found in the literature. This is not altogether surprising given that an ongoing, serious neglect of attention on counselor education doctoral programs, and the counselor education doctoral student, have been noted (Boes et al., 1999; Burnett, 1999; Choudhuri, 1999; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Hosie, 1986; Hughes, 2001; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998; Smaby, 1998; West et al., 1995; Zimpfer, Cox, West, Bubenzer & Brooks, 1997).

Following a content analysis of *Counselor Education and Supervision*, the official journal of the profession, Hosie (1986) reported that only five articles regarding doctoral counselor education programs had been published in the journal during the period between 1961 and 1985. In a subsequent analysis of the same journal during the period between 1986 and 2001, Hughes (2001) reported having found only eight articles that mentioned counselor education doctoral programs. While the profession's major journal addresses current issues and trends in the counseling profession, and "serves as an expression of needs, beliefs, and intentions of the individuals involved in the education and supervision of counselors" (Hosie, 1986, p. 272), a lack of attention to doctoral programs and doctoral students is "a significant statement about where the profession has not placed its attention" (Hughes, 2001, p. 24).

Counselor Education Doctoral Programs

The counseling profession is characterized by four diverse activities: Clinical training, supervision, teaching, and scholarship (West et al., 1995; Zimpfer, Cox, West,

Bubbenzer, & Brooks, 1997). The development of competencies in these four content areas within a context that values lifestyle differences “is the hallmark of counselor education and supervision doctoral programs” (West et al., p. 3). Counselor education doctoral programs are not simply advanced versions of counselor education masters programs (Hosie, 1991). While the curriculum at the masters level is primarily geared toward preparing counseling practitioners, the focus of doctoral programs is on the preparation of scholars, and the future counselor educator faculty and leaders of the profession (Choudhuri, 1999). Doctoral programs frequently espouse an educator-practitioner model of preparation, which recognizes a need for counselor educators to possess advanced competence in counseling, in addition to competencies in teaching, supervision, and research (Granello & Hazler, 1998; Lanning, 1990; West et al.).

Finishing a Product

Daley (1999) noted that masters-level preparation generally is focused on concept *formation*, whereas the focus of preparation at the doctoral level is on concept *integration*. Counselor education doctoral students are expected to engage in higher order thinking, consider material in different ways, make connections, raise new questions, and explicate knowledge (Nelson & Jackson, 2000). The process of doctoral counselor education is akin to *finishing a product* versus *building a frame*, and takes individuals from student to peer status with faculty (Nelson & Jackson, 2000). Pedagogy is likely to make greater use of experiential learning, discussion, and application-related assignments, such as teaching assistantships, and assisting the faculty with the supervision of counselor education masters students.

As a terminal degree in the counseling profession, the doctoral degree is pursued by

individuals who possess a masters degree in counseling, or a related field (West et al., 1995). Counseling professionals with a doctorate are diverse in their employment (Boes et al., 1999). While many counselor education doctoral students aspire to professorships (Zimpfer, 1993), others prefer to work in direct service positions in the public sector or private practice, and as supervisors and administrators of counseling programs (Hollis & Wantz, 1993; Maples, Altekruise, & Testa, 1993; Zimpfer, 1993).

There can be a great deal of variation among counselor education doctoral programs in terms of structure (full time/part time), format (cohort/non-cohort model), mission and vision, philosophy, degree offered (Ed.D/Ph.D), the relative emphasis on counseling, supervision, teaching, and research within the curriculum, and accreditation status (Boes et al., 1999; West et al., 1995).

Accreditation

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) acts as a gatekeeper in determining appropriate standards for the preparation of all counseling professionals, and has been the primary accreditation body for the counseling profession since 1981. The CACREP also is the agency responsible for reviewing and evaluating counseling practice in higher education against these standards. Prior to the formation of the CACREP, the first doctoral standards were formulated in 1977 by the ACES Committee to Develop Guidelines for Doctoral Preparation in Counselor Education (1978).

The purpose of setting nationally recognized standards for counselor preparation is to provide uniformity in the knowledge and skills considered essential for graduates of counselor education masters and doctoral programs (Willcoxson, 1994). The CACREP

standards are a powerful tool for program evaluation and improvement, regardless of the accreditation status of a counseling program. However, institutions with accredited counseling programs provide recognition that the content of education offered has been evaluated extensively, meets the standards set by the counseling profession, and “have accepted their responsibility to provide quality training programs” (CACREP website, 2003). To ensure continual relevance, the doctoral standards have been revised several times.

While the CACREP is a major force in the determination of counseling curricula, the agency does not address non-curricular issues (Fong, 1998; Granello & Hazler, 1998; Sexton, 1998), such as program format (i.e., cohort or non-cohort model) and pedagogy. These types of decisions are left to the discretion of individual programs, with program mission statements and the profession’s ethical code serving as the primary guides for program organization and pedagogy (Fong, 1998).

Stress and the Counselor Education Doctoral Student

Entering a doctoral program marks the beginning of a stressful period for many students. Earning a doctorate degree in Counselor Education and Supervision is a rigorous process, which typically takes three to five years to complete (Boes et al., 1999). While the experience of earning a doctorate degree ultimately can be personally and professionally rewarding, stress is an inherent challenge in completing a doctoral program, and counselor education doctoral students can be over-challenged on a regular basis (Boes et al.; Hughes & Kleist, 2005).

The typical doctoral student has been away from school for a period of time before returning to pursue a doctoral degree. Resuming life in the student role involves

contending with stressors related to role transitions, including adjusting to a new schedule and academic demands. Doctoral students tend to be older, with multiple roles and external commitments in addition to the student role, which compete for their time and attention. As is characteristic of doctoral students generally, counselor education doctoral students are faced with finding balance between the competing demands of their academic, family, social, and professional roles and lives (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1991).

While stressors related to role transitions may be relatively transitory, and gradually subside as one settles into the student role, other stressors are related to the doctoral experience itself, such as financial concerns, time constraints, support system issues, and interpersonal stressors. Committing to doctoral study is a substantial investment, involving personal sacrifices in terms of time, energy, and finances, and prioritizing doctoral work over other life obligations and pleasures, such as friendships and time with loved ones (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). The devotion and time commitment involved in doctoral study can cut students off from their regular sources of support. In many cases, students must rely on their own personal resources to deal with stressors, or on significant others, who often do not understand the pressure of doctoral study, nor the rhythm of the university calendar (Boes et al. 1999; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994). While the knowledge and skills acquired through one's professional counseling training can be helpful to manage stress, resources other than oneself often are helpful to respond to the challenges the counselor education student is likely to encounter while engaged in doctoral study (Boes et al., MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

Interpersonal stressors can include the pressure to appear knowledgeable in front of peers and professors, and competition among peers for research publications and

scholarly presentations (Byars, 2005). For students in cohort programs, the challenges, frustrations, and excitement that accompany being a member of a group can heighten interpersonal stressors (Maher, 2001). Students in the counseling field also may face unique profession-related stressors in terms of interaction with others, such as vicarious trauma (Jankoski, 2001), and exposure to human grief, as well as role ambiguity, role conflict, and a sense of responsibility to others (Greenberg & Valletutti, 1980). Human service professionals tend to share personality characteristics such as caring, helping, and a client-centered orientation (Pines & Aronson, 1988 as cited in Byars, 2005). While these characteristics have been influential in their career choice, counselors can neglect their own personal needs while meeting the needs of others (Turnispeed, 1998).

Hughes and Kleist (2005) reported that beginning a counselor education doctoral program is a major life event, which can cause considerable stress. Hughes and Kleist (2005) used grounded theory methodology to explore the first-semester experiences of four doctoral students in a counselor education program in the northwestern United States. Three rounds of interviews and a focus group generated qualitative data, which represented participants' phenomenological world as it was perceived to change over time. The findings suggested that new doctoral students moved through three processes, or phases, over the course of the first semester: a) emotionality; b) integration and; c) affirmation. The first few weeks of doctoral study were characterized by dramatic shifts in participants' emotions and thoughts (emotionality), which included experiencing thoughts and feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt, and feeling apprehensive and anxious about the unknown. At the middle of the first semester, students had moved into a phase the researchers called *integration*. During this phase, students questioned whether they

were engaging in appropriate doctoral study activities, and consciously made decisions to take on the behaviors of a doctoral student. By the end of the first semester, students felt more confident and assured that they could succeed in the doctoral program (affirmation).

Given the nature of a counseling curricula, and the development and personal growth that typically occur in a counselor education doctoral program, it is not unusual for doctoral students to undergo changes in their perceptions and self-awareness between the beginning and end of a doctoral program (West et al., 1995; Boes et al., 1999). Students may question their life choices, transform their beliefs and behaviors, and use newly acquired knowledge and skills (Boes et al.). This can further impact their relationships, and create role conflicts in their personal lives (Hazler & Kottler, 1994).

Factors Influential in Attrition and Persistence

Bair (1999) defined persistence as “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of a doctoral degree” (p. 8). While students tend to be highly motivated when they enter a doctoral program, research has documented a pattern of high attrition rates during two particular periods of doctoral study—the first year, and after achieving candidacy status (Bair, 1999). Based on a metasynthesis of research findings of studies on doctoral attrition and persistence conducted between 1970 and 1999, Bair (1999) concluded that as much as two-thirds attrition occurs prior to reaching doctoral candidacy. Academic goals and professional aspirations may attract students to doctoral study, but they are not always compelling enough reasons to sustain students’ motivation and persistence in a doctoral program. While the university’s goal is to retain students in programs until they reach their goals, doctoral students drop out of their programs for a variety of reasons. While some students may lack adequate support and tangible coping

skills (Cesari, 1990), others decide that the cost and demands of a doctoral education on themselves, their families, or friendships are too great (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997). At times, students leave their programs before completion due to a perceived lack of connection with their advisor (Golde, 2000), or a mismatch between their expectations and program experiences (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Other factors influential in student attrition and persistence include the departmental culture (Protivnak & Foss, 2009), ethical climate (Schulte, 2002), and peer interaction (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

The study of attrition is complex, with neither academic indicators, enrollment status, nor demographic factors of age, sex, marital status, children, employment, and race clearly distinguishing between doctoral students who persist to completion, and those that do not (Bair, 1999). Lovitts (2001) pointed out that attrition appears to have less to do with any individual factor, or background characteristic a student brings to a program, than with what happens *after* students arrive at the university. Tinto's (1998) work on student persistence led him to conclude that students' social integration was equally as important as students' intellectual integration into an academic community. This is particularly challenging at the doctoral level, where the typical doctoral student is not a full-time, campus-resident student with an *on-campus directedness* (Hughes, 1983). This alone can create a sense of disconnection from the larger university community (Glover et al., 1998).

Student retention is the most frequently cited problem in every type of educational program (Kerka, 1995). More recently, this issue has been addressed in counselor education doctoral programs (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). In a qualitative study of the factors influencing doctoral students' decisions to persist or leave

their programs of study, Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) interviewed thirty-three current and former doctoral students from seventeen accredited doctoral programs in the United States. The themes found to influence students' decisions to persist or depart their programs were student expectations, student experiences, academic match with program (students' reasons for pursuing the degree, the goal for the degree, and their perceptions of congruence with the program's focus of preparation), and social-personal match with program (students' perceptions of their relationships with faculty and fellow doctoral students as helping or hurting their decision to persist or leave their program). The findings suggested that perceived incongruity between students' expectations and the program match (academic, social, or both) can cause students to question their decision to remain in a program. A lack of connection with faculty members and peers also was identified as a significant experience, which influenced students' decisions to leave a doctoral program.

More recently, Protivnak and Foss (2009) used survey methodology of open-ended questions to explore the subjective experiences of 141 counselor education doctoral students regarding their progress in their programs. The themes found to positively and negatively influence students' experiences and progress in their programs were departmental culture, faculty mentoring, academics, support systems, and personal issues of stamina, role transition, and financial difficulties. The most satisfied students perceived the culture in their programs as characterized by collaboration with faculty, and faculty who were responsive to students' requests.

Counselor Education and the Cohort Model

Most counselor education students do not travel in cohorts (Granello, 2000), and literature on counselor education programs structured as a cohort model is sparse (Hayes et al., 1996; Hayes & Paisley, 2002; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2000; Paisley & Hayes, 2000). In counselor education masters programs structured as cohort models, the cohort model generally is regarded as an impetus for carrying out constructivist-based programming and collaborative pedagogy (Granello, 2000; Hayes et al.; Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Paisley & Hayes, 1998, 2000). Counselor education doctoral programs structured as a cohort model are noticeably absent in the literature (Nelson & Jackson, 2000).

The Cohort Model and Social Support

A consistent finding in the literature reviewed on cohorts is the potential of a cohort group to function as a social support network, at least for the duration of the program. Relationships developed within a cohort can fulfill students' needs for affiliation and support in a learning context through family-like or team-like bonds, and strong emotional ties (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Brooks, 1998; Dorn et al., 1995; Glover et al., 1998; Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2000, 2005; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997; Twale & Kochan, 2000). The sense of social connectedness shared by a group of doctoral students can alleviate feelings of isolation (Boes et al, 1999) by temporarily bridging the divide between doctoral students' social and academic lives (Tinto, 1988), and creating a space to belong and affiliate with peers (Norris & Barnett, 1994).

The availability of peer support and encouragement are among the most valued and beneficial aspects of participating in a cohort reported by doctoral students involved in

cohort programs. Social support takes a variety of forms in cohorts, including personal encouragement, instructional assistance (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Lawrence, 1997; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Imel, 2002), or simply formal and informal interaction, which results from being a member of a group of like-minded professionals working toward a common goal (Brien, 1992; Glover et al., 1998; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Tinto, 1988).

Dorn et al. (1995) found that cohorts were a vital source of support for doctoral students, who were trying to work full-time and maintain their personal commitment to earn a doctorate, especially when the cohort was perceived as a place where concerns and frustrations could be shared. Wesson et al. (1996) reported that doctoral students gained strength through the comraderie and empathy of a supportive cohort group. During the initial stage of doctoral study, students identified the cohort as having a key role in diminishing stress and anxieties related to time, responsibilities, assignments, and uncertainty (Irby & Miller, 1999).

The findings of studies of cohort models used with doctoral candidates suggest that the structure and supportive assistance of fellow doctoral peers and a faculty member are instrumental in counteracting the isolationism involved in writing a dissertation (Burnett, 1999; Holmes et al., 2008). Cesari (1990) reported that cohort participants relied on one another for guidance and information about research methods, resources, and references, and gained a sense of competence and self worth through the process of helping their peers.

In a study of the perspectives of five new educational doctors, who had participated in a weekend cohort while completing their dissertations, Holmes et al. (2008) described a shift from independent to collaborative learning as the group relied on a *teach-the-*

teacher model. Participants identified working as a member of a collaborative team with a purpose and mission as providing the inner strength needed to persist beyond obstacles. Peers served as knowledgeable companions and experienced guides, who helped one another *climb the mountain*. Seamless connections held the group together as they held each other accountable for weekly results, and worked through setbacks to remain focused. Students perceived the cohort group as providing the support and structure needed to direct and manage one's time efficiently, and several students completed their dissertations in three academic semesters.

The findings of several studies suggest that the cohort model is an effective retention intervention. The same supportive conditions found to reduce isolation and increase a sense of belonging in cohort groups also have been identified as important in student persistence (Dorn et al., 1995).

The Cohort Model and Student Persistence

Research has established a strong link between learning that occurs in a group context and persistence in an educational program (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Hill, 1992 as cited in Basom et al., 1996), which is attributable to the networks of relationships and strong emotional ties developed among learners in cohort programs (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 2000; Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Brien, 1992; Brooks, 1998; Burnett, 1999; Dorn et al., 1995; Glover et al., 1998; Hill, 1992 as cited in Basom et al., 1996; Norton & Sprague, 1997; Reynolds & Hebert, 1998; Teitel, 1997; Twale & Kochan, 2000; Wesson et al., 1996).

While some doctoral students persist for reasons such as personal motive (Dorn et al., 1995), never quitting what they begin, and a belief that the doctorate would be helpful in career aspirations, frequent reasons to persist given by doctoral students in cohort programs include the support and encouragement shared by group members (Brien, 1992), friendships, a networking system, and shared experiences (Twale & Kochan, 2000). The trust and comraderie developed through repeated contact over time provide staying power, and there is less chance group members will give up when times become difficult, or perplexing (Holmes et al., 2008). Often, a tacit priority of a connected group is to keep the group intact (Lawrence, 2002).

There is some evidence that doctoral students who had participated in a cohort group are more likely to graduate (Burnett, 1999; Cunningham, 1996; Holmes et al., 2008). Burnett (1999) reported a higher dissertation completion rate for a doctoral cohort of school guidance and counseling students, who believed their academic performance was improved as a result of participation in a cohort. Students identified the structure provided through the cohort as instrumental in increasing their professional knowledge and understanding of research methods and designs, and editing and critical feedback skills, which they believed resulted in higher quality proposal and dissertation documents. Burnett concluded that the cohort model satisfied some of the supervision, support, and relationship needs of a small group of doctoral students as they moved through the dissertation process.

Some data suggest that a cohort model is an effective retention intervention for diverse and marginalized learners, and an effective way to democratize the university. Cunningham (1996) reported higher graduation rates across all racial and ethnic groups

for a doctoral program after switching to a cohort model.

Program-long cohort models may be a means to proactively address retention and persistence issues by providing students with a supportive structure from the beginning of a doctoral program (Parent, 1999).

The Role of the Faculty in Cohort Programs

Faculty are an important element of the cohort experience, and they face unique challenges, particularly with respect to maintaining a cohort program (Basom et al., 1995). From the perspective of faculty involved in cohort programs, cohorts can represent some of the best efforts in education, and some of the worst encounters (Tom, 1997).

Faculty fulfill multiple roles in cohort programs beyond the traditional role of the content expert. In addition to selecting students for cohorts, faculty serve as models, facilitators, and monitors of the cohort process throughout a cohort's lifecycle (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). Within these roles, faculty are called upon to draw forth, connect, challenge, and at times intervene, to assist students' adjustment to the cohort environment while simultaneously helping students integrate what they are learning (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

The Student Selection Process

A cohort community begins with the screening process to select the type of student who can contribute to, and benefit from, a cohort program. The aim is to select a diverse group of intellectually capable students, who have similar motives, expectations, and commitments for participation in a cohort, and a range of shareable knowledge, skills,

and perspectives. Carefully-selected cohorts have been structured with attention to diversity, so that group members have more to share with one another than similar points of view.

Student selection involves much more than how a student looks on an application (Paisley & Hayes, 1998). To be successful in a counselor education cohort program, a student's proven academic track record and past intellectual achievements must translate into meaningful interpersonal interaction (Paisley & Hayes, 1998). According to Hayes and Paisley (2002) the counselor education student most likely to profit from a cohort experience shares the attributes of effective counselors; that is, he or she demonstrates an appropriate level of self awareness, self disclosure, and self-reflection, and possesses a flexible interpersonal learning style, and honest commitment to diversity. Additionally, students should be willing to take interpersonal risks, tolerate ambiguity, and have a sense of humor, especially about oneself. Students with rigid learning styles, obvious prejudices, or other biases which are incompatible with program objectives, are not promising applicants to a cohort-based counselor education program (Hayes & Paisley, 2002).

Even a carefully selected group of students provides little guarantee that a cohort will coalesce as a group, and work together effectively (Norris & Barnett, 1994). Student interaction is a key factor in the effectiveness of the cohort model, and the work carried out by cohorts requires careful planning by the faculty. Collaboration and interdependence must be intentionally incorporated into a cohort program. Even then, true collaboration takes time to develop, often longer than a semester-long experience (Lawrence, 1997).

The Faculty as Models

Faculty influence social interaction in cohorts, often by the decisions they make regarding power and pedagogy (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). Framed by pedagogical assumptions, instructors' attitudes and behaviors shape classroom activities and communication, and influence the degree to which students engage in the learning process (Tinto, 1997).

Students frequently take their cues about how to engage in a cohort process from faculty members. The faculty serve as models for collegiality, empathic listening, respect for diverse views, giving and receiving feedback, and the appropriate use of power and authority (Holmes et al.; Lawrence, 1997; Basom et al., 1996). According to Basom et al. (1995), "cohort development must become a collective commitment, rather than the responsibility of a single individual" (p. 16). Program faculty, who collectively operate as a cohort themselves by dialoguing and making room with one another to explore new ideas and practices within a norm of collaboration, may encourage students to view them as a unified group, which is devoted to consistency and efficiency in cohort instruction (Maher, 2004). The exchange of information among faculty is especially important, as incidents can occur in a cohort during one instructor's class, which can spill over into other instructors' classes (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001).

Regarding group leadership, Senge (1994) believed that a leader does not have to bring other people on board. In attending to the appropriate details within one's sphere, people will come onboard themselves. Similarly, the cohort instructor is "a catalyst who helps the group to become a cohesive unit by creating a safe space for the exploration of ideas and encouraging group reflection and interaction" (Lawrence, 1997, p. 5).

The Faculty as Facilitators

As facilitators, the collective faculty members who initially work with a cohort are especially significant with regard to supporting the development of healthy group norms, dynamics, and working bonds among the participants (Lawrence, 1996, 2000). Initial experiences in a cohort are important, as they provide a foundation for learners to evolve into a cohesive group (Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2000).

Faculty members are facilitative by providing the *enabling conditions*, which help a cohort evolve into a community and do its work (Holmes et al., 2008). Faculty members provide academic structure and timelines for assignments, and learning activities which familiarize students with the strengths each individual brings to the cohort (Barnett & Muse, 1993). Many cohort programs begin with an orientation, or residential experience, which provides an opportunity for students to meet the individuals with whom they will be spending a period of time (Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2000). The faculty also often devote a portion of time outside of traditional course hours to team-building exercises, and other types of social activities to set the stage for future collaborative work within a cohort (Maher, 2004).

As a prelude to collaborative work, Armstrong & Hyslop-Margison (2006) suggested that each group member construct an individual learning biography to share with the entire group. Holmes et al. (2001) found that sharing letters, written by students at the completion of each year in the program, with cohorts behind them in a program, provided a vehicle to share practical information and suggestions between cohort groups, and also promoted a sense of continuity and coherence in a degree program. Formal or informal celebrations of cohort achievements, including group milestones (i.e., completion of the

first semester, first year, achievement of candidacy), annual reunions, and assigning students to serve as cohort historians, or unofficial photographers, are other means of nurturing the development of community within a cohort, which are under the faculty's control (Tom, 1997).

Program faculty are facilitative in planning and setting aside times for a cohort to engage in group reflection, and the sharing of insights and feedback (Barnett & Cafferalla, 1992; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). Having opportunities to consciously contemplate and discuss the meaning of the university, and the shared experiences in which they are engaged, can help focus students' attention on where they are as a group, where they are headed, and how they are transforming individually and collectively (Glover et al., 1998; Hill, 1995).

The Faculty as Monitors

Overdependence on faculty is counterproductive to the cohort process (Witte & James, 1998). A cohort tends to function more smoothly when the group manages itself with oversight from faculty (Witte & James, 1998). However, it behooves the faculty to continuously monitor networks of interaction within a cohort, and how these are impacting and supporting scholarly work (Lawrence, 1996; Wesson et al., 1996). By keeping their finger on the pulse of the evolving norms and dynamics within a cohort, faculty members can exercise judgement about whether to step in, or maintain distance to let the group work out its issues (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

When the enabling conditions are provided by the program instructors, the primary responsibility for defining and enacting a process for working together rests with the

group members (Holmes et al., 2001; Lawrence, 1997). Members of a cohort are collectively responsible for the quality of life in the group, and for maintaining the conditions conducive to working and learning together (Lawrence, 1997; Mealman & Lawrence, 2000).

The Influence of Group Norms and Dynamics on Group Life

Group members influence social interaction within a group, including their regard for one another (Bandura, 1997). The literature suggests that mutual trust, respect, and an appreciation for diversity are essential for successful group processes, and also for meaningful learning to occur (Brooks, 1998; Teitel, 1997). As is characteristic of groups generally, a cohort group is interwoven with norms and complex social dynamics, which influence how a group develops, functions, and performs (Barnett & Cafferalla, 1992; Lawrence, 1996; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Social dynamics have the potential to undermine or facilitate the goals of a cohort program, erode or enrich learning conditions and opportunities within a cohort, and alter the overall cohort experience for group members in positive or negative ways (Clifton, 1999; Hill, 1995; Lawrence, 1997; Maher, 2001; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997; Wesson et al., 1996).

Many of the powerful outcomes attributed to cohort models come from the unique blend of members within a cohort group, which gives rise to the norms and dynamics that influence and characterize group interaction (Lawrence, 1996). Group norms and dynamics cannot be predicted ahead of time, because they flow out of participation in the group, and rest on how relationships and contextual influences play out in the group (Lawrence & Mealman, 1999; Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). While cohorts in the same

program share essentially the same stimulus material in terms of a prescribed curriculum and program faculty, the phenomena at work in cohorts can vary widely from one cohort to the next, and cohort groups cannot be expected to behave and evolve predictably.

Group Norms

Group norms are the least visible, but most profound, form of social control within groups (Keyton, 1999). Group norms regulate group life and influence how a group uses resources, communicates, works together to accomplish tasks, deals with tensions, and approaches and solves problems (Bormann, 1975). As shared expectations, or *codes* of behavior, norms render social life more predictable by reducing uncertainty about group behavior, and providing a way forward for interaction. In this sense, group norms serve as guides for community, and help a group maintain its culture. Group norms convey the types of behaviors and issues a group will accept and tolerate.

Group norms are usually noticeable in a cohort after the first few courses completed together (Lawrence, 1996). When group norms support coming together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, and a perception of all members as having something of value to contribute to the group, the effectiveness of the group for the educational success of all members is strengthened (Lawrence, 2002). However, norms can develop in cohorts which can be at odds with professional norms, individual mindsets, or expectations (Maher, 2004). Lawrence and Mealman (1996) reported that an *anticipatory mindset*, based on group members' early impressions of one another, can be a troublesome issue for some cohorts. As a type of stereotyping, this type of *automatic vision* can prevent learners from seeing other group members in their fullness, including what they had to contribute to the group.

Personality-driven behaviors can influence group norms and participation in a cohort (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001) reported that students with strong personalities influenced group members' perceptions of what could, and could not, be said in a group, and affected their willingness to share certain viewpoints in class. Dominant group members, such as those individuals who are very outspoken, or exhibit certain behaviors, can inhibit group process by monopolizing time, and manipulating an agenda (Lawrence, 1997; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Teitel, 1997). Beck and Kosnik (2001) reported that some group members with strong personalities used the cohort as a platform to organize resistance and challenge program goals, which led to an *us* versus *them* dynamic between a doctoral cohort and program faculty. New program faculty, who are unfamiliar with a cohort's norms, can experience a sense of *outsiderness* when becoming involved with a cohort, particularly one which has been intact over an extended time (Maher, 2004).

Group Dynamics

A group's functionality and productivity also are influenced by group dynamics. Group dynamics are the inferred, invisible constructs, or group properties, which affect the energy and mass movements of a group (Yalom, 1995). The word *dynamic* is derived from the Greek word *dunasthi*, meaning *to have power or strength*, and refers to the idea of *forces*. The interactional forces at work in a cohort group affect social interaction and processes related to power and influence, participation, commitment, cohesiveness, collaboration, communication, and trust (Lawrence, 1997). Group dynamics have been the focus of several studies conducted with cohort groups. While different researchers

have used different foci to examine the dynamic qualities of cohorts, the findings have been helpful to identify the characteristics of effective cohort groups and successful cohort processes. Languishing, or problematic, cohorts usually exhibit some variation of the positive attributes of cohorts (Fahy, 2002).

Kurt Lewin has been instrumental in deepening our understanding of the dynamic qualities of groups, particularly with regard to the concept of interdependence. In his field theory, Lewin (1951) dismissed the idea of motivation as an individual concept. Lewin proposed that interdependence unifies a group into a *dynamic whole*, which underlies group motivation. Lewin spoke of space as psychological, and as existing within one's phenomenal field, or *lifespace*. He believed that a lifespace was influenced by resolving the tensions between the person and the environment. Lewin (1951) described a *field* as mutually interdependent factors, regardless of the similarity or dissimilarity of the individuals constituting a group.

According to Lewin, all groups are interdependent. However, he identified two types of interdependence. He described *interdependence of fate* as influential in a psychological sense, and as coming into play when members of a group realize they are in the *same boat*; that is, their welfare as individuals depends on the welfare of the group as a whole. In this situation, individuals are psychologically-motivated to assume a share of the responsibility to achieve a greater, common goal. However, *task interdependence* is more significant with regard to group process. Task interdependence refers to interdependence in a group's goals, and requires cooperation. According to Lewin, the need to rely on others for achievement creates a dynamic of tension for a group. The dynamic of tension, rather than an individual, psychological motive, motivates a group

toward its goals. Lewin (1951) discussed competition within a group as *negative* task interdependence.

As a basic feature of groups, interdependence depends not only on one's own actions, but also on the actions of others in a group, wherein each member influences, and is influenced by, each member.

Characteristics of Effective Cohorts and Cohort Processes

Effective groups operate by a clear purpose, shared leadership, open communication, high levels of inclusion, acceptance, support, and trust (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Zander, 1982). While cohort groups share many of the characteristics of effective groups generally, Norris and Barnett (1994) identified cohort effectiveness as resting primarily on “*interaction* (which results in cohesiveness among group members), *purpose* (which promotes collaboration), and *interdependence*, the hallmark of a group's realness” (p. 33).

Within a cohort group, interdependence is demonstrated by collaboration, shared leadership, a collective sense of group ownership (Lawrence, 1996), and a reasonable certainty among group members that *If I help you now, you will help me later* (Witte & James, 1998). Learners agree to be interdependent by sharing knowledge, resources, and support, and to depend on one another to accomplish the work (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Holmes et al., 2008; Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2005). Without interdependence, a cohort can quickly degenerate into a collection of *me first* individuals (Witte & James, 1998).

Barnett et al. (2000) identified effective cohorts as those characterized by empowerment, collegiality, affiliation, and trust among group members. These attributes are enhanced when a group has been carefully selected, and structured with attention to

diversity. Although members of a cohort share a goal, they are not necessarily a homogeneous group with respect to age, social maturity, skills, expertise, and cultural characteristics. It is the diversity within the group on which a cohort relies to learn, accomplish the work, and move through the curriculum and program (Lawrence, 1996, 1997).

Healthy Working Bonds

Healthy working bonds are essential for an effective cohort process (Lawrence, 2002). Social bonding facilitates collaboration, the development of one another's talents (Dorn et al., 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Lawrence, 1996, 1997, 2002; Saltiel & Russo, 2001), and the motivation to work through difficult times and setbacks (Holmes et al., 2008). Healthy bonds are fundamental to peer support (Mather & Hanley, 1999). In addition to mutual trust, healthy bonds are characterized by respect for cultural diversity. Successful cohorts facilitate multicultural interaction, and provide an effective vehicle for addressing a multicultural perspective within a curriculum (Cunningham, 1996), depending on whether diversity is valued, or creates tension in a cohort (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992).

Participation in a cohort affords students the opportunity to bond, which also can reduce professional isolation (Norton, 1995). Students' professional networks are likely to expand due to bonding, and the development of close relationships (Barnett et al., 2000; Hill, 1995). Given the affiliations developed within a cohort group, members are likely to view others as resources both during and following a cohort program (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992).

A familial theme has been used to describe the bonds among members of a cohort

(Glover, 1998; Maher, 2001; Potthoff et al., 2001). Based on the observations of a new doctoral cohort in action, Glover et al. (1998) described a cohort as serving as a *surrogate family unit* to members, and students' connections to the larger university occurred primarily through their identification with a cohort group.

Other researchers have described the bonds developed among group members as having a *relationship orientation* or *task orientation* (Maher, 2000; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). Groups with a task orientation focus on the group's working goals, such as tasks, products, activities, and efficiency, whereas groups with a relationship orientation focus more on the social aspects of group life, including members' feelings and needs (Maher, 2000, 2005). Maher (2005) found that the learning orientation of many masters students who were participating in a cohort, changed from a task orientation to a relationship orientation as the meaning of cohort membership changed from an inconsequential meaning to a significant meaning over a ten-month period.. Scribner and Donaldson (2001) found that group dynamics influenced the development of a *task* or *learning* orientation with cohort groups. Members of cohorts who had developed a learning orientation paid greater attention to group processes, and learned in critically-reflective ways, although they did not necessarily complete course requirements expediently, or in the traditional sense. By contrast, task-oriented groups focused primarily on productivity, and tended to avoid addressing group process issues, including tension and conflict. Task-oriented groups did not necessarily learn in meaningful ways. The researchers concluded that high performance and meaningful learning are not synonymous. Norms that enabled a cohort to successfully address group tensions led to increased cohesiveness among group members. The findings suggested a "cohort effect"

(p. 613), which the researchers described as the cumulative impact of a cohort experience on students' perceptions of support and learning over time as they developed stronger bonds.

Academic competition and domination by a few vocal students can disrupt the formation of strong, healthy bonds in a cohort (Hill, 1995; Norton, 1995). At times, competition problems can arise, because the idea of sharing resources and helping one another to achieve goals is incompatible with traditional concepts of grading (Barnett & Muse, 1993). The bonds developed among group members can create boundaries which can feel exclusionary at times. For example, the work in a cohort is often accomplished through the formation of smaller groups, or *sub-cohorts*, within a cohort group (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). While these smaller groups often are based more on similarity of interest and personality, rather than intended to be exclusionary (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001), a fear of being excluded can be a limitation of participation in a doctoral cohort.

In an investigation of group process and dynamics in doctoral cohorts in the Leadership in Urban Schools Doctoral Program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Teitel (1997) reported that students identified increased connections, support, networking, and deeper discussion during class as the beneficial aspects of participating in a cohort. Sources of limitations of participation identified by students included the formation of cliques (which had the potential to create a dichotomy of *haves* and *have nots* in terms of power in the cohort), being trapped and stuck in conflictual, or unpleasant, relationships within a cohort group, and getting *boxed into* defined roles in the group. Students believed the same students dominated or shrank from discussions,

and they grew tired of the predictability of other's responses. The quality of peers' work and admission standards were raised as issues by some students, who perceived that "weak members will continue to plaque classes in future semesters" (p. 71).

Some data suggest a "dark side of cohorts that can include all of the problems identified with inbreeding" (Saltiel & Russo, 2001, p. 101). Radencich et al. (1998) reported recurring problems for some cohort groups in an elementary and early childhood preservice teacher education program at a large southeastern university. While there was congruence among the diverse voices in support for the cohort structure, there also were many negative reactions to cohort involvement by some students, which included the formation of cliques, and scapegoating of professors and peers. The impact of exclusive membership created a family-like environment in some cohorts, but also was dysfunctional at times, creating a sense of *otherness* felt by cohort members who were perceived as different, and by professors and students who were not involved in a cohort. The researchers concluded that the cohorts developed cultures, which were "almost bimodal: on the whole very positive or almost pathological" (p. 112).

Similar findings were reported by Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001), who investigated the development and meaning of community in four cohort groups in an undergraduate teacher education program at Syracuse University. The researchers reported that the cohorts developed a collective identity and culture, which was "powerfully positive or disturbingly negative" (p. 362). Issues of race and ethnicity moved into the foreground in some cohorts, which led to either a high level of engagement and participation, or dissension and tension within the group. The researchers concluded that without the development of a healthy sense of community,

activities involving group reflection and critical feedback can break down. Many of the interactions and incidents that occurred among group members outside of the classroom remained outside of the teacher's radar screen, until they erupted in class at a later time. The researchers concluded that instructors must be prepared to deal with group members' unresolved issues and residual feelings when they surface during class time.

The conclusions generally drawn from these studies is that group dynamics and other phenomena can evolve and change in cohorts, "shifting the very ground we are trying to understand" (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001, p. 363). The findings stress the important role of the faculty in monitoring group norms and dynamics throughout a cohorts life-cycles (Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001; Lawrence, 1996; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1997; Wesson et al., 1996).

Mutual Trust and Respect

Members of cohort groups enable one another academically, but also in a personal and psychological sense. Mutual trust and respect are essential for successful group processes, and learning in a cohort (Teitel, 1997; Brooks, 1998; Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, & Bondy, 2006). In groups where there is a high level of trust and respect, there also is a higher level of interaction, and sharing of insights and feedback (Maher, 2000, 2005). When trust is high among group members, a cohort provides an avenue for the expression of divergent ideas and greater risk-taking (Twale & Kochan, 2000), because group members also have achieved a degree of comfort in the group, and feel free to exchange views without fear of ridicule or reprisal (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Brooks, 1998; Lawrence, 1997; Teitel, 1997). Within trusting groups, members are more open to examining their own group processes as learning material (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-

Olcott, 2001). Conversely, when trust is an issue, group members' sense of academic and psychological safety can feel compromised (Ross et al., 2006). Hill (1995) identified academic competition and pressure to monitor members of a cohort who are perceived as not performing adequately as hindering the development of trust and cohesion in a cohort. When a basic sense of trust is lacking, the group effort can dwindle to actions perceived as self-serving (Witte & James, 1998), and there is greater mental and physical withdrawal of members from the group (Lawrence, 1997).

Ross et al. (2006) identified successful cohorts as those that provide academic and psychological safety and support. Successful strategies in a cohort were identified as keeping an academic focus, pulling one's own weight, taking care of the community, communicating concern about other members, and conveying respect.

Collective Sense of Empowerment

Group members are empowered in their goals by virtue of a common vision and expectations, and when they believe they are valued and have a voice in the group (Maher, 2001). Empowerment can be highly motivating for individuals involved in a cohort group (Hill, 1995). Coupled with a collective identity, a cohort group can become an empowered group very quickly as group members discover a group voice, and tend to be more vocal than non-cohort students with regard to the negotiation of course requirements, assignments, evaluation, deadlines, and the quality of teaching, course content, and material (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Teitel, 1997). It is not unusual for group members to challenge instructors' authority, due mainly to the social bonding that occurs within a cohort group (Barnett et al., 2000; Teitel, 1997).

The collective clout exercised by cohorts generally is positive, as when a group acts

collectively to address an issue, or resolve a problem (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). However, if used for less than altruistic reasons, cohort agency can lead to conflict between the faculty and students (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Barnett et al., 2000; Maher, 2004; Teitel, 1997; Radencich et al., 1998; Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). While the power of the cohort is the cohort using its power (Saltiel & Russo, 2001), this has raised concerns in some cohort programs regarding reasonable domains of influence (Maher, 2004). Cohorts can be challenging to teach, due to a shift in the balance of power between cohort students and instructors, which is qualitatively different than the balance of power observed in traditional classrooms (Maher, 2004; Teitel, 1997).

Over time, an empowered cohort group assumes increasingly greater responsibility for managing group processes and activities necessary for meaningful learning to occur, and for meeting group members' needs (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Maher, 2000, 2005; Lawrence, 1996). While cohorts can never be entirely self-regulating, nor the classroom an entirely democratic space, cohorts are *self-authoring* with respect to agreed-upon norms and decisions about how members will accomplish their work, and maintain the *quality of life* in their shared spaces (Lawrence, 1997).

Collegiality and Shared Leadership

As a collegial model, a collaborative cohort “looks more like a circle of equality than a pyramid of rank” (Geltner, 1994, p. 6). Faculty join the circle as facilitators and co-learners, rather than as directors, who try to control the process (Geltner, 1994; Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). The instructor “has the power to positively influence the group dynamics by remaining flexible and open to student input about alternative approaches.

He or she also can negatively impact the dynamics by rigidly adhering to a set agenda and discouraging critical discourse” (Lawrence, 1997, p. 5).

A successful cohort process relies on shared leadership and collaborative ways of knowing (Lawrence, 1996), which are developed through attention to building collegial relationships. Collegiality encourages a cooperative communication style between instructors and students, and the students themselves (Barnett & Cafferella, 1992). Belenky et al. (1986) called this *connected teaching*. Participation in a cohort program encourages the development of both collegial and personal relationships (Barnett & Cafferella, 1992). However, members of effective cohort groups recognize the difference between friendships and collegial relationships, and practice collegiality by serving as *helpful critics* to one another as the group strives to accomplish its goals (Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Authoritarian, dominating faculty can stifle interaction in a cohort. The appropriate use of authority stimulates and empowers learners to assume responsibility for the group by recognizing the group’s dynamics, and relying on the group’s resources, rather than on the instructor (Basom et al. 1996). This shift in view of the authority of knowledge allows students to have input into a learning agenda, and empowers students to take on leadership roles within the cohort, which are consistent with their skills and knowledge (Lawrence, 1997).

At different times, or areas of the curriculum, individual group members emerge to provide guidance and leadership for the group (Lawrence, 1996, 1997). While some members may contribute knowledge of theoretical frameworks, research methodology, and writing or editing skills, other members may exercise leadership by providing the

organizational strength needed for cohesiveness, a positive attitude, sense of humor, or comic relief during times of tension (Maher, 2001). Power sharing of this nature allows for the productive use of resources, while also providing for economy of time and effort (Witte & James, 1998).

Participation and Commitment

The cohort process relies on the individual commitment and participation of all members for effective group performance (Fisher & Ellis, 1990). Participation enables people to develop a sense of identity and belonging to a group (Zander, 1982).

Participation in a cohort encourages a shift from *interested recipient* to *proactive participant* (Witte & James, 1998), and from independent learning to collaborative learning (Holmes et al., 2008). Individual commitment is essential, because it implies a willingness to be interdependent for mutual benefit (Lawrence, 1997). When individual commitment is high, group members are more willing to commit their time, resources, and energy to group goals, including the resolution of conflict (Lawrence, 1999).

Uneven participation and varying levels of commitment within a cohort can be problematic. Passive group members, or those individuals who are highly committed to personal goals, but whose commitment to group process is partial, can leave group members feeling disappointed and angry about not having their expectations and needs met (Lawrence, 1997). Limited involvement by some individuals also can be a cause of competitive discord within a cohort group (Mather & Hanley, 1999).

Collaborative Peerships

Collaboration lies at the heart of group learning models (Kasl et al., 1993), and collaboration is the primary means of accomplishing the work in cohorts (Lawrence,

1996). While a shared purpose and common goals promote collaboration (Norris & Barnett, 1994), collaboration is not likely to happen spontaneously with adult learners, who are battling time constraints and other pressures (Frey & Alman, 2002). For this reason, social interaction is intentionally structured around collaborative activities, assignments, and other group exercises to stimulate and accelerate interaction, and to positively influence group dynamics.

The central idea behind collaboration is for “the participants to make use of each other’s talents to do what they either could not have done at all or as well alone” (Wildavsky, 1986, p. 237). Collaboration involves much more than simply requiring students to work together in groups, or separating a task into respective parts to be carried out individually. To be truly collaborative, five components must be present: a) clear, positive interdependence; b) regular group self-evaluation; c) interpersonal behaviors that promote individual learning and success; d) individual accountability and personal responsibility, and; e) frequent use of appropriate interpersonal, small group skills (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991).

The dialogue of the collaboration is critically important (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruffee, 1987). When students’ perceptions of collaborative interaction are limited to leavening a workload, the greater goal is diminished, and that is not collaboration at all. True collaboration involves the joint construction of knowledge, and the acquisition of a common knowledge base which becomes the *property* of the collaborators (Bruffee, 1987). In having contributed to a group outcome, group members can individually explain what the group knows (Marsick & Kasl, 1997).

To be effective, collaboration requires an openness to *being teachable* by peers (Bruffee, 1987; Holmes et al., 2008), and often necessitates that learners move outside of their individual comfort zones (Maher, 2005). Being collaborative requires patience, trust, and an awareness that the goal will take time to accomplish (Kerka, 1997). Highly independent learning styles and an over-reliance on individual knowledge can frustrate students' attempts to find a common language for their collaborative efforts (Lawrence, 1996; Witte & James, 1998). Conflicting work styles, or situations in which participants are intellectually mis-matched also can hamper the formation of connections needed for effective collaboration, and learning on a meaningful level (Maher, 2005).

Accountability is an important component of productive collaboration, because collaboration relies on each member being responsible for his or her share of the work, and accountable to the group for its quality and timely completion (Holmes et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2006). A failure to deliver on commitments can result in a loss of trust among group members. Similarly, the group is accountable for providing critical feedback to its members, including confronting members when they do not live up to their group obligations (Drago-Severson et al., 2001; Dorn et al., 1995; Maher, 2004; Twale & Kochan, 2000).

Group Cohesiveness

Zander (1982) identified cohesiveness as perhaps the most essential construct of group behavior. While there is no single definition of cohesiveness as a group phenomenon, Yalom (1995) described cohesiveness as a sense of solidarity, which creates a condition of warmth and comfort among group members. Cohesiveness is both a unifying force, and an attribute of *groupness*, which develops over time through group

interaction (Norris & Barnett, 1994), shared experiences, and a shared history (Maher, 2001). Baron and Byrne (1991) explained cohesiveness as “the pressure or forces causing members to remain part of a group” (p. 443). Cohorts are cohesive when the group purpose is clear and acted upon (Basom et al., 1996).

According to Yalom (1995), groups with a greater sense of *we-ness* “value the group more highly, are more satisfied with their affiliation with the group, and will defend it against internal and external threats. Such groups have a higher rate of attendance, participation, and mutual support than groups with less “*esprit de corps*” (Yalom, 1995, p. 48). In a well-connected cohort group, there often is a strong desire to maintain affiliation with the group, and to remain in the group (Lawrence, 2002). Group cohesiveness is demonstrated through shared leadership and the management of group processes, including conflict resolution (Clifton, 1999; Lawrence, 1996). Some conflict is normative as members collaborate and become interdependent (Clifton, 1999), and a cohort structure can provide a legitimate model for openly tackling hard issues (Maher, 2004).

Within cohesive groups there is greater debate, diverse points of view, and critical discourse (Fisher & Ellis, 1990), which also are components of a collegial process (Maher, 2000). Cohesive cohort groups demonstrate greater self-disclosure (Basom et al., 1996) and meaningful dialogue (Teitel, 1997). Members of cohesive cohorts reveal themselves, and allow their attention to evolve from an inward focus on self to an outward focus on others. This attribute is important for learning to lead and inspire others (Basom et al., 1996). Deeper discussion of sensitive issues, including diversity

issues, also have been reported in cohesive cohorts (Teitel, 1997; Wesson et al., 1996), as well as an appreciation of diversity generally (Barnett & Caferalla, 1992).

In a qualitative study of forty-two doctoral students, representing four cohort groups at different stages of completion in an educational leadership program at Arkansas State University, Wesson et al. (1996) found that cohorts developed an identity, personality, and culture over time, which determined how the group worked together. While students reported a fluctuation in group dynamics over time, they also identified high levels of thinking and new ways of constructing knowledge as a result of the cohort experience, which was most evident in cohesive cohorts. Cohesiveness was exhibited through social interaction, positive supportive exchanges, synergy, and a diffusion of competition. Cohesive cohort groups facilitated deeper discussion of topics and sensitive issues, whereas collusion shut down learning. Students passively colluded by not fully participating in group projects, and not holding accountable those students who were not doing their fair share of the work.

Ultimately, an expectation for a graduate cohort model is to develop the type of group cohesion that results in collective unity and strength through which learners become motivated with their own progress in a program. In a study of educators earning their doctorates, Dorn et al. (1995) surveyed 108 doctoral students using the Cohesiveness and Persistence Questionnaire developed by the researchers. Three open-ended questions regarding cohesiveness and persistence were included, which invited descriptive responses. The researchers found a positive correlation of .767 ($p < .01$) between group cohesiveness and doctoral student persistence in cohort programs, with no significant differences of gender, ethnicity, age, and years in program. The findings

indicated that commitment to group and commitment to the doctoral degree were highly interdependent aspects of membership in a doctoral cohort. Belonging to a cohort group, the creation of a collective identity, and having peer mentors encouraged students to remain in the program, and greatly contributed to their motivation to complete a doctoral degree while working full time. Although some students identified personal motive as the most influential factor in persistence, no student identified the cohort as impeding completion of the program. The researchers concluded that the social aspects of participation in a cohort were as important as the task aspects.

While cohesiveness is desirable for motivation and persistence (Dorn et al., 1995; Barnett et al., 2000; Hill, 1995), group cohesiveness can hamper the continual growth of a group at times (Yalom, 1995). Group cohesiveness can create a comfort level based on habitual patterns of interaction and predictable roles and responses (Maher, 2000, 2005; Teitel, 1997). The intense *togetherness* of highly cohesive cohorts can create problems related to groupthink (Barnett et al.; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). Janis (1982) identified *groupthink* as a shared illusion of consensus and agreement within a group, due to a tendency to screen adverse information and deviations from group norms. The symptoms of groupthink include a conformity of thinking and selective bias, as well as limited discussion, and alternatives not considered.

Group Reflection

A group's awareness of the work they do together, and how they go about doing it, is vital to the development of group cohesiveness and productivity (Oswald, 1996). The literature suggests that negative phenomena is measurably diminished when a cohort group is willing to critically examine its group processes as learning material, and resolve

interpersonal issues as a means to seek mutually agreeable solutions (Hayes & Paisley, 2002; Witte & James, 1998).

Many researchers and educators believe that attention to group processes is as much the work of cohorts as the completion of curricular tasks, and should be explicit focus of learning in a cohort program (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001). In a group, reflection of this nature can foster an increased sense of group ownership and responsibility (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006), and enables students to determine the relevance of all activities and processes with respect to their professional growth and development (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992).

Schon (1987) argued that during the formal preparation period, professionals should be permitted to develop the ability to become more reflective about their work during a *reflective practicum*. The value of attending to group process and engaging in group reflection lies in the potential to free energy needed for greater communication and mutual learning in a cohort (Holmes et al., 2008; Witte & James, 1998). Teitel (1997) reported that students who met monthly for a one-credit integrative seminar to discuss cohort relationships, progress, and the connections they were forming between their learning and work environments, were more satisfied with their doctoral program than students in the same type of cohort program, who did not participate in these types of discussions.

The Student's Experience in Cohort Programs

The literature provides some insights into students' perceptions of the cohort model, including the benefits and drawbacks of participation in a cohort program. I found two qualitative inquiries in the literature, which generated phenomenological data on

students' experiences in cohort programs. Lawrence (1996) explored the intersubjective experiences of students in several undergraduate and graduate cohort programs. Maher (2000, 2005) explored the meaning and influence of cohort participation to masters students in one graduate cohort program. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a review of these findings.

In a hermeneutic phenomenological dissertation study of the lived experiences of students in twelve different undergraduate and graduate cohort groups at National-Louis University, Lawrence (1996) investigated the lifeworld of a cohort by exploring the intersubjective experience of being part of a community of learners, the role of the group on the learning process for the individual student, and how cohort groups co-create knowledge through shared experience. Data were obtained through conversational interviews and focus groups with twenty-nine students and recent program alumni, and through a review of reflection papers written by an additional eighteen students. Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, as defined by van Manen (1990), was the methodological tool used for the analysis.

The essential structures of a learning community were identified as a group identity, mutual commitment, safe environment, familiarity, and the roles of the participants and instructors in the community. Six intersecting themes emerged as structures of the experience of learning in a cohort group: (a) building a learning community; (b) experiencing a collaborative process; (c) knowing and learning; (d) valuing multiple perspectives; (e) building interpersonal connections, and; (f) facilitating individual development.

The findings suggested that cohorts were instrumental in community building, collaborative processing, supporting critical reflection, valuing diversity, developing interpersonal connections, and facilitating individual development, self confidence, peer support, and comraderie. Evidence of transformative learning also was found. Many students reported that their self confidence increased, and that they learned more about themselves through others. The findings suggested that it takes longer than a semester for students to become familiar with one another, and to engage in *true* collaboration.

The findings suggested that faculty can influence the cohort experience by attending to group dynamics, promoting a safe environment, decentering authority, promoting interdependence, maximizing the potential for co-creativity, encouraging exploration of multiple perspectives, valuing experiential ways of knowing, and helping students develop support systems within their group.

Lawrence concluded that to be in a cohort is to be part of a community of learners. The group becomes an essential part of the learning process, which sparks passion from one individual to the other, and grows into a shared passion. While the cohort formally ends, the sense of community, and the social and professional networks created therein, often continue. The most successful cohort groups valued diversity, and “many students broke out of their comfort zones of dealing with people who were similar to themselves” (p. 181).

In a descriptive, ethnographic study using a short term longitudinal design, Maher (2000, 2005) explored the first-hand experiences of an entire cohort of thirteen elementary and secondary teachers, who were enrolled in the Masters Degree of Education program at a southeastern university during the first operational year of the

program. The first year of the program was structured as a closed cohort model, after which students moved into non-cohort classes to complete the program.

Interview and observational data were collected from students three times over a ten-month period, and across four courses. Each student participated in three semi-structured interviews conducted during the first, fifth, and tenth month of the year-long program.

The major themes identified in students' experiences were the development of student roles and norms, the resolution of conflict between students and faculty through the development of cohort agency, and the specific ways in which cohort membership facilitated and constrained individual learning in a cohort. Firmly entrenched norms and roles were exhibited in the classroom. The developmental trajectory of the cohort was found to align with discernible stages.

Four themes related to the learning environment emerged: Seeing peers as family, seeing peers as part of a task orientation team, a comfort zone of being accepted, and being able to learn through small group participation. The ebb and flow of peer relationships was important to membership, and both conflict and cohesion were part of students' learning experiences. Peer interaction was characterized by peer responsibility, feedback discourse, and different perspectives. Student-instructor interaction was characterized by student stress and negotiation.

Students' orientation toward the group affected membership expectations. Whereas some cohorts were more product-oriented, focusing on the completion of a collaborative task as an end in itself, others described a process-orientation, which focused on the completion of a task as the means to a human goal, and was characterized by the mutual validation of diverse contributions and perspectives. The findings revealed that many

students' understandings of the meaning of cohort membership and learning in a cohort changed from a task orientation to a relationship orientation as a result of shared experiences and a shared history.

The findings suggested a pattern of evolved understandings, as evidenced by qualitative shifts in the meaning and influence of membership over the cohort's lifecycle. The meaning of membership changed from an inconsequential to significant meaning, and from a modest to deep influence. Frustration and excitement accompanied a pattern of growth and change throughout the cohort's lifecycle. Shared experience, shared history, and several residential experiences over a ten-month period helped the group to evolve.

At the start of the cohort, membership had little significance, and the cohesion developed between cohort members appeared to be somewhat tenuous. Although students valued their peer relationships, many noted that they were superficial and confined to the classroom. By the end of the first semester, students developed a level of comfort with each other that enabled shared understanding to blossom. Habitual patterns of interaction led to a *cohort comfort zone*, which was characterized by predictable roles and meaningful relationships, and represented a developing mindset in which students felt known, accepted, and willing to open up to others. At ten months, when cohort membership was coming to a close, students characterized their relationships as close, but not deep. Students identified the benefits of cohort participation as shared learning, focused discussion, and increased trust among the group. They believed they had an active voice in the cohort, and that one year together was enough.

The researcher concluded that a cohort community depends on consistent, stable membership over time. Combined with interdependent learning tasks, a cohort creates a *professional living situation* and opportunities for students to learn beyond a curriculum. While this can provide a familiar and protective environment for student learning, it also can create stressful or uncomfortable situations as students learn to live together over an extended period of time.

Summary

This chapter was a broad review of the literature related to the topic of this inquiry. The literature reviewed included the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry, the major philosophical assumptions underlying the research methodologies used for the inquiry, the epistemological foundations underlying counselor education, counselor education and the counselor education student, and literature on cohorts, including students' experiences in a cohort model. While I found no research-based data on the specific topic of this inquiry, the literature examined in this chapter provides additional context, which can deepen our understanding of the lived experiences described in this inquiry.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Researchers are so busy trying to keep their methodological skirts clean that they forget the messy world in which they are standing. Phenomenological research tries to understand the mess. It is mired in it. Phenomenological procedures will not seem elegant by natural science standards because they acknowledge the nature of the world and try to meet it, the data, on its own terms. (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 33)

The following question lies at the heart of this inquiry: What are the lived experiences of counselor education doctoral students in the cohort model at Duquesne University, and what meaning do they make of their university, and other *world*, experiences in the ExCES program? In this chapter, I situate the inquiry within the realm of phenomenologically-inspired qualitative research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the research design, and a rationale for its appropriateness to answer the research questions. Following a discussion of the philosophy underlying the methodology, I describe myself as the research instrument, establish my epistemological stance in the inquiry, and outline my presuppositions about the *world*. The institutional context for this research, as well as the recruitment process, purposive sample, research protocol, and inquiry process are addressed. The phenomenological approaches proposed by van Manen (1990) and Colaizzi (1978) are described in detail, including how these approaches were combined to carry out the inquiry.

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

A qualitative design was selected to investigate the research questions in this inquiry. Qualitative research is suited to the task of understanding human experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sexton & Griffin, 1997), exploring areas of research about which there is little previous knowledge (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and when the purpose of a study is to provide a deeper and fuller understanding of a phenomenon, and its context (Cherry, 2000). Qualitative research is especially well-suited to educational research (van Manen, 1990) and counseling-related research (Gama, 1992; Nelson & Poulin, 1997), because it produces useful knowledge which discernibly matters to someone for something, and holds the prospect of change for those who have stakes in it (Chambers, 2000).

A fundamental assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is multidimensional and ever-changing: “It is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured” (Merriam, 1988, p. 167). In contrast to quantitative research, which sets out to test a hypothesis, or determine a correlation or causal relationship among variables, qualitative research is concerned with how people perceive and understand their worlds (Cherry, 2000). For this reason, qualitative research is regarded as hypothesis-generating research, potentially leading to the development of new theoretical constructs “that can enhance understandings of phenomena, inform relevant questions, and generate new hypotheses” (Levers, 2002, p. 126). According to Patton (1985), qualitative research is

an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand

the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what the meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (p. 1)

As is characteristic of qualitative research, the focus of this research is on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This is essential to understand what is *real* in the everyday world in the ExCES program from students’ perspectives. Qualitative methods emphasize richness and holism, and offer the potential to reveal the complexities of lived experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A qualitative design is appropriate when a research agenda is interested in process, rather than outcomes, context rather than a specific variable, and in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1988). Ultimately, qualitative research discovers contextual findings, rather than sweeping generalizations.

Compared to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine its component parts or variables, qualitative research relies on an inductive, process-oriented approach to understand how the parts form a whole (Patton, 1985), thereby giving “a more general ‘voice’ to the particularity of detail” found in the data (Erickson, 1986 as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 201). In this inquiry, an inductive research process involved moving from a focus on concrete, subjective experiences to the elucidation of the broader, abstract themes in the data.

Another distinguishing feature of qualitative research is an emphasis on language. As Tesch (1990) noted, “When we ask questions about human affairs, the responses come in sentences, not numbers” (p. 2). Qualitative data is *textual*, meaning that an

experience is converted into, and “conveyed through words” (Merriam, 1988, p. 69). Language was the primary way I achieved understanding in this inquiry, insofar that the data were gathered, analyzed, and presented using words, potentially leading to many possible interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While qualitative inquiries allow for reflexive flexibility in the interpretation of themes, they also emphasize the rigor of the methodologies used (Krauss, 2005). Developing themes by featuring the words and experiences of the participants themselves is an important result of qualitative research, which adds richness to the findings (Krauss, 2005).

The researcher is the primary vehicle for gathering and analyzing qualitative data, taking the place of a research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980). The self-as-instrument process relies on techniques of observation that “allow the investigator to sort and winnow the data It is necessary to listen not only with the tidiest and most precise of one’s cognitive abilities, but also with the whole of one’s experience and imagination” (McCracken, 1988, p.19).

I served as the data-gathering tool, because I entered the participants’ worlds, and used my interview questions, observations, and audio and video tape to capture data. In this respect, I served as “the voice of the lifeworld” (Mishler, 1984 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 342), because it was through my understanding and re-construction of the informants’ constructions of lived experiences, in their own words and terms, that phenomena were illuminated.

The Type of Qualitative Design

In seeking answers to the research questions, this research was designed as a phenomenologically-oriented inquiry with multiple informants (Colaizzi, 1978; van

Manen, 1990). In some respects, this inquiry loosely resembles a qualitative case study, because I essentially was studying the lived experiences of students in a single counselor education doctoral program, attempting to gain an understanding of the situations and meanings for the individuals involved. Merriam (1988) described the case study as a study of a bounded system of a phenomenon of interest, meaning that it is not possible to understand a phenomenon apart from its context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Examining experiences in a particular context provides “perspective rather than truth . . . and context-bound information rather than generalization” (Patton, 1980, p. 283). However, unlike the case study, the unit of analysis in phenomenological inquiries is lived experience, rather than an individual, group, or program. I was not studying individuals per se, but their subjective *experiences*; that is, individuals’ experiential relationships to the phenomenon in question (Colaizzi, 1978). As such, this was a very experience-near inquiry, providing a close examination of the meaningful *relationships* between individuals and the phenomena of their worlds (van Manen, 1990). In this inquiry, the unit of analysis is the lived experiences of a sample of current and former students.

As is characteristic of qualitative inquiries generally, language is the medium used to create a feeling of understanding, and to communicate what an experience is like (Tesch, 1990; van Manen, 1990). Lived experience is “soaked through with language” (van Manen, 1990, p. 38), and language is a conduit for getting private meaning *out* from one and into the world (Gergen, 2006).

Phenomenology is not so much a particular method, as it is a particular approach to describe a way of *being* in the world as an alternative to objectification (Willis, 2004). As an alternative epistemology of research, phenomenology raises the other types of

research questions regarding the meanings of experiences, which defy quantification (van Manen, 1977). Natural science methods are too limited to comprehend “the idiographic, the experiential, the Taoistic, the comprehensive, the holistic, the personal” (Maslow, 1966 as cited in Tesch, 1990, p. 73). In van Manen’s (1997) words, phenomenology “does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: A real person, who in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (p. 31).

Within the realm of phenomenological research, there are diverse methodologies for understanding human phenomena. Despite its many forms, phenomenology “has always been an investigation into the structures of experience which precede connected expression in language” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 1214). According to Spiegelberg (1975), the phenomenological inquiry

must start from a direct exploration of the experienced phenomena as they present themselves in our consciousness . . . without committing itself to belief or disbelief about their reality It must attempt to grasp the essential structures of these experienced phenomena and their essential interrelations the way in which these phenomena take shape in our experience. (p. 267)

Given the infinite variety of human phenomena, contexts, and possible research questions, there is no set of fixed, formal procedures for phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). Instead, there is considerable diversity and flexibility in the genres chosen by the researcher for the task (Willis, 2004). Researchers have freedom “for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures, and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project” (p. 162), including inventing an approach

(van Manen, 1990). Consequently, phenomenological inquiries frequently utilize a combination of methods, which are defensible to the researcher and the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

My research questions guided the choice of methodologies I used. The flexibility of the methodologies proposed by van Manen (1990) and Colaizzi (1978) allowed these methodologies to be blended and adapted to the purpose of the inquiry, while also providing a systematic approach for data gathering and data analysis, respectively. From van Manen (1990), I have taken guidelines to enter students' worlds to obtain rich descriptions of lived experiences, and an existential framework to describe and understand lived experiences in their differentiated dimensions, which were illuminated through Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysis.

Rationale for a Phenomenologically-Oriented Inquiry

This inquiry sought to understand lived experiences from the informants' perspectives (emic), rather than from my perspective (etic). Understanding the individual experiences described by multiple informants widens the horizon of individual life by disclosing a phenomenon's particular qualities (van Manen, 1990). As Dilthey (1990/1923) stated, "What persons have in common is the starting-point for all the relations between the particular and the general in the human studies" (p. 186). Consequently, phenomenological findings have a universal, or intersubjective, character, because they illuminate *possible* human experiences (van Manen, 1990). In this inquiry, the subjective experiences described by multiple informants ultimately disclosed the common meanings within the informants' everyday experiences in the ExCES program.

Phenomenological approaches are useful for describing phenomena through sense

perceptions and emotions, and remembering, believing, and valuing (Colaizzi, 1978; van Manen, 1990). I anticipated that such phenomena would be part of the perceptions and descriptions of experiences given by the informants. This research relied on creating a space for these to be shared, where subjective experience “takes precedence over models, tests, controls, outcomes, norms, and everything else” (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 32). In reference to Langeveld, Barritt et al. (1985) wrote that the phenomenological researcher must meet his or her subjects in the phenomenon as people together mean it and never somewhere else. The researcher does not begin from *a general understanding*, but from the phenomenon itself as it is met in experience, which can only be analyzed if the researcher is in a state to allow experience to speak. Taking this stance reminded me of the counseling maxim, *Begin where the client is*, because it was through an openness to all of the informants’ voices and experiences, not just those I resonated with, that phenomena were illuminated.

This inquiry was exploratory in that no previous work on the specific topic of this research has been undertaken in the ExCES program, nor any other counselor education doctoral program to date.

This inquiry was phenomenologically-oriented, because it broadly sought answers to epistemological (How do students know the world?), ontological (What is it like to be in the world?), and existential (What sense do students make of their experiences in the world?) questions of lived experiences.

This inquiry was descriptive in describing lived experiences as given by the participants. While the analytical process was inductive, it also included a deductive component in that the existential framework described by van Manen (1990) provided the

pre-established analytical categories of lived experience used for the analyses.

As is characteristic of human science research generally, this inquiry was inherently hermeneutic or interpretive, with the goal of understanding how students make sense of their lived experiences. In this sense, this inquiry also was constructivist, because it was based on my reconstruction of the informants' constructions of their everyday worlds, therein allowing for multiple interpretations.

This study was naturalistic. Data were gathered in the same context in which students' experiences were *lived*, and focused on naturally-occurring experiences. Cohorts were not formed for the purposes of the inquiry. The participants were members of pre-existing cohort groups in the ExCES program. At no time during the research process were students' cohort experiences under my control. There was no manipulation of treatment or subjects, because the researcher *takes things as they are* (Merriam, 1988).

van Manen's Approach to Understanding Human Phenomena

van Manen's (1990) contemporary approach to understanding human phenomena is hermeneutic in its recognition of the researcher as a hermeneut, or interpreter, of meanings "as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). van Manen's (1990) interest is in concrete lived experience; that is, making "some aspect of our lived world, of our experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible" (van Manen, 1990, pp. 126-127). To van Manen (1990), research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching-questioning-theorizing is the

intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world. (p. 5)

As an educationalist, van Manen's concern for lived experiences in pedagogical contexts is reflected in his method. Pedagogy, in the sense van Manen means it, is more than the usual definition of teaching, instructional methodology, or curricular approach. He described pedagogy as a state of being and acting, which is embedded in wondering about acts such as parenting, teaching, and more broadly, life itself. Pedagogy implies a special knowledge of inner life, a relational quality based on an understanding of how people experience things, how they look at the world, and how each person is unique (van Manen, 1990).

Like van Manen, my interest in this research was largely pedagogical in nature, inextricably linked to my identity, interests, and practices as an educator and counseling professional. I was drawn to the notions of *pedagogical thoughtfulness* and *tact* as guiding concepts in this research, which van Manen (1990) described as a minding, heeding, caring attunement to the project of life, an endeavor that is ethical and pedagogic. This is familiar terrain to those involved in the counseling profession. In counseling, as in teaching, a pedagogically-inspired research endeavor requires an empathic regard for others, and a propensity for critical reflection. On the one hand, pedagogy is "a practical discipline On the other hand, pedagogy is a self-reflective activity that always must be willing to question critically what it does and what it stands for" (van Manen, 1991, p. 10). In adopting this orientation toward the world I was attempting to describe and understand, the potential of the findings to inform disciplinary practices became clear to me. Pedagogically-inspired research offers an awareness "of

the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted” (van Manen, 1990, p. 8). In the interest of acting out pedagogical values, van Manen (1990) stated that

when we raise questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way . . . pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience . . . a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld . . . [and] allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one’s pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact. (pp. 1-2)

van Manen’s concern with context also appealed to me. He encouraged researchers to view lived experience from an individual, holistic, and contextual perspective. This requirement is in concert with the counseling profession’s imperative for preparing culturally competent counseling professionals. This research began in subjectivity, with individual descriptions of lived experiences, and progressed to an understanding of the common, intersubjective ways individuals experience and understand their shared worlds.

van Manen’s ideas about phenomenology and pedagogy are woven together into a methodology, which consists of six research activities: a) Turning to the nature of lived experience; b) Investigating lived experience as lived; c) Reflecting on essential themes; d) Describing the phenomenon through writing; e) Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and; f) Balancing the parts and the whole of the research context.

Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience

At the heart of every phenomenological research endeavor is a deep questioning of an experience, which seriously interests the researcher, and commits him or her to becoming personally engaged with the phenomenon to be investigated (Barritt et al., 1985). van Manen (1990) described this interest as “a being-given-over to some question, a true task, a deep questioning of something” (p. 31). Often, the researcher’s personal experience, or pedagogic orientation in the world, underpins his or her sense of wonder about what a phenomenon is really like (van Manen, 1990).

In my case, initial curiosities regarding the topic of this inquiry evolved from a personal questioning coming from inside myself, arising from my personal experiences in the ExCES program as a member of the Beta cohort. Before this study materialized, I wondered how my doctoral peers experienced our cohort: Were our perceptions similar? What did the members of our cohort value about the group? What was taken from the cohort experience as individuals, and as a group? In what ways were our experiences similar and different from other cohorts in the ExCES program? Were we unique?

The impetus for this study also stemmed from an absence of literature detailing the experiences of counselor education doctoral students in a cohort model, and the value of such literature to an aspiring counselor educator such as myself. While research questions often are shaped from personal experience, we extend them to an exploration of other’s experiences, which allow us to be more experienced ourselves (van Manen, 1990). What can I learn from others like myself, who chose to undertake doctoral study in a cohort model, and how can this inform my pedagogy as an educator? If I can understand students’ lived experiences in the context of their professional development

and preparation, I can begin to appreciate the pedagogical possibilities in my future work as a counselor educator. Through my encounters with the informants in this study, I became a critically-reflective learner. I could look at the cohort experience with fresh eyes, and see my living educational values begin to emerge. These values have become standards for examining my experience and professional practice. The search for meaning has taken form in my research questions.

Investigating Lived Experience as Lived

In the second step of van Manen's method, textual sources of lived experience are gathered. In addition to close observations, textual sources include verbal or written descriptions, such as videotapes, audiotapes, literature, biographies, journals, or diaries, as well as pictorial or poetic images, such as art and music (van Manen, 1990). Investigating lived experience *as lived* "means re-learning to look at the world by re-awakening the basic experience of the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). The data sought are not concerned with factual accuracy, but with an individual's original *living sense* of an experience *before* abstracting, conceptualizing, or attaching social or cultural meanings to it. The intent is to understand the phenomenon as it was immediately perceived and encountered (van Manen, 1990), as if back in the *there and then* situation in a *lived way*. van Manen (1990) suggested the four existentials (corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality) as guides to pose questions and explore a phenomenon "in all its experiential ramifications" (p. 152). This requires the researcher to "stand in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of lived relations and shared situations" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32), and to be open to all possible experiences.

van Manen (1990) suggested the following guidelines to elicit rich descriptions:

- (1) Describe the experience as you lived through it avoiding as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations.
- (2) Describe the experience from the inside as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions.
- (3) Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of the experience: describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience.
- (4) Focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time.
- (5) Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed).
- (6) Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology.

Phenomenological Reflection on the Essential Themes

Texts of lived experiences are viewed as organized in terms of themes. van Manen (1990) explained themes as

the experience of focus, of meaning, or point. . .not an object one encounters at certain points or moments in the text. . .the form of capturing the phenomenon one is trying to understand (p. 87). . .metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. (p. 90)

Reflectively reading and re-reading texts brings themes to the surface. van Manen (1990) suggested using the four existentials as reflective ground “to come to grips with the structure of meaning . . . in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning or themes .

. . . Reflecting on lived experience then becomes reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of the experience” (p. 78).

Understanding is *seeing meaning* in the texts of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). The structuring of meaning with themes discerns *essential* themes from those of a more incidental, related nature (van Manen, 1990), and provides the outline for *bringing speech* to the themes through the hermeneutic phenomenological writing process.

Writing the Hermeneutic Description

van Manen (1990) understood phenomenology as a written form of reflective scholarship, which reduces data to essences. Writing turns a phenomenological inquiry into a *living text*, which *tells the story*. Rather than a culminating activity at the end of a study, van Manen (1990) stated:

Writing is our method (p. 124) Research is writing in that it places consciousness in the position of the possibility of confronting itself in a self-reflective relation (p. 129) To read or write phenomenologically requires that we be sensitively attentive to the silence around the words by means of which we attempt to disclose the deep meaning of the world. (p. 131)

Writing provides an opportunity to reflectively uncover themes by permitting distance between the experience and the narration of the experience. The hermeneutic writing process objectifies and subjectifies our understanding of an experience; that is, it “separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know . . . distances us from the lifeworld, yet it also draws us more closely to the lifeworld . . . decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it returns thought to praxis” (van Manen, 1990, pp. 127-128).

Hermeneutic writing is a process of writing and rewriting to fully describe a phenomenon and discover its depth. As an interpretive movement, each reiteration delves deeper into the meanings reflected in a text. Honing the text each time reveals new insights, and focuses “our reflective awareness by disregarding the incidental contingencies” (van Manen, 1990, p. 128). The hermeneutic researcher goes through successive drafts to construct a narrative, which accurately portrays the essential meanings of a lived experience. The narrative is illustrated with anecdotes (van Manen, 1997), which *show and tell* the meaning of a lived experience in an indirect, but teachable way (Willis, 2004). The end product is a phenomenological narrative, which captures the essences of an experience if the narrative “reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation

A phenomenological narrative should aim for the strongest pedagogic interpretation of a phenomenon, and rich, thick description to ground the research in a perspective which can inform educational practices. van Manen (1990) suggested four ways for developing a phenomenological description. A *thematic* framework structures the description around specific themes. An *analytical* structure focuses more on what is problematic in alternative theoretical representations of a phenomenon. An *exegetic* description explores other philosophical or phenomenological accounts of a phenomenon. An *existential* framework is structured around a phenomenon’s corporeal, spatial, temporal, and relational qualities. An existential framework was used for this inquiry. Corporeality, spatiality, temporality, and relationality were the *a priori* categories of lived

experience explored, analyzed, and described in the inquiry. Within each of these categories, data analysis was thematic, structured around common, emergent themes.

Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

van Manen (1990) reminded the researcher to constantly consider the significance of the parts of a text in relation to the total textual structure. The researcher can get so involved in describing the *whatness* of a phenomenon “that one gets stuck in the underbrush and fails to arrive at the clearings that give the text its revealing power” (van Manen, 1990, pp. 33-34). The researcher must step back numerous times to look at the parts in relation to the whole, and how the phenomenon is situated in its context. The continuous *to and fro* movement between the parts and the whole allows a more comprehensive vision of a phenomenon as captured in themes, and describes a research process which forms a hermeneutical circle (van Manen, 1990).

Ultimately, the research questions, and the way the questions are understood, are the starting and end points for phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990), insofar that it can be demonstrated that the phenomenon “is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience, is validated by lived experience, and it validates lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 27). As a final step, van Manen recommended returning to informants to validate that the findings accurately reflect their lived experiences.

The first three steps of van Manen’s method were influential in this inquiry. I relied on van Manen’s guidelines to orient myself in relation to the world, and to enter the world to revisit phenomena through the informants’ eyes during the data gathering process. During the initial phase of data analysis, I relied on van Manen’s suggestions for reading texts of lived experiences, which were beneficial to develop a *conversational*

relation with the data. The existential framework described by van Manen aided the analytical process, and provided a framework to describe and present the findings of this inquiry.

The Institutional Context and Research Setting

This inquiry was carried out in the Executive Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University during the program's ninth year of operation. Duquesne University is a private, urban, Catholic university, centrally located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Duquesne University is one of fifty-three institutions in the United States and Canada, which offer an accredited doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision. Duquesne University is one of the two universities in Pennsylvania with accredited doctoral programs.

The ExCES program is one of four doctoral programs housed in the School of Education at Duquesne University. The ExCES program is part of the Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education. Within the Counselor Education Program at the time of data gathering, there also was a Master of Science in Education degree program, with specialization in the areas of School Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Community Counseling. There also is a Postmaster's Program, which offers School Certification, and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in a counseling specialty area, or the opportunity to obtain needed credits for Counselor Licensure.

The ExCES program was initiated in 1997 as a three-year, full-time doctoral program. The program is structured as a program-long, program-wide cohort model, and in such a way that during any given three-year period, there are three active, operational

cohort groups at successively different stages of the program. The ExCES program is constructed to support development in the curricular areas of Teaching, Supervision, Research, Clinical Practice, and Service. The program is appropriate for experienced counselors, whose career interests are research and teaching in counselor preparation programs or obtaining supervisory positions in schools or agencies” (Duquesne University School of Education catalog, p. 12). Originally, the program offered the degree Doctor of Education. However, beginning in the summer 2005, the program began awarding the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

Applicants to the ExCES program are drawn from numerous agencies and school systems in the local area, and surrounding counties and states. The program also enrolls several international students. Typically, applicants possess a minimum of a master’s degree in counseling or a related field, and have at least five years of professional experience. Based in the philosophy that effectiveness as a practitioner is a necessity and an enhancement for success in teaching and supervision, a clinical practicum and internship are required parts of the program. ExCES students are assigned the status of *adjunct faculty* in the program while coursework is completed, and are responsible for assisting in the teaching and supervision of masters students under faculty supervision.

Students enter the program as pre-candidates, and participate in a summer weekend orientation experience at an off-campus location. The orientation provides the faculty and students an opportunity to become acquainted with one another before beginning coursework in the fall semester. During the first two years of doctoral study, a majority of classes are completed on campus on Saturdays, one to two weekday evenings, and during the summer months, which enables students to complete doctoral study while

maintaining their full-time or part-time jobs. Block-scheduling is used for courses, and students entering the program are aware of course titles, their sequence, and specific meeting days and times. With the exception of a cognate, which has been different for each cohort, all cohorts have followed roughly the same schedule, completing two to three courses each semester. Other than the completion of a dissertation (which is completed individually), an independently determined six-hour internship, and flexibility for individuation of some elective coursework based on personal interest, the core of the program is undertaken as an intact group, enabling a cohort to begin and end coursework together. Other than an occasional seminar, there is little formal interaction among the different cohort groups in the program.

At the end of the second year of doctoral study, each student is required to pass a written and oral comprehensive examination, leading to doctoral candidacy. The focus of the third year of the program is on the completion of remaining coursework, a clinical internship, and the dissertation. At the completion of the third year of the program, the cohort component of the program ends. At that time, students who have not completed a dissertation, and its successful defense, continue to enroll in the university for one credit during the fall and spring semesters until the dissertation requirement is fulfilled. The university stipulates a period of seven years to complete the dissertation with provisions for granting extensions on a case-by-case basis.

At the time of data gathering, eight cohorts had been admitted to the ExCES program. The number of students in each cohort ranged from two to twenty-one members. The inaugural cohort, Alpha, is the largest cohort, with twenty-one entering students. The Beta cohort was launched two years later in the fall of 1999, followed by

the Gamma cohort in the fall of 2001. Since that time, growth of the program has been rapid, with a new cohort of ten students admitted to the program annually, rather than biennially. The Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, and Theta cohorts began doctoral study during the 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 fall semesters, respectively. At the time of the inquiry, a majority of students in the first five cohort groups had either graduated, or continued to enroll in the university as continuing doctoral candidates, pending the completion of the dissertation requirement. At the time of the inquiry, members of the Zeta cohort were beginning their third year of coursework. Members of the Eta and Theta cohort groups held precandidacy status in the program, and were not yet eligible for doctoral candidacy. The Eta cohort was beginning the second year of coursework. Members of the Theta cohort had recently entered the program.

Recruitment of Volunteers for the Inquiry

Volunteers for the inquiry originated from mailings and two classroom visits. Upon receiving ethical approval to conduct my dissertation from the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (DU-IRB) on September 19, 2006, a list of names and contact information for all enrolled doctoral students, and graduates of the ExCES program, was obtained from the Counselor Education Department to identify the target sample for the inquiry. Former students who had started the program, but left before its completion, were not included in the target sample.

The recruitment of volunteers began by obtaining permission from two faculty members to conduct brief visits to their classrooms during a regularly scheduled class session with members of two of the three active cohort groups in the program (Theta and

Zeta cohorts). I was not known personally to these individuals, and I sensed that explaining the dissertation topic, and fielding questions in a face-to-face situation, may be an important factor in their decisions to participate in the inquiry. I did not conduct a classroom visit with the Eta cohort, which consisted of only two group members. Members of the Eta cohort, along with all other students who had completed the cohort component of the program, including program graduates, received information about the inquiry through the mail.

Classroom visits were conducted on October 7, 2006 and October 25, 2006. After asking the faculty member to step outside of the room, I introduced myself, presented an overview of my study, and invited students to collaborate in the research with me. In both groups visited, I responded to several questions regarding confidentiality and the scheduling of focus groups. I treated students' questions and concerns with respect, and explained how I would protect their identities and manage issues related to confidentiality. At the request of one student, I decided to make the guide questions for participant reflection (Appendix A) available to interested students ahead of time. In addition to building trust by familiarizing students with the general lines of inquiry, this also provided students with an opportunity to think about the experiences they wished to share ahead of time. Given the nature of their questions and concerns, I anticipated that some information shared may be of a sensitive nature, and students were informed that they could request an individual interview with me.

Interested students were asked to provide their names and contact information on a sign-up sheet, which was passed around the room. At that time, they were given two copies of the Consent to Participate in a Research Study form (CPRS) (Appendix B), and

a return stamped envelope. The CPRS contained full disclosure relative to the nature of the research, and informed consent. Students were advised that the return of a signed and dated consent form indicated voluntary agreement to participate in this inquiry. Students were instructed to sign and date both copies, retain one copy for their records, and return a copy to me in the stamped return envelope before November, 4, 2006, the deadline for the return of consent forms. All other students were informed that they could contact me at any time before the deadline if they wished to participate in the inquiry.

The classroom visits generated a total of seven signed and dated consent forms, which I received on-the-spot, and one verbal agreement the following day, from a student who contacted me to request an individual interview. As the deadline approached, students who had expressed interest in the study, but had not yet returned a signed consent form, were emailed a friendly reminder regarding the deadline, and also of my availability to discuss any additional questions or concerns they may have. No additional consent forms were returned.

Individuals affiliated with the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, and Eta cohorts were mailed a Participation Request Letter (Appendix C), which explained the intent of the research and invited their participation in the study. Two copies of the CPRS, a stamped return envelope, and a copy of the guide questions for the focus group were included in the mailing. Eighty-nine letters were mailed, and twenty-nine signed and dated consent forms were returned to me. Coupled with the return of the seven consent forms generated through classroom visits, a total of thirty-six individuals in the target sample volunteered for the inquiry. Upon receiving signed consent forms, I contacted

each consenting participant to confirm their agreement to participate in the study, and to arrange for participation in a focus group discussion.

The Purposive Sample

In qualitative research, sampling is deliberate, or purposive, focused on obtaining individuals who can provide information suitable for detailed research of a phenomenon (Patton, 1980). The purposive sampling method used was based on intensity sampling, which selects individuals for a study *because* they have had a particular experience, rather than because they represent intrinsically-interesting cases, or the general population (Stake, 1994). van Manen (1990) refers to such individuals as *informants*, because individuals are *experts* of their own experiences. An informant offers a picture of what it is like to be oneself when making sense of an experience (Cohen et al, 2000). Informants often become co-collaborators in a research project, because the researcher can return to the informants throughout a study to dialogue about the ongoing record of a transcript, and to validate the research findings (van Manen, 1990).

In qualitative research, the adequacy of sample size is relative to the intended purposes of sampling, and for the intended qualitative product (Sandelowski, 1995). While twenty-five participants generally is considered a good sample size in a qualitative study (Cherry, 2000), sample size for a phenomenological inquiry can be as small as several individuals, and often is not more than ten individuals (Cresswell, 1998). Colaizzi (1978) stated that the subjects in a phenomenological inquiry must be able to articulate their experiences. The purposive sample of current and former doctoral students met this criterion, and also were motivated and interested in the results. As Merriam (1988) noted, the important criterion in a phenomenological inquiry is “not the

number of respondents, but rather their potential to contribute to the development of insights and understanding of the phenomenon” (p. 77), and the intensity of the contact needed to gather sufficient data regarding an experience (Cohen et al., 2000).

I had hoped that my sample would include a cross-section of individuals from the eight cohort groups in the ExCES program. However, the selected sample ultimately was determined by voluntary participation, and participation in a face-to-face focus group discussion or interview. There were no volunteers from one particular cohort group, whose members had already completed the cohort experience. All of the individuals who volunteered for the study were selected, with the exception of four program alumni, who were living out-of-state, and could not participate in a face-to-face interview. While these four individuals offered to participate in a phone interview, or to respond to questions in writing, they were not selected in order to maintain consistency in the methodology used to gather data. I was prepared, however, to consider these additional data sources later if new phenomena continued to emerge after the selected sample had been interviewed. This proved unnecessary, as saturation (in terms of redundancy of data) had been reached in the sample before the final interview.

Thirty-two individuals were selected for the inquiry. Six individuals in the selected sample ultimately did not participate in the inquiry due to personal and work-related issues, which arose after they had returned a consent form. This resulted in a purposive sample of twenty-six individuals (N=26). A demographic description of the purposive sample is included in Chapter IV.

Preparing to Enter the World

The self-as-instrument process requires that researchers are aware of their beliefs and expectations about a phenomenon, so that the phenomenon can be portrayed accurately. Husserl (1962/1913) emphasized the process of *reduction*, or bracketing of one's *natural attitude*, to ensure that *the things themselves* could be returned to. However, Colaizzi's (1978) position is more in line with Merleau-Ponty's contention that complete reduction is not possible, because as the research instrument, the researcher is *at the world*, in a constant process of dialoging with the data. Colaizzi does not have the researcher set aside presuppositions, but advised using one's presuppositions to formulate research questions. I made every effort to become aware of my pre-understandings and biases as a preliminary step to data gathering. This was especially important given that this research topic began with a fragment from the horizon of my own experiences in the ExCES program.

Rather than attempt to distance myself completely from my experiences and the research setting in order to claim complete objectivity, my connection to this research is consistent with Denzin's (1997) view that we are situated in the worlds we study, and we need to recognize ourselves. I was not seeking validation of my personal perceptions and experiences. Given that my intent was to remain open to experiences as encountered by others, the first questions in the inquiry were addressed to myself: What personal experiences do I bring to the inquiry that could color the research activity (Colaizzi, 1978)? How might the ways I know and understand the world unconsciously obstruct what I hear in other's experiences, and see in the data? As a conduit for expressing the informants' emic perspectives, I needed to enter the informants' worlds already cognizant

of my taken-for-granted assumptions, and monitor them continuously throughout the research process.

I carefully considered the knowledge and experiences I brought to the inquiry, and recorded them in my journal in the form of presuppositions. Rather than a one-time exercise at the beginning of the inquiry, this marked the beginning of the ongoing self-monitoring process in which I engaged for the duration of the inquiry. Seeing my presuppositions first in writing, and then holding them before my mind's eye throughout the inquiry, helped me maintain an emic perspective. I revisited my presuppositions often throughout the research process in a vigilant attempt to remain open to the world at-hand. In much the same way that a counselor suspends his or her personal values and beliefs to be as present and open to a client's reality as possible, I wanted to be attentive to how things appeared to the informants. At times during the inquiry process, I had inner reactions to what the informants shared, which revealed biases I initially had not been aware of. I recorded these in my journal as they emerged, so that the phenomenon could "speak for itself" (Tesch, 1990, p. 23). My presuppositions are included below so that they also are transparent to the readers of this research.

Explication of My Presuppositions

1. Current and former students will be motivated to participate in this research for a variety of reasons, and will describe both positive and negative experiences.
2. The more challenging aspects of doctoral study in the ExCES program are social, rather than academic, in nature.

3. The informants' perceptions of the interpersonal relationships with the program faculty and their doctoral peers will be reflected in their perceptions of the program and cohort model.
4. Perceptions of group cohesiveness and support will be influential in the lived experiences examined in this inquiry.
5. There will be similarities in the experiences described by informants at the beginning, middle, and end (i.e., precandidacy, candidacy, and graduated) of the cohort experience, respectively.
6. There will be a variety of contextualizing influences on the informants' lived experiences. In particular, the size of a cohort, and the nature of the program as a counseling program will influence the informants' everyday lived experiences.
7. There are multiple ways of being a cohort group in the ExCES program.
8. The informants' perceptions of the quality of relationships within their cohort groups will be reflected in the significance and value they attribute to their experiences.
9. There will be evidence of the four lived existentials and theoretical concepts used for the inquiry in the informants' lived experiences.

Description of the Researcher as Instrument

This inquiry was conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirement for the degree Doctor of Education in the ExCES program at Duquesne University, where my doctoral experiences occurred as a member of the Beta cohort.

Prior to beginning doctoral study, I had no previous experience with a cohort model

as a learner and teacher. My experiences in my cohort were both intellectually and personally challenging, and overwhelmingly rewarding in ways I could not have anticipated at the beginning of the program. I came to this research as a participant-observer-researcher in a very literal sense, with one foot in the world as an ExCES student, and the other foot in the world as a researcher of the world in which I am part. While this *insider status* has strengthened my commitment to the analysis of this inquiry, it also posed issues I needed to address in order to “put subjectivity to use in the service of understanding others” (Barritt et al., 1985, p. 29). I have taken steps to address these issues directly by making my personal experience, pedagogical interest, presuppositions, and epistemological stance in the world as transparent as possible.

I am a Licensed Professional Counselor in Pennsylvania, a National Certified Counselor, and a Nationally Certified Psychologist. My clinical background includes counseling adolescents, adults, and families, through which I developed a special interest and clinical training in the area of child sexual abuse. Teaching has evolved as my passion, a discovery I made after *falling* into it seventeen years ago. I taught a variety of psychology courses as an adjunct instructor at a local community college for seventeen years. During the last eight of those years, I also taught several different graduate courses in the Counselor Education master’s program at Duquesne University, both as part of my doctoral training, and then afterward, as a part-time employee of the university.

I came to this research already committed to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. I have come away from each course I have taught in awe of how much more there always is to learn, and by how much our students can teach us. This has

further reinforced a view of myself as a work-in-progress, and of my appreciation for learning and development as lifelong processes. From a pedagogical perspective, building a vibrant discourse community in the classroom has been important to me, and frequently has been included as a course objective on my course syllabi. In striving to create a space in the classroom, where questioning and challenging in an atmosphere of respect is a mutual responsibility, I strongly believe that what learners ultimately take from their classroom learning experiences is in proportion to their investment and contributions to them.

My Epistemological Stance in the Inquiry

The importance of context and social interaction in the construction of meaning were important considerations in approaching this inquiry from the epistemological stance of social constructivism. In many ways, constructivism and phenomenology are congruent philosophies, insofar that the nature of reality and meaning are viewed as subjective (Schwandt, 2000). Both philosophies view the knower and *the known* as inseparable and interactive; that is, there is an inseparable meaningful relationship between people and the phenomena of their worlds. From a social constructivist stance, what is *real* results from a dialectical process (Arends, 1998), wherein the world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social factors (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As Gergen (1999) stated, “while the mind constructs reality in its relationship to the world, this mental process is significantly informed by influences from social relationships” (p. 60).

Ethical Considerations and the Informing Process

Formal approval of this dissertation was obtained from the Internal Review Board for Research of Human Subjects of Duquesne University. I adhered to ethical standards involving human subjects, and followed a checklist during the informing process.

Care was taken to consider any potential coercion and dual-role issues concerning my affiliation with the Beta cohort. Given that five years had passed between the time of data collection and the completion of the cohort experience for the Beta cohort, it was deemed that any risk of possible coercion between myself and members of the Beta cohort who chose to participate in the inquiry would be minimal.

Participation in the inquiry was voluntary. I handled the informing process verbally prior to each informant interview and focus group discussion, and also obtained signatures on the Informed Consent Document to collect demographic data, and record the interviews and focus group discussions (Appendix D). The purpose of the inquiry was explained to participants during the recruitment process, and then again immediately preceding each encounter with the informants. The informants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and were advised that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They also were advised that at any time during an interview or focus group they could decline to answer any question, or terminate the discussion. I assured the informants that any identifying information about themselves, and the identities of individuals they mentioned, would be removed during the transcription process, and also would be protected during the presentation and publication of the research. Procedures for ensuring anonymity detailed how codes would be used in place of names. While verbatim quotes would be used, I was the only

person who would be able to link quotes with names. Participants were informed that all paper documents bearing their names and identifying information would be kept in a locked filing drawer in my home, and destroyed five years after the completion of the inquiry. I explained that audiotapes would be destroyed following the transcription process, and that videotapes would be kept in a locked filing drawer in my home and destroyed five years following the study. Relevant computer files were password-protected.

The informants were informed of any risks, including vulnerability related to disclosure in the focus group discussions. Confidentiality in the dyad interviews and focus group discussions was ensured inasmuch as possible by asking informants to sign an Agreement of Confidentiality in the Focus Group and Dyad Interview (Appendix E). Participants were informed that there would be no benefit, monetary or otherwise, from participation in the inquiry. They also were informed that the results of this research would be provided to them upon request at the completion of the inquiry. One informant made such a request.

I adhered to these procedures to provide clear accountability for all parties and to foster open and trusting relations between the informants and myself. Upon ensuring that the informants understood what was required of them, they completed the Informed Consent Document and other forms freely.

Strategies Used to Gather Data

While the procedures used to gather data are discussed separately in this section, in reality, data gathering and data analysis are not separate processes (Merriam, 1988); they are concurrent processes, with each informing and driving the other (Miles & Huberman,

1994). As is characteristic of an iterative research process, data gathering and data analysis were closely interwoven in the inquiry.

According to Kumar (1993), rapid appraisal methods (RAMs) are the primary strategies used to gather phenomenological data. Defined by Stake (1994) as “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p. 241), RAMs equip the researcher with a variety of ways to enter into other’s perspectives (Patton, 1980). The advantage of using more than one data-gathering strategy is access to multiple sources of evidence regarding the ways a phenomenon is perceived (Yin, 1989), and “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Stake, 1994, p. 241). Methodological triangulation helps to ensure breadth and depth of qualitative findings, and is particularly compelling in an inquiry carried out by a single researcher.

Data gathering occurred during November and December 2006. I used a blend of data gathering strategies to approach the phenomenon directly through face-to-face encounters with the informants, which included the focus group discussion, *mini* focus group, dyad interviews, and individual interviews. I used paper, pen, audiotape, and videotape to capture data. I also relied on participant observation, and the notes I maintained in my journal as secondary sources of data.

The Focus Group Discussion

As a qualitative method of data gathering, the focus group engages individuals with similar interests, or backgrounds, in a carefully planned discussion of a specific research topic (Levers, 2006). Generally, participants have special knowledge or experience related to the topic of study, and are key stakeholders in the phenomenon being explored (Levers, 2006).

The purpose of the focus group is not to achieve consensus around the topics and experiences shared. Instead, the focus group “assists in obtaining in-depth understanding of perceptions, opinions, and the ways in which people make meaning of a variety of aspects of their lives” (Levers, 2006, p. 381). In Krueger and Casey’s (2000) words, the focus group is not used to infer, “but to understand, not to generalize, but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the populations, but to provide insights about how people in the group perceive a situation” (p. 83). As such, the focus group taps into a different kind of data than the data obtained through interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000), and is a “highly efficacious way to get at important contextual factors” (Levers, 2006, p. 385).

While opinions about the size of the focus group vary, a typical focus group generally consists of six to ten participants (Morgan, 1998b as cited in Levers, 2006). When the focus group is used as a discussion of more complex issues, Krueger (1994) recommended no more than seven participants. At times, a *mini* focus group, comprised of approximately four or five participants, may be better suited for the research purpose (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Initially, I conceptualized (and proposed) the focus group as the primary strategy to gather data, with individual interviews providing a means for elaboration and deeper dialogue around issues raised in the focus group discussions. However, I encountered two circumstances, which necessitated modifications to my original proposal. The first circumstance involved the grouping of participants for the focus groups. The second situation occurred when three scheduled mini focus groups ended up being facilitated as dyad interviews. While I had not originally proposed the use of dyad interviews for the

inquiry, the dyad interviews were the consequence of last-minute cancellations by individuals who were scheduled to participate in mini focus group discussions, leaving two individuals per group.

Originally, I had hoped to keep students in their natural cohort groupings for focus group discussions. While I was aware of the possibility of group influence on individual responses, particularly among students in active cohort groups, it seemed reasonable to assume that a greater degree of familiarity among members of a cohort group may be reflected in greater openness and depth of discussion in the focus group. Structuring focus groups in this manner also had the advantage of allowing me to directly observe interaction and communication among members of respective cohorts. Unfortunately, it became apparent relatively quickly that keeping students in their natural groupings was not a viable option. Neither the number of volunteers from each cohort group, nor the informants' availability, fit neatly with this strategy. The alternate path I chose was to recast groupings for the focus group by staying as close as possible to the informants' statuses as precandidates, candidates, and graduates. I ultimately settled on grouping graduates and doctoral candidates together for the focus groups, and decided to interview the small number (five) of precandidates in the sample individually, or in mini focus groups.

These groupings made sense to me in several ways. The groupings provided a means to gather data from two experiential tiers simultaneously—the individual, subjective level, and by their status as precandidates, candidates, and graduates. Moreover, in addition to all of the graduates, all but two of the candidates in the sample had already completed the cohort component of the program, and were working on their dissertations.

By contrast, all of the precandidates were engaged in an active cohort experience. From a lifeworld perspective, the precandidates were physically and temporally closer to the experiences I would be asking them to describe than the other informants. Additionally, after receiving a confidential request from one precandidate for an individual interview in lieu of participation in the focus group, I was aware that privacy may be a greater concern among the precandidate informants. The privacy afforded by the interview appeared to be a more appropriate strategy for these individuals.

I facilitated two focus group discussions in which a total of seventeen informants participated. Each focus group discussion consisted of a mixed group of candidates and graduates, who are affiliated with three different cohort groups in the ExCES program.

Informant Interviews

According to Polkinghorne (2005), one-on-one interviews and dyad interviews are used most often in qualitative research. A total of nine individuals were interviewed. Interviews were arranged at a time convenient for the informants, and were conducted in conjunction with the focus group discussions. In addition to all of the precandidates in the sample, two candidates and two graduates participated in an interview in lieu of a focus group discussion, because the interview could be flexibly arranged around their schedules. Three informants were interviewed individually. Six informants were interviewed in a dyad format in the following pairs: Dyad 1 consisted of two precandidates who shared a cohort group. Dyad 2 consisted of two graduates from different cohort groups, and Dyad 3 consisted of a precandidate in the second year of the program and a candidate in the third year of the program. The length of the individual and dyad interviews ranged from one hour to one and one-half hours.

Participant Observation

Becker and Geer (1957) stated that the participant observer is in the same position as a social anthropologist visiting a distant land, insofar that to understand the culture, the language must be learned; that is, the *argot*, or special uses of words and slang, is important to penetrate a culture. My centrality to this research as a doctoral student and researcher enhanced my observations and sensitivity to the informants' experiences, and the issues raised. As the primary instrument of inquiry, the researcher's "self-in-the-world is the best source of knowledge about the social world" (Bednarz, 1985, as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 303). My first-hand knowledge of the research context and counseling culture enabled me to interpret the informants' words and references to the curriculum, faculty, and profession with confidence. I could envision the material spaces the informants described, including the physical layout of the building, and the places where their experiences took place.

Colaizzi (1978) reminds us that an informant is more than a data source: He or she is "exquisitely a person, and the full richness of a persona and his verbalized experiences can be contacted only when the researcher listens to him with more than just his ears, he must listen with the totality of his being and with the entirety of his personality" (p. 64). As the informants discussed their experiences, I used *imaginative listening* to remain attuned to the whole person. Imaginative listening calls for the researcher to be totally present as participants describe their experiences (Colaizzi, 1978). This is not unlike a counselor, who not only listens closely to words, but also to the tone, emphasis, and emotion in one's voice, and to the silences between words. I listened to informants with my eyes and ears, observing the consistency between their words and body language. At

times I checked the accuracy of my observations, and what I was sensing, by briefly summarizing my understanding of what the informants had shared.

I entered observer comments into my journal, which ensured that I would not lose important pieces of triangulating data. Later, my observer comments helped me to evaluate that a consistent, accurate snapshot of the phenomenon emerged.

The Inquiry Process

One week prior to all scheduled focus group discussions and interviews, and then again the day before, I emailed participants a reminder of the day, time, and location of the interview or focus group.

All encounters with informants took place in a conference-style room on the fourth floor of Canevin Hall on the Duquesne University campus, and were recorded. The room was chosen because it was fitted with suitable furniture, comfortably accommodated a group and recording equipment, and was familiar and easily accessible for the informants. The location of the room provided relative seclusion and freedom from potential distractions. To ensure that the encounters proceeded without interruption once underway, I taped a *Please Do Not Disturb: Recording in Progress* sign on the outside of the door.

Prior to each interview and focus group, I arrived on campus early to arrange the furniture in the room, and to set up and test recording equipment. The focus groups and dyad interviews were videotaped using a high quality video tape, and a video-recorder I borrowed from the university's Media Center. I made a back-up audiotape recording for each videotape as a safeguard against video equipment failure. The audiotapes were destroyed upon ascertaining that I had obtained a quality videotape. Individual

interviews were audio-recorded using a high quality audio cassette tape and cassette recorder.

I was cognizant of the importance of creating a research context in which the informants felt comfortable to express themselves, and speak candidly about their experiences. I spent some time at the beginning of all encounters to establish a rapport and put the informants at ease, and advised the informants that they may discuss the experiences they were comfortable sharing.

As mentioned previously, all encounters with the informants began with a review of the Informed Consent Document (Appendix D). The informing process was the same for all informants, with the exception of ensuring confidentiality in the focus groups and dyad interviews. These individuals were asked to sign an Agreement of Confidentiality in the Focus Group and Dyad Interview (Appendix E).

Following the informing process, demographic data was collected (Appendix F). Once all forms had been completed and collected, the informants were given an opportunity to ask questions. Data gathering then proceeded with the aim of obtaining descriptions of lived experiences.

The Semi-Structured Protocol

While Colaizzi (1978) recommended one open-ended question to lead to a description of a phenomenon, I used a protocol of four semi-structured, open-ended questions to assist in gathering specific data from all informants (Appendix G). The open-ended nature of the questions allowed informants to talk about experiences of their own choosing, and in the manner and language with which they were comfortable.

The questions were essentially the same for the focus group discussions and

interviews. The sequence of the questions was designed to go beyond superficial responses, and consisted of an orienting question, a transitional question, a question of meaning, and a closing question. The initial statement made to informants, *What kinds of experiences have you had in your cohort?* was intended to be a broad, orienting question. Following the first interview, this statement was modified to *Describe what it is like being in a cohort in the ExCES program.* This change elicited more descriptive responses from informants early on.

van Manen (1990) recommended asking for concrete examples when exploring what an experience is like; that is, “Ask the person to think of a specific instance, situation, person, or event then explore the whole experience to the fullest” (p. 67). The second statement, which asked the informants to describe an experience that immediately comes to mind, or stands out most vividly, invited detailed descriptions of first-hand experiences. The third question was a meaning question. Meaning questions are designed to lead to a deeper pedagogical understanding in order to be able to act more thoughtfully in certain situations (van Manen, 1990). When it appeared that a full description had been given, the closing question was: *Is there anything you would like to add, or came wanting to say, but have not yet had the opportunity to discuss?*

Informants were given adequate time to reflect and gather their thoughts while discussing their experiences, because reflection involves “stepping outside the duration of time and takes time” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 168). The inquiry process took the form of a conversation, rather than a series of question-answer sequences, and created space for the informants to have most of the words. Conversation involves a relationship with the other for “keeping the question of the meaning of phenomena open. . . oriented to the

substance of the thing questioned” (van Manen, 1990, p. 98). While specific questions were asked of each informant, the informants also guided the subject matter in deciding which direction and interpretation of the questions they took. In following the conversational threads opened up by the informants, I had the freedom to pursue their leads into unanticipated areas. Depth of probing was attuned to further explore issues raised by individual responses, and drew out dimensions of experiences which initially may not have been foregrounded in awareness.

I relied on techniques which would elicit rich, descriptive data, and allow for the formulation of meanings during my analyses. I had given prior consideration to the types of prompts which would capture *there and then* details, and bring them into the *here and now* in a lived way. Many of the prompts used were patterned after the guidelines recommended by van Manen (1990) for obtaining full, detailed accounts of experiences. Prompts encouraged informants to stay as close as possible to the senses and feelings of their everyday worlds. This was important, because I was not seeking explanations, intellectualizations, or *new* insights. My interest was in the experiences where were *already there*.

I used a combination of prompts to invite clarification, details, and elaboration to delve beneath surface descriptions (the *whatness*) to the experiences *as encountered* (what it was *like*). To clarify vague information and get at specific details, I used statements such as, *Can you give me an example of what you mean?* and *Can you talk about what that was like for you?* An example is that after one informant shared the perception that tension was an ongoing issue in the cohort, I asked the informant to describe what she was sensing and feeling at the time, as if back in the situation.

Elaboration prompts such as, *Can you tell me more about how it felt having that experience?* were effective in fleshing out details. Summarizing my understanding of what had been shared at different times throughout the conversation provided additional opportunities for clarification and elaboration.

There were times I went back to something shared earlier in the conversation, which unfolded aspects of an experience in greater detail. In this sense, the inquiry increasingly took on a recursive aspect as the conversation progressed. When the informants' descriptions started to become too general or intellectual, or wandered too far from *I* statements, I redirected their focus back to the sense and feeling of their experiences. After one redirection, it was not unusual for the informants to catch themselves making third-person statements, and to refocus the conversation back on personal experiences themselves.

At the close of the focus groups and interviews, I provided time for the informants to express any concerns, or to ask additional questions. I anticipated the possibility that the events highlighted in experiences may be associated with strong affective responses (Willis, 2004), and I was prepared to debrief if I observed signs of distress, discomfort, or strong emotional responses in the informants. There was only one occasion when some time was spent talking with an informant after the tape recorder had been turned off.

Following all encounters, I thanked the informants for sharing their experiences with me, and advised them that they could contact me if they had further questions or thoughts about what they had discussed. No further contact was initiated by an informant. Focus group participants were advised that I may contact them a second time for an interview. While all informants were agreeable to further contact, none of the informants were

interviewed a second time. Once all individuals in the sample had participated in an interview or focus group, few new descriptions of the phenomenon continued to emerge, and the data gathering phase ended. At that time, I determined that the intensity of contact had been sufficient to reach saturation, answer the research questions, and provide a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. However, on one occasion I had a brief telephone conversation with an informant for clarification regarding a transcript.

Research Procedures

Immediately following each focus group and interview, I entered the beginning and end time in my journal along with observer comments, methodological and theoretical notes, and impressions which emerged during the encounters. I then immediately reviewed the recording in its entirety to ascertain that I had obtained a quality recording. Shortly thereafter, I reviewed the recording a second time for the purpose of transcription. I personally completed the transcription process manually, being careful to remove all identifying information associated with the informants and the individuals they had mentioned. Working closely with the text in this manner allowed me to develop an *orienting gestalt* toward the data, which set the stage for the ongoing “conversational relation” (van Manen, 1990, p. 97) I maintained with the data throughout the research process.

Individual and dyad interviews were transcribed verbatim into type-written texts. I validated the accuracy of the transcripts by reviewing each recording in its entirety a final time while following along with the transcript before destroying the recording.

Given that the focus group generally is longer than an interview, and generates data

from multiple informants simultaneously, the *interview log* (Merriam, 1988) technique was used as an acceptable alternative to full verbatim transcription (Levers, 2006). Following the recommendation of my dissertation committee, I constructed an interview log for each focus group discussion while viewing the videotapes made for each focus group twice. I used a notebook to make detailed notes on the main points of the discussion, including important ideas, descriptive concepts, and relevant verbatim comments made by informants. When I was confident that I had captured all relevant data, I reviewed each videotape in its entirety a third time to validate the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the interview logs. Each interview log was then typed into a text, which was read and coded during the analysis in a similar manner to a transcript (Levers, 2001). The two focus group interview logs and six transcripts of the individual and dyad interviews produced the eight texts, or “protocols” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59), used for the data analyses. In preparation for data analysis, I made two copies of each protocol.

Treatment of the Data

Data analysis is “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112). An organizing scheme often is useful to handle large amounts of phenomenological data, and to facilitate the process of data analysis (Tesch, 1990). Pre-existing classification schemes developed by other researchers can be used for such a purpose (Tesch, 1990). van Manen’s (1990) existential framework, described earlier in this chapter, fulfilled this purpose by providing the *a priori* analytical categories (corporeality, spatiality, temporality, and

relationality) used for data analysis. While the analytical categories were already defined, data analysis within each of the categories was thematic and data-driven. In everyday life, we are not usually aware of, nor accustomed to, viewing our experiences in these four modalities, because the lifeworld is indivisible (van Manen, 1990). This inquiry provided an opportunity to examine phenomena in their differentiated modalities more closely.

Data Analysis

Within the realm of phenomenological research, there are different approaches to data analysis. Data analysis followed a version of the guidelines for analysis set forth by Colaizzi (1978). Colaizzi (1978) stated that to investigate lived experience, one must use “a method which neither denies experience nor denigrates it or transforms it into operationally defined behavior; it must be, in short, a method that remains with human experience as it is experienced, one which tries to sustain contact with experience as it is given” (p. 53).

Colaizzi’s (1978) procedural analysis is a well-established descriptive method, which has been used extensively in qualitative research literature (Cohen & Omery, 1994). While Colaizzi’s (1978) method has origins in the philosophy of phenomenology, drawing largely from Husserl’s philosophy of pure phenomenology as description (Koch, 1995), the method also incorporates a hermeneutic element in its attention to “formulated meanings” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Formulated meanings are the primary methodological tool for analysis. The outcome is a description of the meanings of an experience through the identification of essential themes.

I chose Colaizzi’s method for several reasons. The systematic framework of

procedural steps kept me close to the informants' experiences and provided a structured, iterative, inductive approach to describe lived experiences. Consequently, I considered Colaizzi's method a prudent form of analysis to answer both the *what* and *how* research questions.

According to Colaizzi (1978), data analysis is performed in seven research steps: a) Reading and understanding the protocol; b) Extracting significant statements; c) Formulating meanings for significant statements; d) Organizing formulated meanings into theme clusters; e) Describing the investigated phenomenon; f) Describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and; g) Returning to the participants.

Stages of Data Analysis

Data analysis took place in a series of procedural steps and stages, and began with the description obtained in the first interview. Data analysis began with the analyses of the eight protocols, which captured the informants' subjective experiences. Once the protocol analyses were completed, the data were aggregated and considered as a whole.

As is characteristic of a iterative research process, data analysis was a continual process of moving between the parts and the whole. While the informants' subjective descriptions initially were the whole, these eventually became the parts of the whole phenomenon.

Initially, I worked with one protocol at a time, systematically completing the first three steps of Colaizzi's (1978) method before moving on to the next protocol. The findings for each protocol were summarized in a narrative and displayed in a table before moving on.

Step 1: Reading and Understanding the Protocol

Colaizzi (1978) suggested reading the protocol to gain a sense of its whole contents. I read each protocol in its entirety four times, and frequently made notes in my journal as I held a conversation with the data. van Manen (1990) suggested three processes for textual analysis: “the wholistic or sententious approach; the selective or highlighting approach; and the detailed or line-by-line approach” (p. 93). I used each of these processes at different times to approach the text and “dialogue with the data” (Tesch, 1990, p. 93). Each reading was a fuller reading, successively drawing me closer to the sense and feeling in the description, and to the meanings cushioned within the lines and paragraphs of the text.

I read the protocol the first two times using a wholistic approach to acquire an overall sense of its wholeness, and a feel for the informants’ responses. As I read the protocol a third time, my attention was drawn to the parts of the text which seemed to stand out as most figural to the experiences being described. By the fourth reading, my dialogue with the data had become more honed. I read the text slowly, paying attention to every line. My attention was focused on key words, phrases, passages, and ideas that seemed particularly revealing in terms of meaning in the language of the informants. Now I was ready to begin the coding process. Codes are “tags for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

The protocol was coded in terms of *significant statements*, the unit of analysis in the inquiry, and Colaizzi’s (1978) term for “phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon” (p. 59). The coding process was guided by the four lived

existentials, which served as descriptive codes, and also the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), when meaning units clearly coincide with pre-existing conceptual categories, they can be used to code data. Given that the existentials are pre-existing themes in all lifeworlds (van Manen, 1990), the validity of the existentials as descriptive codes had been established. In addition to the four lived existentials, I also examined each protocol for contextual influences, and evidence of the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry.

As I examined each line on every page of the protocol, I thought about what was being shared. To be considered relevant, a significant statement had to describe some aspect of lived experience in the ExCES program from the informant's point of view. I highlighted relevant significant statements within the text using a luminous pen, and jotted the descriptive codes (*body, time, space, relation*) in the margins next to the highlighted statements. I also followed this process to identify contextual influences and theoretical concepts within the texts. In most instances, it was relatively easy to determine the appropriate descriptive code for a significant statement. However, given their unity in experience, the existentials are not always easily distinguishable from one another (van Manen, 1990). I resolved any questions about the descriptive code assigned to a statement by considering the statement in its context. When the whole of the protocol had been broken down in this manner, I extracted the statements from the text.

Step 2: Extracting Significant Statements

The second step of Colaizzi's method calls for the extraction of significant statements from the protocol. Each highlighted statement was written onto an index card and labeled with a data source code. I used four colors of index cards to represent the

descriptive codes and analytical categories used for the analysis (yellow = corporeality, pink = spatiality, blue = temporality, green = relationality). The top of each index card was labeled with a data source code. For example, *P1-P1-4* identifies the data source as Protocol 1, Precandidate1, page four. Similarly, *P3-G9-2* designates the data source as Protocol 3, Graduate 9, page two. The data source code protected the informants' identities and also ensured that I later would be able to effortlessly return to places within a protocol to validate the accuracy of my analysis. The significant statements in each existential category were also given a number code.

Once all statements had been extracted from the protocol, Colaizzi (1978) recommended eliminating repetitious statements. I followed this suggestion and eliminated any index cards that contained the same, or nearly the same, significant statement. I then read through the final set of significant statements distilled from the protocol. Together, the set of statements formed a full picture of the experiences described by the informant(s). I then entered the final set of statements into lists in Microsoft Word. I compiled six lists, one for each of the four existential categories. The lived relations category was broken down into three parts: Lived relations with group members, lived relations with the faculty, and lived relations between cohort groups. The next step of the analysis involved ascribing a meaning to each extracted statement.

Step 3: Formulating Meanings for Significant Statements

Colaizzi (1978) suggested that each significant statement be paraphrased and given a “formulated meaning” (p. 59). The purpose of formulating meanings is to capture and disclose the underlying meaning of a significant statement. This often is the most difficult step of the analytic process, because the procedure involves a “precarious leap”

(Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) as the researcher attempts to bring an interpretive meaning to each extracted statement. Colaizzi cautioned that this leap should never read meanings *into* statements; rather, the idea is to draw *out* the meanings intended by the informant. The process of formulating meanings involved rephrasing each significant statement related to body, time, space, and relations into a more general statement of meaning, with contextual meanings intact. Formulated meanings were not written for significant statements related to contextual influences, or the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry.

I read the significant statement on each index card several times very carefully to discern its meaning, and then wrote a formulated meaning on the back of the index card, which I believed accurately and succinctly reflected the informant's intended meaning. In an effort to preserve the informant's voice, I tried to remain as close as possible to the informant's own words to formulate meanings. I validated the accuracy of each formulated meaning I had written by returning to the original description to compare my interpretation with the significant statement in its context. Moving back and forth between the parts (formulated meanings) and the whole (original descriptions) minimized the chance that the informant's intent had been compromised by the interpretive process. Each formulated meaning was specified by the same number code as its corresponding significant statement. Formulated meanings were entered into the lists in Microsoft Word, in the columns adjacent to the corresponding significant statements. The final lists of all extracted statements and correspondings meanings for lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations with group members, the faculty, and between cohort groups, are provided in Appendices H, I, J, K, L and M, respectively. Each list of formulated

meanings provided the basis for the development of theme clusters, and the eventual emergent themes, which describe the informants' phenomenological experiences of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality in the ExCES program.

When the eight protocols had been analyzed and summarized in this manner, the fourth procedural step moved the analysis from a focus on subjective experiences to working with the data as a whole, and the development of theme clusters.

Step 4: Developing Theme Clusters

Up to this point in the data analyses, I had worked with each protocol as a separate data set. While the findings of the protocol analyses provided insights into the informants' unique lived experiences, I now needed to delve deeper to discern the broader, common themes within the informants' experiences.

This step began by bringing together the formulated meanings (index cards) from all of the protocols, and sorting them into four piles by card color. I worked with one set (descriptive category) of color-coded cards at a time to develop theme clusters.

Clustering united discrete units of meaning by a common theme, and essentially was a search for similar themes within each set of formulated meanings. Interpretations are continuously being made as theme clusters are developed (Colaizzi, 1978). As I read through each set of formulated meanings, I developed theme clusters by sorting similar formulated meanings into smaller piles, or by starting a new pile to accommodate a new theme. The process of clustering was facilitated by common key words used in the formulated meanings, and many formulated meanings clustered easily into a theme. Other formulated meanings seemed to fit with more than one theme. Returning to the protocol to examine the informant's original line of discussion allowed me to find the

card's theme. I adhered to this process until every card had been placed into a pile with a theme.

Theme clusters need to capture and provide a rich picture of the whole phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). To ensure that the theme clusters I had developed were trustworthy, I again returned to the protocols to validate the accuracy of my interpretations against the informants' original descriptions.

Next, I closely examined the inter-relationships among the clusters that had developed for each existential category. My aim was to reduce the data to its richest common denominator by merging theme clusters into broader, unifying themes without losing the richness contained in the data. Once I was confident that the emergent themes provided a rich and complete picture of the informants' corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences, data analysis ended.

Step 5: Describing the Investigated Phenomenon

In this step of analysis, Colaizzi proposed integrating the themes into an exhaustive description, or narrative, which portrays the whole phenomenon, and identifies its fundamental structure. I chose to present the findings using the existential framework proposed by van Manen (1990); that is, by the themes expressing the informants' phenomenological experiences of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality.

Step 6: Describing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon

Colaizzi (1978) recommended writing a description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, which he described as an unequivocal statement of the essential structure. In place of this step, I described each theme in each analytical category, and

also used multiple verbatim quotes taken from the interview transcripts and focus group logs to show each theme's connection to the data.

Step 7: Validating the Findings

As a final step, Colaizzi (1978) recommended returning to the participants to validate that the descriptive findings represent their experiences. For a variety of reasons, I chose to validate my understanding of the data against the responses given by the informants in their original descriptions.

Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative design of this research as a phenomenologically-oriented inquiry. I described myself as the research instrument, the institutional context for this research, the purposive sample, research protocol, the inquiry process, and research procedures. I detailed how I combined and used the methodologies proposed by van Manen (1990) and Colaizzi (1978) to gather and analyze the data. Eight protocols were used for the data analyses. The protocols were read multiple times, significant statements were extracted, and formulated meanings were written. Data analysis was a process of data reduction. Formulated meanings were clustered and merged into broader themes fully describing the informants' lived experiences of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality in a cohort model.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the data analyses. The chapter begins with a demographic description of the purposive sample, followed by a summary of my participant observations. The findings of the protocol analyses then are presented. Eight protocols, generated through multiple data sources, and representing the subjective experiences of a purposively-selected sample of twenty-six informants, were used for the analysis. Two protocols were generated through focus group discussions, three protocols were generated through dyad interviews, and three protocols were generated through individual interviews. Each protocol was analyzed separately using the four lived existentials as the analytical categories. Each protocol also was examined for contextual influences and the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter II.

Following the presentation of the findings for the protocol analyses of subjective experiences, the similarities and differences among the informants' subjective experiences are briefly discussed. The chapter continues with a summary of the emergent themes for the phenomenological data analysis of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality. Tables illustrating the interpretive, inductive processes used to derive the themes for each lived existential are provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the contextual findings identified by the inquiry.

Participant Demographics

The demographic description of the purposive sample is reported in Table 1 below. The participant demographics are reported in terms of total numbers for the precandidate, candidate, and graduated informants, rather than displayed through individual

descriptions, to protect the individual identities of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Description of the Purposive Sample

	n	Male	Female	Married	Single	Caucasian	Of color	Mean age (in years)
Precandidates	5	0	5	2	3	5	0	35.8
Doctoral Candidates	11	4	7	6	5	8	3	46.5
Graduates	10	4	6	6	4	8	2	50.8
Total Sample	26	8	18	14	12	21	5	51.2

The purposive sample consisted of twenty-six informants, who are affiliated with seven of the eight cohort groups in the ExCES program. There were no volunteers from one cohort group. While the number of informants affiliated with the seven cohort groups was relatively small (ranging from one to ten), the sample was diverse in terms of cohort status, sex, marital status, race/ethnicity, and age. The diversity of the sample provided access to emic perspectives across the entire program continuum, and generated a range of subjective experiences.

The purposive sample consisted of five *precandidate* informants, eleven *candidate* informants, and ten program alumni, or *graduated* informants. Four of the individuals holding precandidacy status were in the first semester of the program. One precandidate

was in the second year of the program. All of the precandidates were involved in an operational cohort. The eleven informants holding candidacy status had already completed the second year of the program. Two of the candidates were in the third year of the program and involved in an active cohort. Eight candidates had completed the third year of coursework and the cohort component of the program, and were working on their dissertations. Ten informants had graduated from the ExCES program within six months to four and one-half years at the time of data collection. Eighty percent of these individuals had graduated within two and one-half years prior to data collection. Eight informants were male and eighteen were female. Fourteen informants were married and twelve were single (seventeen informants also identified themselves as parents). Twenty-one informants identified themselves as Caucasian; five informants identified themselves as Non-Caucasian. The average age of the informants was 51.2 years.

In addition to the data reported in Table 1, this was the first cohort experience for twenty-three of the informants. Three informants had been involved in a cohort in their masters programs. With the exception of two individuals who were not employed at the time of data collection, twenty-three informants were employed in professional counseling roles. One informant was employed in another job area. The primary professional roles of the participants were identified as follows: Eleven informants identified themselves as clinicians (counselors or therapists, including private practitioners). Four informants identified themselves as school counselors, two as counselor educators, and six as supervisors or administrators of clinical programs. Seven informants reported that they also held secondary job titles: Three informants had

adjunct faculty positions, and two informants were involved in private practice. Two informants reported a secondary job title in a counseling-related role.

Summary of Participant Observations

As mentioned in the previous chapter, all encounters with the informants began with a review of the consent form, an opportunity to ask questions about the inquiry and research process, and the collection of demographic data. Participants in the focus group discussions and dyad interviews also completed the Agreement of Confidentiality form.

Nine informants participated in an interview. Three interviews were conducted as individual interviews, and three interviews were conducted as dyad interviews. After an initial period of sharing experiences and perceptions of a more general nature, the informants appeared to relax and become comfortable talking with me. Their responses became more personal and detailed, and they shared both positive and negative experiences. The private nature of the interview appeared to provide a sense of safety for the informants, who divulged experiences, thoughts, and feelings that they indicated had not been shared with members of their groups, or the faculty. On several occasions, an informant expressed a concern that he or she may be sounding “too negative,” and inquired if I was hearing similar things from other informants.

While the dyad interviews provided some of the interpersonal stimulation provided by the focus group discussion, they also provided a different dynamic. Comparatively fewer experiences were shared in the dyad interviews, but this did not play out as a disadvantage. The dyad interview allowed more time for concentrated conversation of comparative experiences, which was beneficial in terms of probing subjective experiences and emerging information in greater depth. The *playing off of other's*

responses frequently observed in the focus group (Levers, 2006) also was observed in the dyad interviews. The presence of *the other* tended to act as a catalyst, wherein the experiences and perceptions shared by one informant frequently sparked a memory, emotion, or experience in the other participant, which then led to the sharing of similar or dissimilar experiences. This often seemed to spontaneously extend the discussion into areas of experience the informants may not have anticipated sharing ahead of time.

Upon arrival for the focus group discussions, participants were greeted, and seated in chairs arranged in a circle. I explained that the purpose of the focus group was not to achieve a consensus of responses, but rather to generate a range of subjective experiences. I also discussed several ground rules that would help the focus group run smoothly, and remain within the two-hour period set for the discussion. For example, participants were asked to set their cell phones to vibrate, and also to refrain from leaving the room once the discussion was underway.

The focus group discussions began with introductions, and the participants introduced themselves in *round robin* style by name and cohort affiliation. Once the first protocol question was asked, the participants seemed comfortable, and in some cases eager, to share their experiences and hear about other's experiences. Many participants seemed as aware of who had contributed to the discussion as I, and it was not unusual for participants to invite others to clarify, or elaborate, a particular point they had raised. While there was validation of perceptions and experiences at times, diverse points of view and experiences also were shared.

Given the high level of interaction among the participants, I had numerous opportunities to jot notes and observe. I noted that individuals who shared a cohort could

do things that only people with a history can do; they could say things like, *Remember when*, and some of the others would nod their heads. At times experiences were shared which members of a cohort group had not been aware of, which led to exchanges of concern, or surprise, between them.

In addition to creating a space for sharing experiences, the focus groups also seemed to become an occasion for some of the informants to re-connect with one another. At times, being *back in* the place of their experiences, and surrounded by some familiar faces in the circle, seemed to trigger spontaneous recountings of some experiences which otherwise may not have been shared.

In the following eight sections, the findings of the analyses of the eight protocols are presented.

The Findings of the Protocol Analyses of Subjective Experiences

The findings for each protocol are presented in the order in which the data were collected. The findings are presented in a narrative, which summarizes the informants' subjective experiences, and also are displayed in a separate table created for each protocol. Each table displays a sampling of significant statements and formulated meanings for each existential category, as well as significant statements which reflected contextual influences, and related to the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry. The full list of significant statements and formulated meanings generated by the protocols, and used for the analysis for each existential category are provided in Appendices H through M.

Analysis of Protocol 1

The one-hour individual interview with Precandidate 1 (P1) began with P1 stating that being in a cohort

has had its wonderful moments and its painful moments. . . .The experience of meeting everyone who are so very diverse and have different cultural backgrounds and very different educational experiences, that's been a real pleasure and high point. I have to say from some of the cohort members I have received a lot of support and warmth, and then on the flip side, it's also been a very painful experience because there's also been some mean-spiritedness. . . .I was expecting intellectual discourse, but I was not expecting things like attacking comments and a lack of acceptance and judgementalism, and that kind of thing. That was something that was quite, quite shocking.

On several occasions, P1 observed, and also personally experienced, insensitive remarks and “disrespectful” behaviors by some group members, including a multicultural issue. She now realizes

that multicultural issues are widespread, that they are not excluded from people even at the doctoral level in a counseling program, that there needs to be more work on clarity about what is, and is not, a multicultural issue. I mean, you can joke around or whatever, but you know, there is a fine line between insulting somebody and humor. This really wasn't in the spirit of humor.

P1 also expressed concerns about the sub-grouping that is occurring in her group, which she thinks is inconsistent with “the spirit of a cohort program.” She stated,

“There’s definitely a separation of *this group* and then *that group* within the cohort, and there are some people who can move in-between the groups, but they stay neutral, which is great, and that might be the key to pulling the whole thing together.”

When I asked P1 in which group she sees herself, she stated that she sees herself “within a group which needs to be supportive of each other, and I think if that group wasn’t present several people would have left the program already, myself included.” Within this smaller group, P1 has found respect, an empathic understanding of one another, and some assurance “that there was going to be mutual support for each other, and a mutual talking each other out of leaving.” I asked her what could happen that would threaten her remaining in the program, and she responded:

I think that if the sub-grouping got to the point that it was damaging in the sense that it became incredibly vicious, that would not be a climate that I would be considering to be conducive to growth and learning. At that point, it would be a really difficult decision that I’d have to make as to whether I want to stay in this program or not.

P1 discussed experiencing a struggle between feeling the need to “self-protect” and education, which has resulted in her backing away from participating fully in the classroom and group, “which is really not me.” While P1 typically sees herself as a strong leader, taking a leadership role within the group to address these issues with her group members is not something she feels comfortable doing. She stated that at this time, “it’s more of a *what do I do about this*, and what’s safe for me to do, and what’s not safe for me to do.” She is concerned that bringing these issues out into the open in the

group would be “met with resistance and denial,” and potentially worsen the sub-grouping that is occurring. P1 went on to say:

I think a lot of it has to do with my own transitions too. I mean, there were a lot of transitions with entering a doctoral program, and so I just didn't feel up for the game I think. . . .It's a huge goal and I want to see it all the way through and not let anything interfere with that. . . .there's a conflict there between my wanting to complete this program and. . .doing what I pretty much feel passionate about, and that's helping to enhance multicultural understanding. So it's quite a dilemma really for me, one that I seriously never, ever thought would happen.

P1 is not sure if faculty members are aware that these issues are going on within her group. She indicated that she is confident that the faculty would be supportive of her if she sought them out, but also stated, “I hear a lot of [from the faculty], *This is a great cohort, this is a great cohort*, and I'm thinking, well, it's a great cohort in that there's a lot of intelligent people. It's a great cohort in that there's a lot of diversity. But, there are many ways that I think, *What are you talking about? Are you brushing over this? Where are you coming from?*”

Processing with certain members of the group has been helpful, although she thinks limited discussion is appropriate, and tries to avoid doing that too much. Instead, she turns more to her friends and family, who are very supportive.

Looking ahead, P1 talked about feeling hopeful that what she perceives now as a lack of sensitivity and empathy will develop over time “with the individual growth of all group members, myself included.” She feels herself getting “more into it” and becoming more assertive, which she believes will strengthen as she moves through the program.

Upon reflection, P1 said:

I think there was something in me already that enabled me to endure through difficult periods in my life before, and not develop bitterness or a completely negative attitude about those periods in my life, but to learn to look at it in terms of challenges that were very difficult. . . .that kind of moved me to the point where I am now in my development. . . .But, I don't think that until the cohort experience. . .
.that's made me more aware of that, being in a cohort. That's exactly what that is.

Table 2

Analysis of Protocol 1

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	<p>SS: surrounded by intellectual energy</p> <p>FM: Intellectual energy is stimulating.</p> <p>SS: I understood that experience very well</p> <p>FM: Empathized with a group member.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: There were a lot of transitions with entering a doctoral program</p> <p>FM: Beginning doctoral study is a major transition.</p> <p>SS: There's an appropriate way to <i>storm</i>.</p> <p>FM: The first semester is an unsettling time.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: There's <i>this group</i> and then <i>that group</i>.</p> <p>FM: Sub-grouping is creating a division in the group</p> <p>SS: Multicultural issues are widespread.</p> <p>FM: Multicultural issues are widespread.</p>
Lived Relations	
<i>With Group Members</i>	<p>SS: The success of a cohort requires certain factors that you don't learn in textbooks.</p> <p>FM: Personal attributes are important.</p>
<i>With the Faculty</i>	<p>SS: The faculty has a responsibility to protect every member of the cohort.</p> <p>FM: The faculty is responsible for ensuring the protection of group members.</p>
Theoretical Concepts	Significant Statement

Social-Cognitive Learning Theory	<p>SS: I observed this whole thing play out [in the classroom]. (Observational Learning)</p> <p>SS: I think that person was quite brave to have done that. I myself couldn't do it (Self-efficacy beliefs))</p>
Socio-cultural Theory	<p>SS: That person's [faculty member] somebody I feel really comfortable talking with. (More Knowledgeable Other)</p>
Self-Determination Theory	<p>SS: I didn't feel up for the game. (Competence needs)</p> <p>SS: The professor was very supportive, but encouraged a leadership role. (Autonomy needs)</p> <p>SS: I see myself as within a group which needs to be supportive of each other. (Relatedness needs)</p>
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	<p>SS: I'm very conflicted between self-protection and education. (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I check my boundaries, and not let things go too deeply into me, not be too affected . (Self-protective strategy)</p> <p>SS: Every time I would say something, make a comment, or a class response, or a question, [a group member] would <i>jump</i> [all over me] every time. (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I really backed away from participating on many levels. (Self-protective strategy)</p>
Social Support:	<p>SS: I kind of go to my personal support network with the things I'm struggling with.</p> <p>SS: If I want individual support from a faculty member, I have no doubt that I could have that if I sought that out.</p>
Contextual Influences	<p>SS: I wonder if it wouldn't be a better situation to have a larger cohort. I don't think the sub-grouping would be as apparent and powerful (Group Influence/Cohort Size)</p>

SS: I think that the individual interview process should be included in the selection process. . . helpful in looking a individual personalities that would not be conducive to group situations.
(Program Influence/Selection Process)

Analysis of Protocol 2

Protocol 2 captured the experiences shared in a dyad interview between a pair of precandidate informants (P2 and P3), who shared a cohort group. The interview was conducted immediately following a class the informants had attended on campus, and lasted one and one-half hours. The discussion focused on their early experiences in a cohort model, the pressures they perceived, relationships, and feelings of quilt.

Both of the informants talked about feeling frustrated by a “pressure that we all have to get along and be so supportive of each other,” which they do not think is necessarily a realistic expectation in a group situation. P2 stated that she does not feel “supported by *everyone* all the time, and does not *want* to support everyone else all the time.” She went on to say, “I feel mean saying that. It’s the quilt. . . .we’re all together so much, how can I be supportive but not have to be with them *all* the time?”

When I asked her about this, she clarified that “it’s not that I don’t want to support them. It’s a pressure that I have to provide a certain amount of support. . . .the level of support I’m willing to provide is a gray area for me. I sometimes feel there’s an expectation that I should be providing more support.”

We spent some time discussing where she perceives the pressure and expectation to be supportive are coming from: “Some professors have said, *You need to make sure you support each other and stick together, it’s a very hard program. You’re going to need each other. There’s a cohort before you that stuck together as a cohort, and if one person was upset, the others were there for him or her.*” While she acknowledged that some of

the pressure she is experiencing may be coming from her personal values, and “not wanting to leave anyone out,” she also thinks that some group members might “hold me back.”

She described a situation that occurred earlier in the day when several group members went out to eat between classes: “I didn’t invite anyone else along, but I thought about it. I feel guilty that I didn’t say anything to anyone else, and felt like I was sneaking around, almost like we were cheating.” She indicated that it is “a very different type of conversation when someone wants to sit in” with them.

In reference to a particular cohort group in the program, P3 stated:

I think they [faculty] really valued that. I don’t think there’s *not* a cohesion in our cohort. . . .I think we do well leaning on each other academically. . . .This constant push for intimacy isn’t necessary to have in a cohort. You can get along to work together, you can respect each other as individuals and scholars. That’s really in essence what you want to do in an academic environment. . . .I think we’re cohesive the way we’re supposed to be. . . .But, I don’t think we’re going to be the [name removed] cohort and support everybody.

P3 discussed that she does not feel “emotionally connected” to many members of the group. She went on to say that she believes she has not “tried hard enough” with some group members, but that she respects them “as intellectuals.” When I probed more about this, she stated, “I think they do good work. In our cohort, working together is fine. I think we’re all hard workers. . . .you don’t *have* to get along personally to work on projects together. Certainly it helps.”

P3 has “settled in” with a couple group members, who she perceives have similar

personalities, and also offer each other feedback and support. She thinks that some people in the cohort are “completely annoying. If they weren’t here, I’d be happy. I feel guilty about that. Socially, I don’t, but in a cohort, I do.”

When I asked more about the guilt she was feeling, P3 stated:

I feel like we can’t not like each other. I feel like I can’t say that except in my own small group where it’s safe. I feel like I’m going to be shamed if I don’t like everyone. . . .I feel like I’m making a clique which I don’t intend to do, but I need [names removed]. I’m not going to compromise that. . .but that’s what I’m feeling like, like I’m making this *popular group* clique and *you can’t be in it*. I’m hoping people don’t think I’m doing that, but that’s what the guilt looks like in my head.”

Later in the interview, P3 acknowledged that she also feels guilty because the group gets a lot of encouragement and positive feedback from the faculty.

Both individuals talked about the importance of peer feedback in personal growth, and also as areas of personal growth they are working on while in the program. While P3 sees herself as “putting it out there,” she also realizes that “sometimes I say more negative stuff than positive stuff, which comes across as criticism, although that’s not my intent. It’s something I’m working on. I do tend to flip toward the negative, because for me, that’s the more helpful. I know what I do well, although it’s nice to hear that too.” Being direct is more difficult for P2, because she wants to “maintain the relationship.” However, she considers giving feedback to group members as “part of my responsibility as a professional and to the cohort. . . .the cohort doesn’t do that for me.”

The informants also discussed their thoughts about their experiences in the personal growth. P2 shared that the personal growth group experience has been “supportive” and

helpful in getting to know the members of her group. P3 identified the personal growth group as “the biggest component here, because you really are forced into finding out who you’re going to be friends with, and who you can work with.”

In closing, the informants shared their thoughts about the cohort experience generally. P3 stated, “We definitely need to be able to work together as a group, and also work individually as hard as we do as a group. I think we do pretty well depending on each other to pick up slack here, and then in another class, to lean on someone else.” She gave the example of copying journal articles for group members as one of the ways group members support and help each other. At the end of the interview, P3 stated:

There’s always someone who’s going to pick you up, because they won’t be doing well another time. It’s that support. I think when you’re in school doing your own thing, there’s some self-doubt, that everyone else seems to know what they’re doing. In a cohort model, it’s not that way, because on some level we all talk about our insecurities, and validate each other that we’re still learning. That’s something that’s absent in just a classroom model.

Table 3

Analysis of Protocol 2

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	<p>SS: They drain my energy. We're all together so much (P2)</p> <p>FM: Feels emotionally drained.</p> <p>SS: I feel like I'm going to be shamed (P3)</p> <p>FM: Thinks she may be shamed.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: At the beginning of the semester I was all over the place (P2)</p> <p>FM: It took time to feel organized.</p> <p>SS: Knowing I'm going to see the group on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday makes it easier to work together on group projects (P3)</p> <p>FM: Regular contact with group members throughout the week makes it easier to complete group projects.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: The personal growth group here is the biggest component (P3).</p> <p>FM: The personal growth group is a significant experience.</p> <p>SS: I'm doing my job giving difficult feedback (P2).</p> <p>FM: Considers giving and receiving feedback a group responsibility.</p>
Lived Relations	
<i>With Group Members</i>	<p>SS: It's good to be on the journey with someone else (P2).</p> <p>FM: Being with others on the journey has been beneficial.</p> <p>SS: I respect them as intellectuals (P3).</p> <p>FM: Respects group members as intellectuals.</p>
<i>With the Faculty</i>	<p>SS: They're still a mystery to me (P3).</p> <p>FM: She is still becoming acquainted with the faculty.</p> <p>SS: They have so much <i>knowing</i> (P3).</p> <p>FM: Respects the faculty's knowledge.</p>

Between Groups

SS: Every cohort is different in dynamics (P3).

FM: Each cohort group has its own dynamics.

SS: We heard about the [group name removed] cohort being there for each other (P3).

FM: Groups heard about other cohorts.

Theoretical Concepts

Significant Statements

Social Cognitive Learning Theory

SS: I know my limitations and have to work at it (P3)
(Self-Efficacy Beliefs)

SS: We heard about the [cohort name removed] cohort (P3)
(Modelling)

SS: Seeing that others are overwhelmed, that itself is valuable (P2).
(Modelling)

SS: We do well leaning on each other academically (P3).
(Group-Efficacy)

Socio-cultural Theory

SS: They [the faculty] have so much *knowing* (P2).
(More Knowledgeable Others/Faculty)

SS: When [group member] gives me feedback, I learn and grow from that (P2).
(More Knowledgeable Others/Peers)

Self-Determination Theory

SS: There are some people I don't necessarily want to work on a relationship with (P3).
(Relatedness Needs)

SS: We're engaged in a personal journey together (P2).

SS: I did well initially on the papers we had to write. I think I started off strong (P3).
(Competence Needs)

Bio-ecological Systems Theory

SS: I feel like I can't say that, except in my smaller group where it's safe (P3).
(Risk)

SS: I've settled in with a couple of people I'm comfortable with (P3).
(Self-Protective Strategy)

SS: They might hold me back (P2).
(Risk)

SS: I'm going to take care of my own needs here (P2).
(Self-Protective Strategy)

Social Support

SS: I sometimes feel I should be providing more support than I'm giving (P2).

SS: I don't feel supported by everyone all the time, and I don't want to support everyone all the time either (P3).

Contextual Influences

SS: I'm so busy with my stuff, my full-time job, and what's expected of me (P2).
(Individual Influence/Personal Obligations)

SS: If they weren't here I'd be happy. I feel guilty about that. Socially, I don't, but in a cohort, I do (P3).
(Program Influence/Program Culture)

Analysis of Protocol 3

The dyad interview with Precandidate 4 (P4) and Candidate 1 (C1) took place during a weekday afternoon, and lasted one and one-half hours.

C1 described her experience at the beginning of the program as an unsettling time as she tried to “figure out” her place in her group. She noticed that several group members were already acquainted through their jobs, and that other members shared cultural connections: “Then, there were a couple of us who were sort of looking around kind of like, *What’s our connection here with everybody else?*” Initially, C1 found herself competing with members of the group, wondering if someone else was performing better academically, and feeling like she had to “prove” herself. She also described having “counter-transference-like stuff” happening with some people in the group. C1 explained:

I didn’t want to be an outsider. That was a very personal thing for me. I have struggled with that in previous small groups. . . .I’m having these flashbacks, well, not flashbacks, but it *was* re-experiencing stuff that I thought I was done with. . .the unresolved stuff, those bigger issues resurfacing. For me, it was being accepted in a group and feeling like I’m part of it. Once I became aware of that, I felt like, *Oh my gosh, going back to high school or something*, you know?. . . .Accepting that I don’t need to replay that, I can just be myself here, was really helpful. I know that’s what changed for me.

These insights changed how C1 viewed the group, and she became more determined to use the cohort experience as an opportunity to connect with other counseling professionals, which was lacking in her job.

As “an independent worker,” C1 found groupwork challenging, especially working with individuals with different work styles: “You try to align herself with people who work the way you do, but at the same time there were some personal things going on, and you’d wonder if who you *wanted* to work with was already committed to a [work] group. There was just this weird thing going on.” Sometimes C1 was dissatisfied with the groups of individuals she worked with on assignments:

I knew I was going to have to be the one to push to get done, and to push for quality work. . . . being in a working group of people that don’t communicate with you, that wait until the day before to try to complete an assignment, I mean, we got into arguments. . . .so there was a lot of negotiation in groups about how we were going to do this. For me being a work-ahead kind of person, I don’t like the stress of waiting until the last minute. That was really difficult. I think that’s where a lot of tension emerged in our group.

C1 went on to say that while “there’s a bit of pressure, because we’re supposed to help each other out,” at times she felt “really used” by some group members, who interacted with her only when they needed help with something.

Another challenging aspect of collaborative work was arranging to work together outside of the classroom, because “it’s not like you’re at your job and you’re all there at the same place. I mean, we manage. We use email, but at times that’s difficult. I think that’s forced alliances in my group. I’d have liked to have had more of a choice who I worked with.”

Later in the program, C1 stated that “there were more individual kinds of projects, and we could focus on just being together and supporting each other.” With the

comprehensive exams behind her, C1 believes that “It’s up to me now,” and she is focused on getting done, and exploring job opportunities. C1 summarized her overall group experiences:

When I look at where we are now, I see that we have come together in many ways as a group from where we started. I see my cohort now at a very supportive place. Some people are closer than others, but in general, we all try to take care of each other. We still confront each other. One or two members still frustrate me. I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I think we managed to get through some of those tough growing pains.

Precandidate 4 (P4) shared similar perceptions of the pressures and challenges involved in groupwork:

I found last semester when there were more of us very frustrating in terms of being a cohort member. We had a *huge* range of experience and ability, and strengths and weaknesses. I found group projects extremely frustrating because I felt like there were two group members who were kind of substandard. I was really surprised that they had been admitted. . . .I found it to be really time consuming. I’m sort of an independent worker. I kind of like to do things on my own, so being forced to do group project after group project was not what my preference would have been.

P4 used the word “constraint” to describe her cohort experiences, because she feels like “I could be going at a speed that I can’t.” When I probed deeper about what that has been like for her, she stated, “This is going to sound awful, but to be really honest, it’s like things get geared toward the lowest common denominator. I feel like I had to deal

with this through high school, as an undergrad, and in my masters program.” P4 went on to say:

It’s just this feeling of constraint. A good example is our very first class, a supervision class, which prepares us to do our supervision practicum. The project we had to do as a group, all together, was to create a handbook for ourselves to use. I thought, *This is the perfect publishing opportunity. I don’t think there’s anything like this out there, and this is going to be the first thing I do.* At the end of the class, the professor said, *You know, one of these days, one cohort is going to take advantage of this, and try to get it polished.* I thought [expletive], *now* I have to do this with *everybody*. So now, it’s a full year later, and it’s still not done. . . .I’m still waiting [for other’s parts]. I also have to go back and do the parts for the people who ended up quitting [the program], whereas I could have just done it all at the beginning of last year myself.

P4 also discussed her perceptions of the impact member attrition has had on her group, and thinks that it “really affected the extent to which we were able to bond. I think they kind of had one foot in and foot out all along. . . .In retrospect, it is understandable why we never felt connected as a group. . . .some members were on their way out.” While she described the remaining group members as banding together emotionally, “it doesn’t play out in everyday life because we have such a small cohort. I haven’t felt like our work styles and work schedules allow us to collaborate very much. As a result, we’ve never really been able to get together and help each other out.” However, P4 added that she is getting support and helpful information from members of other cohort groups in the program. She also thinks that the professors have been “a little lax” in structuring

class time and assignments due to the small size of the group.” She stated that not knowing when classes are starting and “what’s expected of us, is very frustrating because it impacts my personal life.”

As P4 moves through the program, her feelings of constraint are gradually lessening, because “there’s just less of a group. You do things less as a group. Things start to become more individuated.” She considers this advantageous in terms of having more time to pursue her personal goals and ambitions in the program, including manuscript opportunities:

Professors are gatekeepers to publications. They’re always working on things, and if they decide to ask you to collaborate, that’s an easy way to get a publication.

From the beginning I was trying to position myself to be the person they would ask. I guess it does come from this feeling that there’s only so many opportunities, so I want to have as many as possible coming my way. . . .It was definitely to my advantage to cultivate those relationships [with faculty members].

Table 4

Analysis of Protocol 3

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	<p>SS: I'm having these flash-backs (C1)</p> <p>FM: Old feelings and issues resurfaced.</p> <p>SS: I wanted to come across as somebody who's easy to work with (C1).</p> <p>FM: Wanted to project a positive image.</p> <p>SS: It's just this feeling of constraint (P4)</p> <p>FM: Feels constrained.</p> <p>SS: Doing any kind of paper with this person was excruciating (P4).</p> <p>FM: Disliked working with some group members.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: At the beginning I was trying to figure out my place in the group (C1)</p> <p>FM: Finding one's place in the group is a focus at the beginning of the program.</p> <p>SS: After the first year , there were more individual projects (C1)</p> <p>FM: The work process was different during the second year.</p> <p>SS: Now that I'm through with comps, it's up to me now. I proved myself (C1).</p> <p>FM: Achieving doctoral candidacy was a major milestone.</p> <p>SS: I found it be really time-consuming (P4)</p> <p>FM: Collaborative work can be a time-consuming.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: I thought this was <i>finally</i> the place (P4).</p> <p>FM: The experience did not fully live up to her expectations.</p> <p>SS: You were with these people for better or worse (C1).</p>

FM: You were with these people for better or worse.

Lived Relations

With Group Members

SS: I like being a beginner with other people (P4).

FM: Beginning the program as a group is beneficial.

SS: I've made some good connections (C1).

FM: Values the connections developed with group members.

With the Faculty

SS: The faculty do their best to support everyone being cohesive, and don't engender competition the way they could (P4).

FM: The faculty support the development of cohesiveness rather than competition among group members.

SS: Professors are gatekeepers (P4).

FM: Professors are gatekeepers to opportunities.

Between Groups

SS: I'm getting support and all the little pieces of helpful information, but I'm getting it from other cohorts (P4)

FM: Other cohorts are sources of information and support.

SS: There's a general sense of camaraderie and support (P4).

FM: There's a general sense of camaraderie and support among cohort groups in the program.

Theoretical Concepts

Significant Statements

Social Cognitive Learning Theory

SS: We heard a lot of stories. . . about how people [other cohorts] had really taken advantage of the cohort model to work together (P4). (Models-Other Cohort Groups in Program)

SS: You're watching everyone else and thinking, *Gee, is our presentation as good as theirs* (C1)? (Observational Learning/Peers as Models)

Socio-cultural Theory

SS: I have pretty good writing skills. People would ask me to edit their papers (C1). (More Knowledgeable Others-Doctoral Peers)

SS: To have the opportunity to be around a group of people that I can learn from is a pretty positive experience (C1). (More Knowledgeable Others-Doctoral Peers)

Self-Determination Theory	<p>SS: I didn't want to be an outsider (C1). (Relatedness Needs)</p> <p>SS: I couldn't relate to that level of scholarship (P4). (Relatedness Needs)</p> <p>SS: I proved myself (C1). (Competence Needs)</p> <p>SS: I kind of like to do things on my own (P4). (Autonomy Needs)</p>
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	<p>SS: This is really messing with our personal lives (P4). (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I need to be very structured in terms of planning when getting homework done (P4). (Self-Protective Strategy)</p> <p>SS: Sometimes I felt really used (C1). (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I needed to voice my needs too (C1). (Self-Protective Strategy)</p>
Social Support	<p>SS: I experienced my cohort as being very supportive (C1).</p> <p>SS: We have definitely banded together emotionally (P4).</p>
Contextual Influences	<p>SS: In my job, I don't have that much support around counseling stuff (C1). (Individual Influence-Job Situation)</p> <p>SS: It was understandable in retrospect why we never really felt connected. They were on their way <i>out</i> (P4). (Group Influence/Member Attrition)</p> <p>SS: I don't think there's time to carve out to just manage the cohort experience (P4) (Program/Group/Individual Influences-Time Constraints)</p>

Analysis of Protocol 4:

The individual interview with Candidate 2 (C2) took place on a Saturday afternoon and lasted one hour. C2 began by stating:

I don't think my cohort has been cohesive. Some people have more conflicts and some individuals in my cohort constantly butt heads. There's lots of conflicts, so in that sense, it would have been nice to have a variety of people coming in and out. Personally, I would have liked to have done this program in ten years, taking my time doing one class at a time. . .that would financially be feasible for me, but not only that, I would have enjoyed the experience more.

C2's understanding of a cohort group "is to work together as a group." She does not think her group utilizes a team approach. As a result, she believes that many potential learning opportunities have been lost. C2 related that she does not think cohorts work, and she would probably not choose to do a cohort program again. She talked extensively about the cliques and conflicts in her group, which she perceives have undermined the development of group cohesiveness, and a "team concept." While she would have liked more opportunities to work with more members of her group, she felt "excluded" by certain individuals and groups of individuals who "would constantly work together on different projects." C2 stated:

If faculty want us to be a cohort, then they need to get their hands dirty and deal with these issues. They need to address their perceptions of the cohort. . . . It's like preaching one thing by saying, *You know, you guys need to work together and be*

cohesive, and imply that through the activities through the years, and yet they sit back, and nobody really takes the lead in terms of making sure that happens . . . At least in a job you go to your boss and you come to a conflict resolution. Here, it's not that agenda, because faculty members have not taken a proactive role. They expect us to become cohesive, they expect us to work together, yet they took no part.

C2 also discussed her perception of a need for boundaries between the faculty and students:

I know we're seen as colleagues by faculty members, because we all do achieve. We may be colleagues, but at the same time, we're all being evaluated, and we should be evaluated equally. . . . Individuals like myself, who do not interact with the faculty outside of class, feel kind of isolated. I think faculty members should be very careful if they are going to hang out with individual cohort members because those cohort members do have conversations with the rest of us. The rest of us then think, *What's wrong with me?*

She went on to say that she notices some group members "hang out" in faculty members' offices, and thinks that this engenders a form of sub-grouping between faculty members and certain students. She expressed that she feels very angry with the faculty. Numerous times throughout the interview, C2 acknowledged having a "personal responsibility" for her share of the issues confronting her group. However, she has not shared her feelings with her group members, nor the faculty. When I asked more about this, she described a situation that occurred during a class when she "took a risk" and made a comment to a group member. She indicated that "the comment I got back [from a

group member] was about moodiness, and that's *it*. . .and a faculty member was there, and that needs addressed. I mean, I make it difficult. They [group members] haven't actually said that, but that's what I'm feeling."

She went on to say that she does not want to be the only one to take risks in class, and that the faculty "need to take more risks, too." She described how confusing it can be when faculty members do not confront inappropriate comments and behaviors that occur in the group: "If you [faculty] don't call it out, then don't expect it not to be confusing. If it happens in a group, then it's a group issue, because other members see it too."

She acknowledged that one of the reasons she is feeling disconnected from her group is that she has not participated fully in the social aspects of the cohort for a variety of reasons. While she thought she could "be more proactive on socializing" with group members, she does not like to go to bars, or spend too much money to socialize. From her perspective, the problem is that "if you can't participate in that, you miss out on the closure for the semester or the class." From her perspective, bringing the social aspect of the cohort into the classroom would allow everyone to participate:

I don't have time because I like to spend time with family, and I have school work to do, and I have my full time job and I have my personal time. Work is work and home is home. I can't negotiate those areas of my life. Maybe that's cultural too, so maybe I should be more giving in that respect. It would have been nice if we could have all talked about our financial situations to see what we *all* could do, but none of that was initiated, so in a way I feel very angry with the faculty. . . .I mean, let's *talk* about these issues. I almost feel the faculty has a responsibility to do this.

Toward the end of the interview, C2 added that she is looking forward to the end of the program, because “it’s been exhausting for me to do this.” She anticipates that she will keep in touch with one or two people, including a faculty member for whom she has a great deal of respect. Upon reflecting on her overall experiences in the program, P4 stated, “When all is said and done, I’m not going to hold resentments. I’m going to resolve this within myself. But it taught me a lot. . . .I don’t look at it like it’s a terrible experience and that I didn’t learn anything, because I did. . . .you definitely learn stuff about yourself, too.” When I asked what she has learned, she indicated that her cohort experiences have been instrumental in becoming “a bit more mature in how I respond to conflict.” Additionally, she has learned that “it’s not always a good idea to speak your mind,” “cohorts are not for everybody,” and “I think what I need to do now is be more tolerant,”

As the interview was drawing to a close, C2 indicated that she thinks certain cultural messages concerning politeness sometimes “get in the way of being yourself and getting to the heart of the issues. . . .I think that to get to the heart of the issues we need to be honest.”

Table 5

Analysis of Protocol 4

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	SS: it's exhausting (C2). FM: The program demands are exhausting. SS: I don't feel safe (C2). FM: She does not feel safe in the group.
Lived Time	SS: I would have liked to have done this program in ten years, taking my time (C2). FM: She would have preferred a traditional program. SS: I can't wait until the end (C2). FM: She is looking forward to finishing the program. program.
Lived Space	SS: you learn stuff about yourself too (C2).. FM: She has experienced personal growth and self-awareness. SS: Certain individuals or groups of individuals would work together constantly (C2). FM: Some group members would always work together.
Lived Relations	
<i>With Group Members</i>	SS: There are cliques and conflicts (C2). FM: Dealing with cliques and conflicts was difficult. SS: Some cohort members you never get close to (C2). FM: Developed closer relationships with some group members.
<i>With the Faculty</i>	SS: There needs to be boundaries (C2). FM: Healthy boundaries between the faculty and students are necessary for healthy group development and functioning SS: They took no part (C2).

FM: Desired more involvement and direction from the faculty.

Theoretical Concepts	Significant Statement
Social Cognitive Learning Theory	SS: The faculty shows favoritism. I've seen it (C2). (Observational Learning) SS: If it happens in group, it's a group issue, because others see it too (C2) (Observational Learning)
Socio-cultural Theory	SS: Sometimes I'm left hanging with no explanation (C2).
Self-Determination Theory	SS: I prefer to do things at my own pace (C2). (Autonomy Needs) SS: Because of my own initiative, I learned a lot. (Competence Needs) SS: I felt almost excluded by certain individuals. (Relatedness Needs)
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	SS: I don't trust. . .because of the sub-grouping (C2). (Risk) SS: favoritism. . .isolates. . .contaminates a healthy cohort. . .The rest of us think, <i>What's wrong with me</i> (C2)? (Risk) SS: I'm not going to hold resentments. I'm going to resolve this within myself (C2) (Self-Protective Strategy)
Social Support	SS: I've felt some positive relationships (C2).
Contextual Influences	SS: I'm paying for this out-of-pocket (C2). (Individual Influences-Finances) SS: I learned a lot about the American culture (C2). (Cultural Influences) SS: We have different ages, so we all have different developmental needs. That's a problem in itself (C2). (Group Influences-Group Diversity)

Analysis of Protocol 5

The data for Protocol 5 were generated through a focus group discussion which took place on a Saturday afternoon with twelve participants, and lasted two hours. All of the participants had completed the cohort experience. Seven participants were doctoral candidates, who were at different stages of completing their research and dissertations. Five participants had graduated from the program. Three of the participants were male, and nine were female.

Following introductions and a brief period of reflection, C3 opened the discussion by stating:

When I started the program, I had decided I had enough friends, relatives, and colleagues in my life. I'd get in and get out of here being as independent as I could be. I'd invest fifty or sixty thousand dollars. I was paying for it, so whatever I needed to do, I'd do it on my own and really try not to get involved in the dynamics of the group process. That lasted two weeks (laughs). I found a lot of challenges with being in a cohort group, which moved me to an understanding of the importance of a cohort process in this type of program. I found it to be a very supportive process, and didn't expect that even with all my counseling and group background.

The discussion initially focused on the participants' concerns when they started the program. Generally, their concerns related to age, doubts about competence, and cultural differences. For example, C8 was concerned about feeling "intimidated" in a group of people "who would be running all over me because they're younger, more experienced,

and know more than me.” One participant came into the program with concerns about cultural differences, and fitting in (C6). C6 was surprised to feel “embraced” by the group, and spoke of the group as “a tool,” which helped him through the course work, and also with some personal issues. He credits his group with giving him the “drive, energy, support, and motivation” to keep striving through the dissertation writing process.

Many of the participants described their group members as sources of support and motivation:

“We had a theme. We called ourselves the *Nine Miners*, because of the situation that happened with the mine. We were going to be there to support each other. . . We had heard about other cohorts, but we were going to make sure we were different and unique” (G5). G5 also believed that her group was unique because they grouped themselves into the *women sub-group* and the *men sub-group*.

The following statements reflect the perspectives of some of the other participants:

Candidate 3 stated, “I have gotten a lot of feedback from group members that I would not have gotten in a non-cohort setting. We really got to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. If one of us would fall, there would be someone there to pick you up. Sometimes lifting, sometimes pushing.”

Graduate 2 stated, “We fought and we laughed. I don’t think I ever laughed so much in my life. . . and we cried a lot of tears. It was good. It’s *still* good. . . if you were just taking classes it would be really easy to walk away, you know, to say *I have a lot going on. I have a really full life. I really don’t need this*. But that big entity pushes you on. It *does*.”

Graduate 4 described her cohort experiences as a “full body experience,” because it

“felt like it tapped into every part of me.”

G5 shared how her group helped her through a personal grief process, and that “it was nice to have people who understood where I was at.”

G3 spoke about the overwhelming anxiety she felt: “From day one, I struggled with *Am I going to be here, or aren't I going to be here*, and here I am, on the other side. If I wasn't part of the cohort model, I'd never have completed. Never. Ever.”

C5 had a different perspective: “We were like, well, if someone doesn't want to be here, that's their journey, and then we'll support that.”

C7 considered her group members as a “dimension of extended family.” She went on to say, “We laughed together, fought together, pushed, pulled, and yet we remained close and very cohesive. Even today, I feel as though there's any member of the cohort that I could call, and would be there for me. . . .That's very gratifying, and feels very supportive. These friendships will continue for a lifetime.”

C9 felt the support of the group most strongly during the first year of the program when there was a sense of being “in this together,” which felt like a cohort model. Other participants shared similar perceptions regarding group cohesiveness, which was felt most strongly during the first year of the program. While a collective sense of cohesiveness diminished somewhat, a majority of the participants continued to feel more connected to some individuals than others.

C5 expressed his feelings as follows:

The feeling of everything we have to do in the next three years was overwhelming. As time went on, relationships were built with cohort members. There was strength in having someone with you, but we never got past a conflictual-type of stage. We

bumped up against it, but never pushed past it. We never really experienced being able to roll past it.

C5's comment led to the sharing of experiences around conflicts while in the program. Two female participants described "clashes" and "butting heads" with some of the male faculty members, which arose from personality differences, cultural biases, and power issues. One participant shared the following perspective:

What happens in a cohort is a microcasm of society. . .I'm going to speak up when I hear, see, or experience injustices. One situation had to do with some injustices I saw happening around multiculturalism. We talk a lot about multicultural competence, and maybe we need to start with some of the faculty. That doesn't mean I don't want to be here. (G5)

Another female participant shared an experience with a male member of the faculty, who she believes "just didn't like me." She went on to say:

I challenge at times. There's no doubt I have strong opinions. I think for whatever reason, he had the opportunity to act out, and he did. I could have acted out too, but I think the idea that domination is power is primitive, but I think that's where he was coming from. I didn't take it to the cohort because that situation wasn't about me and the cohort. It was about me and this guy. . . .I was in a position in which it would have been much more beneficial for me to stay quiet than to challenge this man, and that's what I did. I thought when I left the program, I'd walk into his office and say something, but I didn't for a variety of reasons. (G1)

Another female participant (C9) stated that she had disagreed with many faculty members at different times, and "all have been positive experiences. I never felt I had to

hold my tongue. I also was a masters student here, so as relationships grew, I felt more comfortable, because I had the benefit of being here longer.”

The participants discussed conflicts in their groups, and personality differences which were stressful and frustrating at times. Many of the participants thought that faculty support and intervention would have been helpful. However, a majority of the participants also appreciated being able to work out their own issues.

There was much discussion among the participants about what they had learned, and taken from their cohort experiences. Overall, they believed that they had acquired “a tremendous amount of learning” in all aspects of the curriculum and program. However, the supervision component of the program was identified as one of the most valuable aspects of the program, mainly because it utilized peer feedback, faculty guidance, and a “strengths-based approach,” which was meaningful to the participants. They also learned a lot about themselves, and valued the personal growth and self-awareness they gained through their cohort experiences.

Many of the participants had developed a greater appreciation for humor, which “kept us alive,” the importance of being “authentic,” and “not having to worry about who you were going to be today,” and the “human part” of the learning process. Some individuals stated that they were both enlightened and relieved to learn that “I didn’t always need to know everything. To be who I am. I don’t need to be two steps ahead of everyone to have an intellectual conversation with them.” They also learned to “trust oneself,” and “We can fight, get it out of our system, and move on.” There was a general agreement among the participants that to succeed in the program, they did not need to be “the smartest;” motivation and persistence were more important. Other participants

indicated that they felt “enriched,” and “fortunate to have been at that place at that time.” One participant described the cohort experience as “life changing. Where I was in my life and what I took from my colleagues allowed me to grow beyond what I ever knew I could” (G4).

Table 6

Analysis of Protocol 5

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	<p>SS: It tapped into every part of me. . .It was a full body experience (G4).</p> <p>FM: A cohort experience is a full body experience.</p> <p>SS: I see the table where we all would sit (G4).</p> <p>FM: Could visualize people in places.</p> <p>SS: That big entity pushes you on (G2).</p> <p>FM: The group's power was motivating.</p> <p>SS: I thought they would be running all over me (C4).</p> <p>FM: Expected to feel intimidated due to age differences.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: It was showing up on a Saturday (G1)</p> <p>FM: Saturdays took on new meanings.</p> <p>SS: These are friendships that will last a lifetime (C7)</p> <p>FM: Believes relationships will continue for a long time.</p> <p>SS: The first semester is unique because of the ignorance of what's really to come (C5).</p> <p>FM: The first semester is memorable.</p> <p>SS: I felt the cohort and the support the first year (C9).</p> <p>FM: The first year felt like a cohort model.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: Everyone was best at something (G4).</p> <p>FM: Everyone had something to contribute.</p> <p>SS: The group was a tool for me to work through some of my stuff (C6)</p> <p>FM: The group is a tool for personal growth.</p> <p>SS: Faculty sort of swim in and out of the cohort (C6).</p> <p>FM: Group members direct their own processes.</p>

SS: Personal growth is helpful to deal with conflict and the cohort model (C7)

FM: Personal growth is an aspect of the cohort experience.

Lived Relations

With Group Members

SS: I feel cheated (C5).

FM: Feels cheated out of more gratifying relationships.

SS: There was strength in having someone with you (C5).

FM: Gathered strength from the others.

With the Faculty

SS: I felt every faculty member wanted you to succeed (G3).

FM: Felt supported and cared about.

SS: We would challenge when the faculty would say, *That's the way it is* (G5).

FM: Group members felt free to challenge the faculty.

Between Groups

SS: We didn't want to always be compared (G5).

FM: Cohort groups are models for social comparison.

SS: We knew your motto our first day (C5).

FM: Group members heard about other cohorts.

Theoretical Concepts

Significant Statement

Social Cognitive Learning Theory

SS: We didn't want to always be compared (G5) (Modelling)

SS: There are different cohort effects on different cohorts (C5). (Modelling)

Socio-cultural Theory

SS: I didn't need to have all the answers. There was someone to call on (C4). (More Knowledgeable Others-Doctoral Peers)

SS: I received a lot of feedback I would not have gotten in a non-cohort program (C3). (More Knowledgeable Others)

Self-Determination Theory

SS: I really needed and desired some kind of professional development around supervision (C3). (Competence Needs)

	SS: an added dimension of extended family (C7). (Relatedness Needs)
	SS: We teach ourselves (C6). (Autonomy Needs-Group Autonomy)
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	SS: Humor kept us alive (C9). (Group-Protective Process)
	SS: it was more beneficial for me to stay quiet (G1). (Self-Protective Factor)
	SS: The threat for me came from within the group (C5). (Risk)
	SS: I stood up to him [faculty member] and disagreed. I thought I might regret that (G2). (Risk)
Social Support	SS: I couldn't have pulled through this without support (G3).
	SS: If one of us would fall, there would be someone there to pick you up (C3).
Contextual Influences	SS: We'd fight, get it out of our system, and move on (C7). (Group Influence-Managing Conflicts)
	SS: There was an allowance for everyone to be wherever they were at any given time (G4). (Group Influence-Managing Conflict)
	SS: We had a theme. We called ourselves The Nine Miners (G5). (Group Influence-Group Motto)
	SS: There was an integration. . .some of that ended when people started their dissertations (G1). (Program Influence-Structure of Work Process)

Analysis of Protocol 6

The data used for the analysis of Protocol 6 were gathered in a one-hour individual interview with Precandidate 5 (P5).

Prior to beginning coursework, P5 liked the familiarity of having met her group members at the group's orientation. Since then, her relationships with some group members have gotten stronger and others have not, which P5 thinks is "pretty typical of moving into a new space."

P5 described the first semester in the program as a "period of adjustment and a period of observation, getting to know the dynamics of things, and the politics of it all. It's been a learning experience. It's gone by very fast." However, she expressed that she is disappointed that the group is not getting the designation of adjunct faculty.

P5 was surprised to learn that she can depend on her group members, which is a new experience for her. As an example, she talked about a supervision handbook the group worked on together:

Each person took a different section and we put it together. It was good that [number removed] people actually got it together enough to put together a handbook. We finished it in the first part of the semester. We had a due date and it happened with very little turmoil, and it worked out well. . . .To get [number removed] people to all work together, and not find someone who wasn't doing what they were supposed to be doing, to me is amazing. . . .that stands out for me. Even in my master's program, when we had to do groupwork and there were three of us, I was the one who did the work. It has seldom been my experience when everyone shared the work equally.

P5 also discussed that she is feeling frustrated with some of the personalities in the group, and the dynamics it creates in the classroom: “We spend huge amounts of time discussing things that I think a person should know as a prerequisite to being in this program.” She thinks that “politically motivated” issues, which she explained as the “issue of diversity, almost like having a quota,” are creating conflicts in the group:

It was interesting, the first part of the semester Dr. [name removed] was telling us we’re really great and smart, that kind of stuff. Now that we’ve had some conflict, the faculty is not looking on us as favorably, *because* of the conflict. It isn’t as though we’ve changed or are putting in less effort, but they’re looking at a particular dynamic. And once again, there’s the power differential there. So next semester, is it going to be an equally pleasant experience, or is it going to be less pleasant because of this?

When I asked P5 about this, she stated that the faculty “hold the strings,” and can determine how pleasant or unpleasant the doctoral experience will be: “I’m here to learn, have my doctoral experience, get my area of research. . . .but also in this is a lot of busy-work and hoop-jumping, and I am ready to jump through the hoops. I’m not here to say, *Oh no I’m not jumping through that one.*” She also indicated that she would never challenge anything the faculty would say, which she thinks is “contradictory,” since she is perceived by her group members as a leader.

As the conversation progressed, P5 stated that she thinks “the faculty imposes meaning of the cohort, rather than allowing the group to develop its own dynamics” by telling the group that they need to be cohesive and get along, because they will need each other in the program. P5 added that she believes her group has “tried to give them that.”

When I asked P5 if she would *choose* that dynamic herself, she expressed that while “it’s nice to have support, I’ve always been independent, and have found very few people in life dependable. So, if it happens, great. If it doesn’t, well, it won’t be different from any other experience I’ve had. I’d complete the program regardless.”

Toward the end of the interview, P5 identified leadership, organization, dependability, and resourcefulness as the strengths she contributes to her group. However, when I asked if there was something other than dependability that the group might offer her, she stated, “I haven’t gotten there yet, because in my past experiences, there hasn’t been anyone there to need something from.”

Table 7

Analysis of Protocol 6

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	SS: The little frustrations I have are with some of the personalities (P5). FM: Some members are frustrating. SS: The dependability surprised me (P5). FM: She was surprised to learn she could depend on the others.
Lived Time	SS: It's been a period of adjustment and observation (P5). FM: The first semester is a transitional period. SS: We're all struggling to find our niche (P5). FM: Members are finding their places in the group.
Lived Space	SS: This is our little microcasm (P5). FM: The cohort is our space. SS: We are the cohort and the faculty surrounds us (P5). FM: The faculty is not part of the cohort.
Lived Relations	
<i>With Group Members</i>	SS: As colleagues, I believe we're solid. FM: The collegial process in the group was solid. SS: I can depend on these people. FM: Positive experiences rest on being able to depend on the others.
<i>With the Faculty</i>	SS: They [faculty] hold the strings. FM: There is a power differential between students and the faculty. SS: I would feel very uncomfortable disagreeing with anything they would have to say. FM: Perceives a risk in challenging the faculty.

Theoretical Concepts	Significant Statement
Social Cognitive Learning Theory	<p>SS: I'm not willing to challenge [the faculty]. I'd have to see someone else do it (P5). (Observational Learning-Peer Models)</p> <p>SS: I'm resourceful. . .one of the leaders (P5). (Self-efficacy Beliefs)</p>
Socio-cultural Theory	<p>SS: We spend huge amounts of time teaching this person things that should already be known, because he doesn't have the background (P5). (More Knowledgeable Others)</p>
Self-Determination Theory	<p>SS: I've always been independent. I'd complete the program regardless (P5). (Autonomy Needs)</p> <p>SS: I'm a strong enough learner (P5). (Competence Needs)</p> <p>SS: I don't know what I need yet (P5). (Relatedness Needs)</p>
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	<p>SS: I'm not here to say, <i>I'm not jumping through that one</i> (P5). (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I'm ready to jump through the hoops (P5). (Self-Protective Strategy).</p> <p>SS: There's always tiny threats about getting kicked out of the program (P5). (Risk)</p>
Social Support	<p>SS: Support is nice, but it's not a necessity (P5).</p>
Contextual Influences	<p>SS: There's a lot of personalities (P5). (Group Influence/Blend of Personalities)</p> <p>SS: In my past experiences, there hasn't been anyone there to need something from (P5). (Individual Influence/Past Experiences)</p> <p>SS: The faculty imposes meaning of the cohort (P5). (Program Influence/Faculty's Visions)</p>

Analysis of Protocol 7

Graduate 7 (G7) was not sure what *cohort* meant when he started the program. He liked the idea of being able to take classes on Saturdays and weekday evenings, and that it was possible to complete the program in three years. G7 thought the cohort experience was a “great experience,” which he described as “very much a community, a family atmosphere in going through it.”

G7 discussed the mentorship and support he received from the faculty and his group members as the things he valued most about his program experiences. In many ways, he credits the faculty for his interest in professional leadership and advocacy. He identified drawing experiences from his group members as helping him through the program. He spoke endearingly about his group members, who were instrumental in helping him work through some difficult personal issues, and changing his cohort experiences in personally meaningful ways.

G7 discussed the “barriers” and “walls” he had around himself prior to entering the program, and a class presentation which changed his personal and group experiences. He also talked about the supportive relationships he developed with his group members as serving a purpose beyond getting through three years of coursework:

I formed relationships with individuals I still have. Those relationships also helped me with the dissertation. Even after the cohort experience ended, there was still support there, and I grabbed onto that. . . Even now if something’s going on, I know I could call at least [number removed] other people. I could call right now and I would get some support.

Another meaningful aspect of his program experiences was leadership development.

From the beginning, it was clear to G7 that the program “was into professionalism,” based on the nature of the dialogue in the program and the way the faculty encouraged students to attend and participate in professional conferences, and build professional networks and connections. He stated that “the leadership and advocacy piece that now our profession is really calling for in counselor education may be a result of the cohort model.” He went on to say:

I see a lot of us speaking up and taking an advocacy role and leadership role in our programs, and at state and national levels. We don't train counselors to be advocates for the profession. We only train them to be advocates one way, and that's in counseling sessions. That's great, but sometimes you need to step outside those walls and do some other things. I've seen this model do that. We talked about how we could change some things like this in our cohort, and in personal growth group. Many programs, including where I work, *talk* about things that could change, but we really don't get into a *place*. We *say* you need to step outside and do advocacy for the profession, but we really haven't put that into action in counselor education programs. Other people who haven't graduated from this program are saying they see people from Duquesne taking a leadership role in the profession, and they're saying their programs didn't prepare them to do that. . . . I wouldn't have been involved at a national level. I might not have even joined state and national organizations as a doctoral student. . . . It was *because* of the program and Duquesne University.

While G7 perceives a focus on professionalism to be one of the program's strengths, he did not feel as well-prepared by the program to interview for faculty positions when he

finished the program; that is, “the piece to get into the door and what all that means.” He thinks this area of the program could be strengthened so that students seeking faculty positions will have an expectation of what it is like to be interviewed by a university.

As a member of the first cohort group to move through the program, Graduate 6 believed that his group experiences were different from those of individuals in the following cohort:

The faculty never dealt with doctoral students before. They were used to dealing with masters students. Whatever faculty said, masters students would jump and say, *How high?* They'd [faculty] say to us, *Jump*, and we'd say, *Let's talk about that for a minute. What else can we do here? . . . Are we colleagues? Is there mutuality here, or is this still like the power thing that's one-up and one-down?* At that time, I don't think that many of the faculty [members] had resolved that in their own minds. I don't blame anybody for that. This was a new experience for *everybody*.

G6 was relieved to discover that the faculty was “serious about this collegial thing.” He believes he was treated “by and large in a collegial manner,” but also thinks that the group was treated with “mixed messages” at times: “I do think the expectation that we would all jump together was what was unrealistic. I felt challenged in my courses. The actual course activities were fine. It was sort of the group management stuff at times that seemed to be somewhat inconsistent.”

An experience that stands out most vividly to G6 occurred during his first year in the program. He recalled walking into a classroom with his group members to take the final exam for one of their courses. The professor announced that if they were satisfied with

their current grades in the course, they could opt-out of taking the final exam. He described his reaction:

The sense of relief was palatable. . . .that was probably one of the best experiences that first year; not because I didn't take the final, but the *collegial thing*. I felt prepared for this exam, but essentially it came down to, *Do you know the stuff?* Yes I do. *Good enough*. He's taking us *seriously*. *Wow*. I didn't think that initially, but afterward it was a very powerful experience. It was a sort of validating, affirming experience. It felt like, *You're good enough to be here. You know what you're talking about*. That's what I needed more than anything else at that time. First semester is okay, but you're sort of unsure about yourself. But, to have somebody say to the whole group, *You've got it*, in essence, *I'll take you seriously*. *Wow*.

He went on to say that the program has affected how he teaches, especially the impact of the faculty's message, "*You can do this. You're not stupid. You can make this work.*" He also has developed "a deeper value" for diversity issues. He thinks he probably would have gotten his degree, license, and same job if had he been in a traditional program, "but to be thrown in with a bunch of other people from different walks of life and ages all going after the same thing, I don't know what it would have been like doing this any other way. I can't *imagine* it."

After two years in the program, he "looked forward to the next cohort group coming along." While he felt a sense of "responsibility" toward the new group, he also thinks that the intensity between his group and the faculty decreased upon the new group's arrival:

After the third cohort is when the program went to the *every year* thing [admission model]. I just wonder sometimes if one of the things that the every year cohort model does is help to dilute the intensity of the interaction between the cohort members with faculty. . . .I think that's a negative. Part of how we learn is through the intensity with the faculty. (G6)

Table 8

Analysis of Protocol 7

Analytical Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meaning
Lived Body	<p>SS: I had barriers around me (G7).</p> <p>FM: He felt closed-off from group members.</p> <p>SS: It felt like a release. It felt safe. . . and I didn't stop myself (G7).</p> <p>FM: Experienced an emotional release.</p> <p>SS: The sense of relief was palatable (G6).</p> <p>FM: Felt very relieved.</p> <p>SS: I'm getting a little emotional now thinking about it (G6).</p> <p>FM: Thinking about it raised emotion.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: I was going into my third year then. At that point you have some confidence (G6).</p> <p>FM: Self-confidence strengthened after two years in the program.</p> <p>SS: On Saturdays, the place was buzzing (G6).</p> <p>FM: The place came alive on Saturdays.</p> <p>SS: The cohort still exists as a theoretical construct (G6).</p> <p>FM: The sense of being a cohort continues beyond the end of the cohort experience.</p> <p>SS: After the cohort ended, there was still support there (G7).</p> <p>FM: Support was available following the cohort experience.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: It felt like a union meeting (G7).</p> <p>FM: The group collaborated to address issues with the faculty.</p> <p>SS: Part of how we learn is through the intensity with the faculty (G6)</p> <p>FM: The faculty brings intensity to the learning process.</p> <p>SS: We model a set of assumptions about the profession (G6).</p> <p>FM: A cohort reflects members' assumptions and professional formation.</p>

SS: You've got a mix of people in a cohort. You just learn to work with that (G6).

FM: Group members learned to deal with diversity.

Lived Relations

With Group Members

SS: They just understand (G7).

FM: The others understand and can empathize.

SS: This was very much a community, a family (G7).

FM: Relationships felt like a community or family.

SS: You have a closer relationship with certain people who share your interests, or maybe personality traits (G6).

FM: Gravitated to people with similar interests and personalities.

SS: We had some difficult people in our group (G6).

FM: Some group members were more difficult to get along with than others.

With the Faculty

SS: He's taking us *seriously*.

FM: He felt validated by the faculty.

SS: We were treated as professionals right off the bat (G6).

FM: Felt he was treated as a professional by the faculty.

SS: The faculty never dealt with doctoral students before (G6).

FM: The faculty had no experience teaching doctoral students.

SS: The mentorship from the faculty has been significant (G7).

FM: Perceives faculty members as mentors.

Between Groups

SS: I developed a cohort-to-cohort bond with one particular person who became like my little sister (G7).

FM: Developed a cohort-to-cohort bond.

SS: It's partly like having a responsibility (G6).

FM: Felt a responsibility to members of the following cohort.

Theoretical Concepts	Significant Statements
Social Cognitive Learning Theory	<p>SS: The first semester or two you begin to get the experience that you can do this (G6). (Self-Efficacy Beliefs)</p> <p>SS: I think I was an effective part of the group (G6). (Self-Efficacy Beliefs)</p>
Sociocultural Theory	<p>SS: I had faculty pull me aside and basically tell me, <i>You need to step up, this project was a little shaky</i> (G7). (More Knowledgeable Others/Faculty)</p> <p>SS: I had other people to draw experiences from (G7). (More Knowledgeable Others/Peers)</p>
Self-Determination Theory	<p>SS: I think it's affected my teaching (G6). (Competence Needs)</p> <p>SS: I didn't feel as well-prepared to interview for faculty positions (G7). (Competence Needs)</p> <p>SS: I carried walls (G7). (Relatedness Needs)</p> <p>SS: There was some undue pressure to . . . coalesce into this cohesive everybody-loves-everybody-else kind of group (G6). (Autonomy Needs)</p>
Bio-Ecological Systems Theory	<p>SS: I was thinking I just hope they're serious about this collegial thing, because if they're not, I'm up the creek without a paddle (G6). (Risk)</p> <p>SS: I was labeled as <i>resistant</i> because I wasn't sharing (G6). (Risk)</p> <p>SS: You pull together, or you die (G6). (Group-Protective Strategy)</p>
Social Support	<p>SS: Those relationships helped me through the dissertation (G7).</p> <p>SS: This experience was very much very supportive, your second family (G7).</p>
Contextual Influences	<p>SS: It is demanding for those of us who are married and have children (G6). (Individual Influences/Family Obligations)</p> <p>SS: It was clear the program was into professionalism (G7). (Program Influences)</p>

Analysis of Protocol 8

The last set of data were collected through a mini focus group discussion, which took place on a weekday evening. There were five participants; three of the participants were male and two were female. Two of the participants were doctoral candidates, and three participants had graduated from the program. The focus group discussion lasted one and one-half hours.

After the first question had been asked, G9 opened the discussion:

Overall, the experience was awesome. . .the whole dynamic, the closeness you develop, the common issues, common problems, common concern, common schedule. That kind of closeness was very beneficial. It was a time when a lot was going on in my life. . .and remarkably, drawing from everyone in the cohort, I was just able to do it, because you *have* to do it.

This comment led to a discussion of the participants' early experiences in their cohort groups. Many of the participants shared that they had a lot going on in their personal lives when they entered the program, and that school was a diversion, "like a nice escape" (C11). While some of the participants perceived that a lot of "personal-life stuff" was shared early on among members, one participant recalled "people taking their time to get to know one another" (G10). G8 offered the following perspective:

I came in pretty academically prepared. I really learned that if I set my mind to something, I can do it. I finished really fast. I enjoyed the diversity, and relationships with the faculty. . . .When I look back on it now, I don't know how I did it. I don't know how I wrote the dissertation. Parts of it I look back on fondly and parts of it I'm glad I don't have to deal with anymore.

When I asked G8 to speak more about her experiences, she continued:

We were the first group. We were sort of inventing and creating the program as we went along. It was a little confusing around here and they [faculty] didn't seem to know sometimes exactly where we were going and what we were going to do. That was frustrating, and expectations didn't always meet reality. . . .I think there were times the faculty would look at us and not know what to do, but I sometimes felt more *heard* by the faculty than within the cohort.

G8 went on to say that "there were times I was embarrassed to be part of the cohort."

She described her group as "rebellious," and stated:

Any time anyone tried to come in and teach us that wasn't part of the full-time faculty, we'd give them such a hard time. I felt really sorry for them. . . .I had great relationships with the faculty, but the doctoral program was not my cup of tea in terms of what happened relationship-wise in the cohort sometimes. I met lots of great people. I'm still in touch with some of the people, but there was some really bad stuff going on in there. I consider myself a *relationship person*, and I was like, *Where am I?* I felt like I was beamed in from someplace different.

G9 discussed his perception of the group as a "band of brothers." However, he also shared that one of the things he struggled with as a group member was

an unwillingness of some members to be open, or self-disclose even on a general level in our human dynamics group. Granted, I'm not going to force people to talk about themselves, but that kind of flies in the face of what the flavor of the experience is supposed to be about. I'm aware that was *my* expectation, but that really pissed me off straight away, and I kind of kept it up throughout the program. Another participant shared a perception of a segment of group members who

“clustered and shared,” and a small number of individuals who “chose not to get involved or invest emotionally” in the group (C10).

C11 described her group as “starting off our first year really tight,” but stated that things had changed by the third year of the program:

It really disintegrated. Individual people started to emerge. There were two people you couldn't teach anything to. They knew it all. If you needed support, or to consult with them, they would be willing to help you in that way, but nobody could teach them *anything*. . . .It got to the point in my group that if someone was responding to a question a professor had put out there, and they didn't agree, they'd roll their eyes. It was so passive-aggressive. Faculty saw it. It was just never addressed. As I reflect back on it now, I wish I'd have addressed what I saw happening myself, or even had gotten faculty involved.

When I asked C11 what she thinks stopped her from addressing her observations with the group at the time, her response was, “Where I was personally. I wasn't on top of my game.”

While the participants had different perceptions of the “emotional charge” within their groups, all of the participants perceived some group members as more supportive and involved than others. Similarly, at different times, all of the participants had also observed behaviors by some group members, which were not “therapeutic” (G8). C11 stated that she remembers “sitting in class sometimes thinking, *We are all in the helping profession, and this is going on? It's crap*. That was the disappointing thing. It was really in your face at times.” G9 added that he had some frustrations with the faculty not intervening in certain situations that occurred in the group: “There wasn't necessarily

anything *done* about my frustrations, but the important part was I *felt* heard.”

To G10, having a “voice” was important:

With most of the professors we had, we had a *voice*. I think that was one of the things we really liked. When we had something we didn’t like, people in my group would get on fire about it. Then the faculty would do something about it. I never saw a faculty pay attention as much as they did when we would collectively address an issue. We talked with them about a paper we had to do and the load of work they wanted. They changed it up and it went in our favor. I thought that was pretty good.

The participants also shared what they thought were “the best parts” about being in a cohort group:

“The best part for me is never before nor since have I been with a group of professionals with whom I shared, and they shared as much, and that knew as much about each other as that group seemed to. Still, if I have a question or problem, I’m shooting emails in different directions” (C10).

“I think it was the spirit of comraderie with my group. . . .When you see people doing different things, you can’t help but be supportive. I always feel connected to them, rooting for them” (G10).

“It was really cool to be in the doctoral program, and that when I finished, I’d be a *Doctor*. When I went in, something I do is push boundaries. I know that about myself. The comraderie stands out for me. Personal issues-stuff melted away most of the time when someone needed help. The helping and being validated on a regular basis stand out. Validation was powerful” (G9).

C11 shared that the best part “was being part of the comraderie and bond. It’s invaluable, and creates a lot of emotion for me. The second thing is the relationships I felt with several of the faculty here, which I think will last a long time.”

G8 stated that she “loved the academic piece, and I liked a lot of the people a lot. I enjoyed the diversity we brought as a group, and my relationships with the faculty.”

Table 9

Analysis of Protocol 8

Analytic Category	Significant Statement and Formulated Meanings
Lived Body	<p>SS: I was embarrassed to be part of the cohort (G8).</p> <p>FM: She was embarrassed to be part of the cohort.</p> <p>SS: I ended up crying like a baby (G8).</p> <p>FM: Later cried in response to a painful event.</p> <p>SS: I was tired, and I was hungry at times, and I was glad to do it (G9).</p> <p>FM: Despite feeling tired and angry at times, he was glad to be here.</p> <p>SS: I don't identify myself as strong scholastically (G9).</p> <p>FM: Does not perceive himself as academically strong.</p>
Lived Time	<p>SS: My cohort started off our first year really tight (C11).</p> <p>FM: Group members were very close the first year.</p> <p>SS: I thought for sure they had made a mistake accepting me into the program (G9).</p> <p>FM: Thought it was a mistake he had been accepted into the program.</p> <p>SS: I clearly remember sitting in classes thinking this will go on forever (G9).</p> <p>FM: Time moved slowly during lectures.</p> <p>SS: People would get really stressed out, like the end of a semester or major project (G10).</p> <p>FM: Stress was greater at certain times of the semester.</p>
Lived Space	<p>SS: This was a <i>running away</i> place (C11).</p> <p>FM: School was a haven from personal-life stresses.</p> <p>SS: There was some really bad stuff going on in there (G8).</p> <p>FM: Bad stuff happened in their shared spaces.</p> <p>SS: We had to move in and out of small groups (G10).</p> <p>FM: The work was accomplished by cycling through smaller groups.</p>

SS: There were all these little factions (G8).

FM: Sub-grouping was noticeable within the cohort.

Lived Relations

With Group Members

SS: Personal issues seemed to melt away when someone needed help (G9).

FM: Personal issues were laid aside when someone needed help.

SS: It was the worst dysfunctional family I've ever seen (G8).

FM: It felt like a dysfunctional family.

SS: It's amazing what just one member can do for another person (C11).

FM: The quality, rather than the quantity of peer relationships, is significant.

SS: We had our warts (G10).

FM: Conflicts and tensions were part of the group experience.

With the Faculty

SS: I had relationships with the faculty other members of my cohort did not get to experience (C11).

FM: Her relationships with the faculty were unique, because she was a Graduate Assistant.

SS: With most of the professors, we had a *voice* (G10).

FM: The group had a voice and felt heard.

SS: We're colleagues, to a point (G8).

FM: Students recognized a power differential.

SS: Sometimes I felt more heard by the faculty than by group members (G8).

FM: The faculty was more responsive than group members at times.

Between Groups

SS: There's a bond among us (C11).

FM: There is a bond among cohort groups.

SS: There's a bond of mutual understanding (G9).

FM: A bond of mutual understanding exists between cohort groups.

Theoretical Concepts	Significant Statements
Social Cognitive Learning Theory	<p>SS: If I set my mind to something, I can do it (G8). (Self-Efficacy Beliefs)</p> <p>SS: I still think when are they going to find out that this is a charade (G9). (Self-Efficacy Beliefs)</p> <p>SS: I wish I'd have addressed what I saw happening (C11). (Observational Learning)</p>
Sociocultural Theory	<p>SS: There were unique, specialized areas represented within the group (G10). (More Knowledgeable Others-Peers)</p> <p>SS: There was tons of mutual respect for areas of expertise within the cohort (G9). (More Knowledgeable Others-Peers)</p>
Self-Determination Theory	<p>SS: I adopted everyone. Everyone in the cohort was part of my family (G9). (Relatedness Needs)</p> <p>SS: We didn't have a lot of direction (G9). (Autonomy Needs)</p> <p>SS: Drawing from everyone, I was just able to do it (G9). (Competence Needs)</p> <p>SS: I finished really fast (G8). (Competence Needs)</p>
Bio-ecological Systems Theory	<p>SS: I decided I needed to not be so emotionally invested (G8). (Self-Protection/Emotional Distancing)</p> <p>SS: [Name removed] was like a big brother with protecting protecting everyone (C10). (Group-Protective)</p> <p>SS: I thought about quitting (C11). (Risk)</p>
Social Support	<p>SS: The helping and validation on a regular basis stand out (G9).</p> <p>SS: I always felt somebody had my back (C10).</p>

Contextual Influences

SS: The faculty had things demystified by the time we got here (G10).
(Program Influences-Experience)

SS: The faculty didn't seem to know what to do with us, and where we were going (G8).
(Program Influence-First Cohort Group)

SS: There was a respect for distance (G10).
(Group Influence)

SS: I had a lot of personal stuff going on. This was like a nice escape (C10).
(Individual Influence-Life Situation)

Summary of the Protocol Analyses

The protocol analyses revealed that the informants' subjective lived experiences aligned with the corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions of lived experience. I found evidence of each of the four existentials in each protocol. Within each protocol, I also found evidence of the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry.

Similarities Among Experiences

While the informants were not specifically queried regarding their reasons for applying to the program, none of the informants indicated that they had chosen to pursue doctoral study in the ExCES program *because* it was structured as a cohort model. Each informant experienced some anxiety when they entered the program. The informants shared more than a common goal; they also shared some insecurities regarding their competence, and questions about having what it takes to earn a doctorate degree. Nearly all of the informants mentioned "pressures," which accompanied participation in a cohort group. Similarly, the primary focus of the experiences shared by the informants related more to relationships and the work process in their groups, than to the work itself. In addition to relationships developed with group members, the faculty and other cohort groups in the program also were mentioned frequently.

Differences Among Experiences

While there were similarities among the experiences described by the informants, there also were some notable differences. Some of the differences described by the informants are attributable to the interaction between the contexts of the informants' individual lives and their group experiences, and are to be expected. However, other differences reflect group and program influences, including the faculty. For example, the

perceptions and experiences shared by the individuals affiliated with the first cohort group in the program were somewhat different than the others in that “this was a new experience for everybody,” including the faculty, who had no prior experience teaching in cohort-based programs, nor working with doctoral students.

One informant’s experiences stood out as different from the other’s in that she had many negative reactions toward the faculty, and believed that “cohorts don’t work.” If she had it to do over again, she would elect a traditional doctoral program, which would allow her to work at her own pace, and complete a single course at a time.

Member attrition was an issue in one group in particular, which affected one informant’s experiences in ways which were markedly different from the other informants.

The purposive sample itself was a source of differences in the informants’ perceptions and experiences with respect to temporal influences. The *graduated* informants could speak to experiences across the entire continuum of the three-year cohort experience, and had completed a dissertation. They offered a perspective from *the other side* of the program, which the other informants had yet to experience. Comparatively, the *precandidate* informants simply had not been in the program long enough to accumulate the range of experiences described by the doctoral candidates and program alumni. It is important to note that these differences clearly were not in any way considered a limitation; rather, they enhanced the generality within the findings.

The Emergent Themes

The process of data analysis began with the analyses of the informants' subjective experiences; that is, how the informants perceived and made sense of their individual experiences in a cohort model in the program. Following the elimination of repetitious statements, the phenomenological data analyses transformed the combined set of eight protocols into a total number of 203 significant statements and formulated meanings distilled from the protocols. The thematic findings in each existential category fully describe the lived experiences shared by the informants, and reflect the commonalities within their perceptions and experiences in their everyday worlds.

A total of 69 significant statements and formulated meanings describing lived body were distilled from the protocols. These were arranged into three theme clusters, which were merged into the theme, *Full-body experience*. Table 10 illustrates the interpretive process used to develop the theme clusters and emergent theme.

Table 10

Illustration of Development of Theme Clusters and Emergent Theme for Corporeality

Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters	Emergent Theme
8. Shocked and speechless (1-P1) 24. Feels constrained (3-P4); 57. Experienced an emotional release (7-G7); 67. Cried in response to a painful event (8-G8).	1. Sensations	1. Full-body Experience
4. Feels confused (1-P1); 16. Feels guilty she excluded others (2-P2); 30. Angry with the faculty (4-C2); 63. Embarrassed to be affiliated with her group (8-G8).	2. Emotions	
13. Thinks others could hold her back (2-P2); 14. Thinks she might be shamed (2-P3); 17. Her thoughts seemed juvenile to her (2-P3)	3. Thoughts	

A total of 36 significant statements and formulated meanings describing lived time were distilled from the protocols. These were arranged into five clusters, which were further reduced into four themes: 1) Out of the starting gate: *a period of adjustment and observation*; 2) Moving Toward Unity: *It was showing up on a Saturday*; 3) Increased Differentiation: *The second year felt like a different model*, and; 4) The End: *The spirit of comraderie lives on*. Table 11 illustrates the interpretive process used to derive the theme clusters and emergent themes for temporality.

Table 11

Illustration of Development of Theme Clusters and Emergent Themes for Temporality

Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters	Emergent Themes
1. Beginning doctoral study is a major transition (1-P1); 4. There are pressures (2-P2); 30. The first semester is a period of adjustment and observation (6-P5).	1. First-Semester	1. Transition: <i>a period of adjustment and observation</i>
20. Group mottos unified the group (5-G5); Saturdays took on new meanings (5-G1) 25. The first year felt like a cohort model (5-C9).	2. First-Year	2. Moving toward unity: <i>It was showing up on a Saturday</i> .
14. The work process became increasingly more autonomous (3-C1); 27. Group unity diminished over time (5-G5).	3. Second-Year	3. Increased Differentiation: <i>The second year felt like a different model</i>
9. Looking ahead to finishing and jobs (3-C1); 12. Achieving doctoral candidacy is a major milestone (3-C1); 19. Looking forward to the end (4-C2); 33. Self-confidence increases as moves through the program (7-G6).	4. Third-Year	
10. Wonders how relationships will be affected when the program ends (3-C1); 29. The feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood is still there (5-G5); 36. The comraderie lives on (8-G10).	5. The End	4. The End: <i>the spirit of comraderie. . .that piece lives on</i>

A total of 32 significant statements and formulated meanings describing lived space were distilled from the protocols. These were arranged into six clusters, which were merged into three themes: 1) *Our little microcasm*; 2) *Faculty swim in and out*, and; 3) Personal growth: *You learn a lot about yourself too*. Table 12 illustrates the interpretive process used to derive these themes from the data.

Table 12

Illustration of Development of Theme Clusters and Emergent Themes for Spatiality

Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters	Emergent Themes
1. Multicultural issues are widespread (1P1); 5. The group's strengths are diversified and balanced (2-P3)	1. Diversity Issues	1. <i>Our little microcasm</i>
11. Some group members always worked Together (4-C2); 12. Received a lot of peer Feedback (5-C3)	2. Group Processes	
24. We model a set of assumptions in our cohort (7-G6); 31. Counseling professionals do not always behave in expected ways (8-G8).	3. Parallels with Counseling	
2. There are some risks (1-P1); 8. You were together for better or worse (3-C1); 7. You needed to take care of yourself academically (3-C1); 17. Sub-grouping was not necessarily exclusionary (5-G1)	4. Risks and Self-Protection	
6. The faculty does their best to encourage The development of group cohesiveness (3-P4); 21. The faculty is not part of the cohort (6-P5).	5. Faculty's Position Relative to Cohort Groups	2. <i>Faculty swim in and out</i>
4. The personal growth group is a significant space in the program (2-P3).10. Gained greater self-awareness (4-C2); 14. The group was a tool for personal growth (5-C6)	6. Personal Growth	3. Personal Growth: <i>You learn a lot about yourself too</i>

A total of 66 significant statements and formulated meanings describing lived relations were distilled from the protocols, and arranged into the three theme clusters,

Lived Relations With Group Members, Lived Relations With the Faculty, and Lived Relations Between Cohort Groups. Twenty-eight formulated meanings describing the informants' lived relations with group members were clustered into two themes: 1) Being accompanied: *It's good to be on the journey with somebody*, and; 2) *We had our warts*. Twenty-five formulated meanings describing the informants' lived relations with the faculty were clustered into one theme, *We're colleagues. . .to a point*. Twelve formulated meanings describing the informants' lived relations between cohort groups were arranged into one cluster and theme, *A bond of mutual understanding among cohorts*. Table 13 illustrates the interpretive process used to develop theme clusters and the emergent themes for lived relations with group members, the faculty, and between cohort groups.

Table 13

Illustration of Development of Themes Clusters and Emergent Themes for Relationality

Formulated Meanings	Theme Clusters	Emergent Themes
3. Being with others on the journey is beneficial (2-P2); 6. Support was readily available (2-P3); 8. Members share insecurities and validate one another (2-P3); 13. Gathered strength from the others (5-C5)	1. Lived Relations With Group Members	1. Being Accompanied: <i>it's good to be on the journey with somebody</i>
12. Group members flowed nicely together (5-G1); 15. Interdependence and Independence were important (5-G4)		2. <i>We had our warts</i>
1. The faculty is responsible for ensuring the protection of group members (1-P1); 3. There is a power differential (1-P1); 3. The faculty is a mystery (2-P3)	2. Lived Relations With the Faculty	1. <i>We're colleagues. . .to a point</i>
1. Each cohort has its own dynamics (2-P3); 6. Other cohorts are sources of information and support (3-P4); 7. There are cohort effects on cohorts (5-C5)	3. Lived Relations Between Cohort Groups	1. <i>A bond of mutual understanding among cohorts</i>

The following paragraphs are a summary of the emergent themes, which describe the informants' lived experiences of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality.

The Corporeal Experience

Theme: *A full-body experience*

One theme, Full-body experience, describes the informants' corporeal experiences. As Graduate 4 stated, "A cohort model of everyone starting together is a structure on paper. The thing that seems unique about the experience is that it felt like it tapped into every part of me. . . .it was a full-body experience."

As the structure-giving background of experience and perception, corporeal experiences were evident in the informants' lived experiences. Corporeality involved much more than intellectual experiences. While the intensity of lived body varied from one informant to another, all of the informants described *felt* experiences, which were expressed in phrases such as "exhausting," "draining," "stumbling," "falling," "pushed and pulled," "picked up," "helped up," "lifted," "embraced," "held," and "held back." At times, talking about their cohort experiences triggered "little snapshots that pop up for me," which felt as though they were "re-living" the experience, or "a visceral response to it, like a funny feeling in my stomach."

In addition to physical impressions and sensations, the informants described many emotions, which were reflected in statements such as, "We laughed together, fought together" and "cried a lot of tears." The informants' experiences were peppered with a full range of emotions, including surprise, shock, pain, pleasure, fear, disappointment, relief, hope, and anxiety, as well as social emotions such as guilt, embarrassment, empathy, and shame. For some of the informants, defining moments or "turning points"

in their cohort experiences were related to their emotional experiences, such as when one informant realized, “I could fall apart and it would be okay,” or “If I’d fall, it would be blown up in a passive-aggressive way to make somebody feel better about themselves.”

Corporeal experiences had the potential to transform the informants’ group experiences in positive or negative ways, and also a perceptions of the journey through the doctoral program from a “personal journey together” to “a shared emotional journey.”

The Temporal Experience

The informants frequently referred to time periods as contexts, or anchors, when discussing their perceptions and experiences, such as the beginning of the program, the first year, second year, third year, end of the cohort experience, and experiences following the end of the cohort experience. The precandidate informants spoke about *here and now* experiences and what they were looking forward to. The informants who had been in the program longer often discussed *there and then* experiences. Together, their experiences described the continuum of the program as having a discernible temporal rhythm, which suggested a pattern of connecting, individuating, and staying connected in a new and different way.

Theme 1: Out of the Starting Gate: “a period of adjustment and observation”

The informants felt anxious, overwhelmed, nervous, and excited to begin the program, and had little idea of what to expect. The informants shared more than a common goal; they also shared some insecurities. The first semester was described as a “period of adjustment and a period of observation” as group members became acquainted with one another, and “the dynamics of the faculty.” The informants described the first semester in the program with phrases such as, “unique because of the ignorance of things

to come,” “figuring out how we’re going to relate to each other,” “how things work around here,” and “getting the hang of things.” In addition to academic pressures, all of the informants spoke of new “pressures,” including getting along with group members, becoming cohesive, and supporting everybody.” Questions such as “*Am I going to be here, or aren’t I going to be here?*,” “*Do I fit here, or don’t I?*,” “*Who can I work with?*,” “*Who do I connect with emotionally?*,” and “*What’s my connection to everybody else here?*” were common. By the end of the first semester, the informants had become familiar with group members’ areas of expertise and academic strengths and weaknesses, and a network of *Go-to* people for academic guidance and support was working in their groups.

Theme 2: Moving toward unity: “*It was showing up on a Saturday*”

One informant’s words represented the common experience of moving toward unity: “There was something beneficial in a shared experience. It was showing up on a Saturday, and we were all there doing the same thing.” The informants spoke of the power of shared experiences; that is, “the common issues, common problems, common concerns, and common schedule.” First-year experiences focused largely on a collaborative work process, and “the collectiveness and collaboration were very much felt” then, which “felt like a cohort model.”

Theme 3: Increased Differentiation: “*the second year felt like a different model*”

The informants’ experiences and perceptions were different during the second year of the program, which “felt like a different model.” During the second year, “there were more individual kinds of projects and we were just a group of people who were working together on similar kinds of things for a similar goal, but not having to produce products

as a group.” As the work process became more individuated, there was a corresponding decrease in a sense of unity among group members. “Different collective senses” became more noticeable, although not necessarily in a negative way. As one informant remarked, “I think it had to do with people working on different semester projects. By that time, everyone just seemed focused on finishing up and getting done.”

Theme 4: The End: “*the spirit of comraderie. . .that piece still lives on*”

Nearly all of the informants who had completed the cohort experience spoke of a spirit of comraderie, which lived on well beyond the end of the cohort experience itself. The informants described a living sense of support following the formal end of the cohort, and also a continuing sense of identification with the group. The informants were confident that they could reach out to group members, and still find support there. The informants used phrases such as “the cohort still exists as a theoretical construct,” “you can call them on the phone, and instantly, it’s almost like yesterday,” “I still have this sense of us being a cohort,” and “The feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood is still there, although we’re no longer in a formalized aspect of it.” As one informant put it, “The idea of asking and granting help continues among cohort members, and happens even today.”

The Spatial Experience

Theme 1: “*This is our little microcasm.*”

Lived space is felt space, and one informant’s experience of a cohort as “our little microcasm” encompasses the different ways the informants described lived space.

Being in and part of a cohort group was being *with* “like-minded people” and “others like ourselves.” When describing their shared spaces, the informants used words and phrases such as “diversity,” “strengths that complement,” “biases,” “we teach ourselves,” “mean-spiritedness,” and “you needed to take care of yourself academically.” Cohorts were perceived as places where “we model a set of assumptions about the profession,” and “everybody was best at something.” Within their spaces, the informants felt more, or less, safe, “judged,” “vulnerable,” “in a position of strength,” “empowered,” and “validated.” For some of the informants, school and a cohort group felt like “a nice escape,” “a running away place,” and “sanctuary.” A small number of the informants felt excluded in their groups, “like a mis-fit,” and “vulnerable,” where “the threat for me came from within the group.”

Theme 2: *Faculty sort of swim in and out*

With the exception of one informant, who perceived some of the faculty as part of the cohort “because they couldn’t help but be, we dragged them in. We drove them in,” the faculty generally were not considered part of the cohort group. Rather, the informants perceived the faculty as on the periphery of their groups, “surrounds us,” and “sort of swim in and out of the cohort,” “observe and offer feedback,” “and they’re looking at the dynamics.” However, the faculty were much more than background context. The faculty “walk a fine line,” and bring “intensity” to the learning process. The faculty also were perceived as providing structure, guidelines, and deadlines for assignments, and serving as models. The informants believed that the faculty’s influence on the cohort was considerable.

Theme 3: *Personal growth*

When discussing their experiences, nearly all of the informants mentioned personal growth as a significant part of their cohort and program experiences. While some individuals spoke of personal growth in general terms, other individuals had very specific goals for personal growth, or described the ways they had grown personally as a result of their cohort experiences. The personal growth group was mentioned frequently as a space within the program. A majority of the informants perceived the personal growth group as beneficial for a variety of reasons.

The Relational Experience

When the informants talked about their relationships in the program, their group members, the faculty, and individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program were part of their experiences. The relational realm of the informants' lived experiences was broken down into Lived Relations with Group Members, Lived Relations with the Faculty, and Lived Relations Between Cohort Groups. This provided greater insights into the informants' everyday relational worlds in the program.

Lived Relations With Group Members

The informants described their relationships with their groups members as “a dimension of extended family,” “a second family,” “sisterhood and brotherhood,” “a band of brothers and sisters,” “adopted,” “mentors,” and “colleagues.” A small number of the informants used the word “team” to describe their group relationships. Being with the others *felt* “like a good marriage,” “like a familial system,” “kind of isolated.” Two themes fully describe the informants' lived relations with group members, Being Accompanied, and We had our warts.

Theme 1: Being Accompanied: *“It’s good to be on the journey with somebody”*

With the exception of one individual who felt disconnected from the group, all of the informants spoke of an appreciation for the others as co-travellers on the journey through the program. Overall, group members were perceived as empathetic, supportive companions, who “just understand.” In addition to support, doctoral peers were viewed as competent and knowledgeable, and as sources of motivation, “drive,” and “strength,” and a “belief that this can be done.”

Theme 2: *“We had our warts.”*

At different times throughout the program, all of the informants encountered tensions, conflicts, or “disequilibrium” in their groups due to frustrations with “some of the personalities,” work style differences, and greater stress at certain times in during the semester. Some individuals described a growing “animosity” between sub-groups within their cohorts, and an “ongoing feud” between certain group members. Multicultural issues were identified as problematic by several informants, which led to misunderstandings. Exclusionary sub-grouping and cliques were problems in some groups, as well as groups members who were perceived as having their own agendas, insensitive, “judgemental,” or “attacking.” Some groups “flowed nicely together,” while others were perceived as “rebellious” and “dysfunctional.” Group tensions and conflicts were managed in different ways. However, there was a general consensus among the informants that personal issue seemed to “melt away” when someone needed help. All of the informants believed that faculty intervention would have been helpful at times.

Lived Relations With the Faculty

Theme: “*We’re colleagues. . .to a point*”

One theme, *We’re colleagues. . .to a point*, fully describes the informants’ lived relations with the faculty. The faculty was an influential part of the informants’ cohort experiences, although they were not considered part of the cohort group. While the informants characterized their relationships with the faculty as largely collegial in nature, they also recognized and respected a power differential between themselves and the faculty. The informants’ expectations of the faculty extended beyond those typical of collegial relationships.

The informants’ perceived the faculty as having a variety of roles and responsibilities. In addition to the selection of students for a cohort group, the informants viewed faculty members as content experts, group experts, “mentors,” “gatekeepers,” “coaches,” and “guides.” The informants believed that the faculty is responsible for ensuring the protection of all group members.

Lived Relations Between Cohort Groups

Theme: “*A bond of mutual understanding among cohorts*”

Other cohort groups in the ExCES program, and individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program, were mentioned frequently by the informants. One theme, *a bond of mutual understanding among cohorts*, represents the common lived experiences of *the other* doctoral peers and groups in the program. It was not usual for the informants to “hear stories” about other cohort groups in the program. Cohort groups provided models for social comparison, particularly those that were ahead in the program. Individuals affiliated with groups ahead in the program were perceived as informal

mentors and guides, who possessed knowledge of *what lies ahead* based on personal experience. These individuals often were also perceived as secondary sources of support. By virtue of a shared goal, doctoral program, professors, and a profession, many of the informants felt connected to all ExCES students through “a bond of mutual understanding.”

The Contextual Findings

Qualitative findings are contextual findings, because lived experiences do not stand alone; that is, context is always part of experience and meaning (Gergen, 2006). Contextual findings are ever-present, covert influences on development, perceptions, and lived experiences. The contextual influences identified by the inquiry include influences of the individual student, group influences, and program influences, including the faculty and other cohort groups in the program. The contextual findings suggest that students’ lived experiences are continuously being shaped by the interaction between the circumstances of their individual lives, the collective intellectual and emotional lives within their shared spaces, and the influences of the program and professional culture in which their groups are situated.

The contextual influences identified by the inquiry are summarized in Table 14. A fuller discussion of the contextual findings is provided in Chapter V.

Table 14

Contextual Influences Identified by the Inquiry

Individual Influences	Group Influences	Program Influences
Time constraints	Time constraints	Time constraints
Age	Group diversity	Student selection
Cultural identity/biases	Cohort size	Admission model
Personal biography (Lawrence, 1996)	Member attrition	Faculty roles
Residence (distance from university)	Conflict resolution	Group management
Concurrent life events/situation	Sub-grouping	Faculty experience w/doctoral students
Finances	Shared power	<i>Clinical</i> culture
Personal obligations (family, work)	Task cohesiveness	Cultural biases (Faculty)
Job/work experience	Supportive relationships	Boundary issues (Faculty/Students)
Work/learning style	Status in program	Faculty accessibility/support
Personality attributes	Position in cohort <i>pipeline</i>	Power differential
Academic skills/previous experiences	Group mottos/Identity	Personal growth group
Perceptions of risk/safety/support	Social activities	Academic calendar
Graduate assistantships	<i>Spirit</i> inducted	Collaborative pedagogy
Personal goals/ambitions	Conflict management	Other cohort groups
Self-confidence		
Efficacy beliefs		
Personal growth		
Formation/integration of counselor identity		

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the findings for the data analyses of the eight protocols, which captured the subjective experiences in a cohort model for a purposive sample of twenty-six informants. Each protocol was analyzed separately. The major findings were summarized in a narrative, and displayed in a table constructed for each protocol. Similarities and differences within the informants' subjective experiences were equally important to achieve a degree of generality, which allowed for the illumination of the broader themes within the data. The themes describing the corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences in a cohort model were presented. Chapter V is a fuller discussion of the themes and the contextual influences identified by the inquiry.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter is a discussion of the findings of the inquiry, and provides the answers to the research questions. The chapter begins with a fuller discussion of the themes presented in the previous chapter. While the phenomenological themes suggest a common experience, there is a range of interpretations of the themes. Multiple verbatim quotes and portions of the interview transcripts and focus group logs are used to illustrate the range of emic perspectives found in the data, and also to assist the reader in conceptualizing the interpretive process used to derive the themes.

The chapter continues with a discussion of the contextual influences identified by the inquiry, and the theoretical concepts used for the inquiry. The implications for research and practice are considered, directions for future research are suggested, and program-based recommendations are identified. The remainder of the chapter is a discussion of the strategies used to enhance the quality and rigor of the inquiry, the conclusions drawn, and the inquiry's limitations. The chapter concludes with my closing reflections.

The Phenomenological Experience of Corporeality

Theme: *A full-body experience*

One theme, *Full-body experience*, describes the phenomenological experience of corporeality in a cohort model, which is represented in the following excerpt from a focus group log:

A cohort model of everyone starting together is a structure on paper. . . .it felt like it tapped into every part of me. It tapped my emotional sense, my soul, and required things of me I thought I had deadened. It was amazing how all of those

things unfolded for me when the time was right. The personal growth group certainly was part of it, but it was also the way the cohort was a growing entity. Always growing, always evolving. . . .It was a full-body experience, and that's how I remember it. (Graduate 4)

Merleau-Ponty (2002/1945) viewed the body as the vehicle of the world, because we are in the world as bodies. However, he did not consider the body merely as a vessel; that is, we do not simply *have* bodies; we *are* bodies. As the site of knowing the world, all perceptions and meaning-making are made from a *self-in-relation* perspective. Consequently, all perceptions and experiences in a social world are fundamentally corporeal experiences. Corporeality gives experiences richness and meaning, because lived body reflects what it is like, and what it means, to be oneself in a particular context having an experience. Sensations and perceptions color experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and meaning-making occurs through all of the senses, as well as the active, reflecting mind (Tuan, 1977).

As the informants talked with me, they could “picture the table where all of us would sit,” (G4), and expressed that they were “getting a little emotional thinking about it now” (G6), or had visceral sensations, such as “a funny feeling in my stomach” (G8). An example is Graduate 9 ‘s description of what it was like to reflect and *look back* on his experiences as he talked with me:

It is kind of a blur in some respects, like when I go back into my childhood. I have these little snapshots that pop up for me. This process [doctoral study] was very similar to that, and I continue to have that experience as I talk about the experience.

As I work with interns and staff members, who I recommend start this program, I continue to re-live the experience.

An examination of the lived body existential revealed that being part of a cohort is far more than an intellectual experience, and is anything *but* a neutral experience. A full range of emotions were evident in the informants' descriptions of their group experiences, including social emotions such as guilt, shame, empathy, and embarrassment. Participation in a cohort is an intense experience, and emotional responses to relationships and the events that occur in cohorts tend to be magnified (Maher, 2005; Teitel, 1997). The informants related being in a group with a heightened sense of self-awareness, which included a desire to project a certain "image," such as wanting "to be seen as someone who is easy to work with" (C1), or "not seen as interpersonally difficult, or deficient, in some way" (P4). The informants used words such as "positioning" (P4), "posturing" (G1), "boundaries" (G9), "struggling to find a niche" (P6), and "a respect for distance" (G10). For example, "I wanted to position myself to be the one the faculty asked" (P4), "I don't think we were threatening to each other, so there wasn't this defensive posturing that prevented contact" (G1), "I push boundaries. I know that about myself" (G9), and "I check my boundaries, and try not to let things go too deeply into me, not be too affected" (P1).

The following quotes illustrate the range of interpretations of corporeality found in the data:

Precandidate 4 (P4) characterized how it felt to be in a cohort as "just this feeling of constraint," *slowed down*, and "waiting:"

A good example is our very first class, a supervision class which prepares us to do our supervision practicum. The project we had to do as a group was to create a handbook for ourselves to use. I thought, *This is the perfect publishing opportunity. I don't think anything like this is out there, and this is going to be the first thing I do.* At the end of the class, the professor said, You know, one of these days one cohort is going to take advantage of this, and try to get it published. I thought, [expletive], *now I have to do this with everybody.* So now it's a year later, and it's *still* not done. . . .It's just *really* slowing me down. . . .I could have just gone and really sunk my teeth into it. I could have had the whole thing done. That's what I mean. If I see an idea, I can really dive into it. I work quickly, and I like working this way, because I can get stuff done. When things have to be diffused and take up more time, it's harder for me. It's frustrating, because it's now a whole year later, and I'm still *waiting* to get [other member's] stuff.

The “observing self” (G1) and *experiencing self* played important roles in corporeality. The informants used both observed phenomena and first-hand, direct experiences as *information* to assess risks and safety in their groups. Information about the world which is acquired vicariously is a powerful form of self-regulation (Bandura, 1977b). An example follows:

I observed that when a particular member was responding to a professor's question, a person [group member] turned around, rolled their eyes, wrote a note, and passed it to the person sitting behind them, and they both laughed. . . .The first time that happened, I couldn't even believe it, and I thought, *No, you must have misinterpreted that.* . . .I tried to reserve judgement on that and just let that go,

but then it happened again. . . .And then there were other things that I myself experienced. I would say something, make a comment, or a class response, where another person [group member] would *jump* [all over me] every time I would say something. So, what happened as a result of that is, that I really backed away from participating on many levels, which is really not me.

Some experiences occurred in cohort groups which were particularly revelatory or transformative, because they altered the way the informants perceived, experienced, and related to group members in both positive and negative ways. These types of experiences often became defining experiences, or “turning points” (G7) for the informants. For example, Candidate 1 described being in a cohort as “bringing back” old issues related to acceptance issues, which she “thought I was done with.” When she realized that she had “counter-transference-like stuff” happening with some group members, it felt like “I was having these flashbacks. . .like going back to high school again.” Making a conscious decision not to “replay” old messages changed her experience, and allowed her to “look at the experience as an opportunity” for new learning.

The content of the material in a counseling class triggered a intense, emotional response for one informant, who connected personally to the material:

They [some group members] were just doing a [class] presentation, and up until that point, I was involved and interacting with members of the group, but there was still a piece of me that was distant. Not that it was an issue with the group, but it was an issue for me. There were things I hadn’t let go of in my life, which I didn’t feel comfortable to let go of, even in personal growth group. That didn’t come up at all. . .I don’t know if anyone knew that or not, but I had barriers around me. I

remember just getting caught up in the moment and breaking down, because I related what they were talking about to [personal issue]. *How* the *group* was with me around that experience, *wow*, very supportive. . .when it happened in class it just seemed like it was *us* there. It was a very empowering experience. It felt like a release. It felt very safe, because it just happened and I didn't stop myself. Then, just going through the whole process with my group was a very supportive experience. For me that day, there was a clear shift from where I was at, *because* of the group. (Graduate 7)

G7 identified the opportunity to process his emotions and experience with a supportive group of peers as a “turning point,” which changed how he experienced himself within his group, and also his perceptions of the group and cohort model, generally. Twale and Kochan (2000) noted that cohorts can be spaces for psychological releases and emotional support.

Graduate 8's experience was different:

We had a statistics class, but someone other than one of the professors showed up to teach. Something happened during class that I questioned, and I heard from the other end of the room, *Why doesn't she shut-up?* I was so offended. It felt like the person didn't want me to question the instructor, because our cohort could get in trouble. I felt really judged. . . .There were times I was embarrassed to be part of the cohort. . . .I felt embarrassed to be part of the dysfunctional *family*. There was a point when I started to distance myself, because it really bothered me that people acted out so much. I never exactly was sure who it was that told me to shut my mouth, but I actually ended up crying like a baby [later]. Afterward, that's when I

decided I needed to really pull back and not be so emotionally invested. . . it's unresolved for me. I still have like a visceral response to it, like a funny feeling in my stomach.

Another perspective was provided by Graduate 9:

I still myself as the kid in the seventh grade who is a *dummy* in reading. These are the things I do tend to carry with me. . . I do think these are the things that come up periodically when there's someone out there being judgemental. When I see it happening, I react to it. I hate a bully. My reaction [to a group member] initially was more therapeutic, because I thought this was the setting. Then it became more directive and firm, and then it became very irrational. At times, I'd be screaming at this individual. I felt like I came in with a lot of stuff, but with this one particular person, I really allowed myself a lever. . . I took this person's feuds with other people personally, especially when this individual picked on other people. I didn't like it.

Several of the informants described being part of a cohort experience felt like they were *part of* a larger living body, or "entity" (G2), which "pushes you along" (G2). In the words of Candidate 4:

It's like lighting a candle. The flame that's coming from the match when it combines with the flame coming from the candle grows exponentially, not just double. Bringing us together caused us to glow. All of us together became a new entity. It had its own life force. I experienced it as pulling me along or helping me up.

The Phenomenological Experience of Temporality

Four themes capture and fully describe the informants' temporal experiences. The following paragraphs describe each theme.

Theme 1: *Out of the Starting Gate—a period of adjustment and observation*

None of the informants indicated that they had chosen the ExCES program *because* it was structured as a cohort model. As one informant commented, “it did slip past me when I applied to the program” (G7). While one informant indicated that “the delivery in the way the courses were set up and I could get done in three years” (G7) is what appealed to him, another informant stated that she was drawn to the “intangible quality” (P5) of the people who are associated with the program.

Regarding his understanding of a cohort model, Graduate 6 stated:

I had no idea what that meant when I started. I had never been involved in any kind of cohort experience. I remember the faculty talking about it at our orientation, about a learning community, and those kinds of things, but I really honestly had no idea what to expect from that. I did feel that if this learning community thing was able to be implemented the way the faculty was talking about it, it sounded like a good idea to me. But, at the beginning, it was just kind of a *blank* to me.”

While three of the informants had been involved in cohort models for their master's programs, this experience was *different*: While G6 stated, “I think *this* experience was very much very supportive, your second family. . . .this was very much a community,” P1 thought there was more of a “social element” in her previous cohort experience.

The informants described the first semester of the program as “a period of adjustment and observation” (P5). The first semester was memorable to all of the

informants, including those who had completed the program some time ago.

The opportunity to meet the individuals with whom they would be spending the next three years at the program's orientation session was considered "a good start" (C9) for the group, and the informants "liked the familiarity of that" (P5). However, beginning a doctoral program is simultaneously exciting and stressful (Irby & Miller, 1999). The informants looked forward to beginning the program, but also were "anxious and nervous about what I'm getting myself into. I'm not sure I can deal with this" (G6):

"The first semester is unique because of the ignorance of what's *really* to come. The feeling of everything we have to do in the next three years was overwhelming. At least I'd have others going through it with me" (Candidate 5).

"I remember feeling so overwhelmed with anxiety. From day one I struggled with, *Am I going to be here, or aren't I going to be here?* The anxiety was unbelievable" (G3).

"There was a lot going on in my life at time. I wasn't on top of my game. . .there were many times I thought, *I can't do this*, and I thought about quitting" (C11). Graduate 5's commitment also wavered at times: "Many times I asked myself, *Why am I doing this?* I could be doing a lot of other things with my life."

Graduate 9 provided the following perspective:

It felt like before I knew it, it was over, at least the coursework component. And yet, I clearly remember sitting in classes thinking *this will go on forever*, and it seemed like it would never end. . . .I remember when we first started the program, and talked about coming here. I thought for sure they had made a mistake accepting me into the program, because I don't identify myself as strong scholastically. . . .It never went away. Very often today I think, *When are they*

going to find out that this is charade, and I don't know as much as they think I do?

From Precandidate 2's perspective:

This is a lot of work. Time management is tough. I *still* feel overwhelmed, but I'm feeling I'm getting the hang of things finally. At the beginning of the semester, I was *all* over the place. I had a hard time focusing, and getting the right assignment done on the right day, and just being organized. Even now, some people are talking about being overwhelmed, and are struggling more now than they were at the very beginning. . . We talk about it, and we're honest about it. Now I'm finally getting my act together. . . I think being able to talk with others in a cohort about insecurities, or about being overwhelmed is important, because we're together so much. . . seeing that others are overwhelmed, that in *itself* is very valuable. and are married.”

Graduate 7 shared a different perspective:

I remember during the first semester class, [group member's name removed] looked at everyone and said, *You've got one week, because you're only down six-thousand dollars. If you want to get out, get out now, because after next week, they're [Duquesne University] taking it all.* To me, that's the reality. If it's not working in the cohort for you now, now is the time to do it [leave], because there's the reality that there's a financial cost here that's adding up.

A general consensus among the informants was that “there are a lot of transitions with entering a doctoral program” (P1). At the beginning of the program, Graduate 6 recalled talking a lot with his group members “about balance in our lives, trying to make room for everything, how difficult it is to be a doctoral student. It's a demanding

experience for those of us with children,” and “you’re trying to figure out how to have a personal life in the mix” (P4). Early in a cohort program, students are not only adapting to their new student roles, but also to their group contexts (Mealman & Lawrence, 2000). While the informants expected that doctoral study would be rigorous, they had not anticipated some of the interpersonal expectations, which felt imposing at times. All of the informants spoke of these as new “pressures:”

The pressure we felt was not to perform or anything like that. . . .it took the form largely of faculty-induced pressure. It was in the expectations, the courses, and the way collaborative work was set up. . . .I felt a real undue pressure to become cohesive with people, who I really didn’t share anything with. We all take classes at eight-thirty in the morning on Saturday, but we didn’t live together, we didn’t work together, we didn’t have the same interests, we didn’t run in same circles. We had *this*. This is big and important, but I have a life too, and that was a big deal. (G6)

Other informants described the pressures as “We’re all in here, we’re all struggling to find our niche, we’re all working it” (P5), “to be supportive” (G6), “cohesive” (C2), “work collaboratively” (P4), and “we’re supposed to help each other out” (C1).

According to P3, “I’m always feeling this pressure that we all have to get along personally, and you *don’t* have to get along personally to work on projects together.”

The general feeling among the informants was that “you’re not going to bond with everyone at the same level of intensity, or passion, comraderie. There’s going to be some sub-grouping involved, and not in a subversive sort of sense” (G6).

Maher (2005) noted that developing supportive relationships in a cohort program

initially can feel more like an obligation than motivated by a sincere desire, but also observed that relationships tended to take on a more nurturing aspect over time. Similarly, Lawrence (1996) found that it takes time in a shared space to develop meaningful relationships.

Precandidate 4's perception of the pressure she felt was different:

Because this is a clinical program, I think there's this other piece, where not only is it important for us to work together so that we can do well, but there's this expectation that we're going to manage the interpersonal piece extremely proficiently because we're in an interpersonal field. I felt some pressure around really needing to do this well. I needed to manage these personalities in my group. I needed to manage my experience really well, so I'm not seen as interpersonally difficult, or deficient in some way. That might influence how people think my clinical skills are.

The informants described the first year of the program as emphasizing a collaborative work process, which felt more daunting and time-consuming to some of the informants than the class material itself. From Precandidate 4's perspective, "We're therapists, we don't *have* to work in groups. . . . Even though I like to be independent, I kind of like being a beginner with other people, just sharing information and helping each other out. I like the idea of there being some support and cohesion, so I think that if there wasn't as much of a groupwork piece, it would be really nice."

Collaborative pedagogy is based on the idea of preparing students for any discipline that depends on effective interdependence and consultation for excellence (Bruffee, 1995). However, unless collaboration is intentionally structured to occur, adult learners

(who are juggling multiple responsibilities and battling time constraints) are not likely to collaborate spontaneously (Frey & Alman, 2002). Marsick (1997) noted that people typically have no reason to collaborate unless they share a common purpose that ties them together for the sake of common goals, or perceive that there is personal benefit in doing so (Kasl et al., 1993). The informants identified the formation of work groups, work quality, and differences in personalities and work styles as challenging aspects of the collaborative work process. Work-style differences have been found to create tensions in cohorts (Maher, 2005). As G10 stated, “We’d break down into little groups, but then merged again, because different classes required us to do different things with one another. They never allowed us to stay in a clique. We had to move in and out [of smaller groups].” Other individuals noticed that the same individuals always worked together on different projects, and they would have liked more of a choice of work partners.

In Graduate 6’s words, “Once out of the starting gate, during the first semester or two you begin to get the experience that you can do this, and that there’s certain people you can gravitate to who are more supportive than others. Those people offered each other support.”

Theme 2: *It was showing up on a Saturday*

The second theme, *It was showing up on a Saturday*, captures the group’s movement toward unity, which is represented in G1’s quote:

There was something very beneficial in a shared experience. It was showing up on a Saturday and we were all there doing the same thing. Everybody worked. We all had jobs, and there were different professions. That in itself provided a

cohesiveness. There was something that was very supportive about this being holistic. There was sort of a gestalt. The diversity within the group provided a gestalt, a whole-systems perspective. We were all one in some ways. There wasn't a competition. There was an integration. There *was* a pressure to not let someone fall out of the system. The system itself did a lot to pull people into alignment. I think some of that ended when people started their dissertations. In some ways, some things become more individuated in the process, and simultaneously, the system still holds. (G1)

The first year of the program felt like a shared experience to the informants. The "common issues, common problems, common concern, common schedule" (G9) facilitated a sense of *togetherness* among group members, and Saturdays began to take on new meanings for the informants:

On Saturday mornings when everyone came in here for class, most of the faculty would already be here. [Faculty name removed] would always have the coffee on. The place was *buzzing*. The lights were on. We'd come in, stake our our seats, unpack bookbags, sharpen pencils, get our cups of coffee, and we'd spend ten or twenty minutes just connecting with other people in the cohort as people were coming in. Day after day, Saturday after Saturday, that really sort of formed a kind of bond. I was talking earlier about the people I felt closer to, but on Saturday mornings, you talk to *everybody*. You were getting coffee, you were down in the [department] office, you were grabbing this professor about something, and all of this was before eight thirty in the morning. It was a real sort of unifying kind of experience. (G6)

Drago-Severson et al. (2001) referred to weekly routines as part of the “ritualization process” (p. 25), which occurs in groups, and serve to facilitate the development of bonds among members.

Precandidate 4’s group experience was different from the other ‘s experiences in that member attrition “really affected the extent to which we were able to bond:”

I think they [group members] kind of had one foot in and one out all along. For example, in our personal growth group. . .we never achieved cohesion. . .I think part of that was knowing some group members weren’t totally present. It ended up being really understandable in retrospect why we never really felt connected. They were kind of on their way out.

Candidate 2 offered another point-of-view:

I don’t think my cohort has been cohesive. . . .I think part of the problem is that we need to understand team-work and that sort of thing. I work in a team, so I do understand that concept. There are cliques in my cohort. I notice certain individuals and groups of individuals that would constantly work together. I felt like some kind of a misfit. . . .I do understand the purpose [of a cohort model], but I think we need to be honest that there’s going to be cliques. I mean, we’ve all been to school, we know that cliques happen.

Early experiences in a cohort group are important (Lawrence, 1996; Maher, 2005), because they lay a foundation for future experience, including support and a collaborative process. This was especially important, as the structure of the work process in the program was perceived to change to a more autonomous process following the first year.

By the end of the first year, a majority of the informants believed that group

members had pulled together to do the work, and perceived a relatively high degree of task cohesiveness within their groups. Some relationships among individual group members had grown stronger, and others had not. There was a general perception that individuals had begun to *settle into* relationships “with certain people who share your interests, and maybe personality traits” (G6). Other researchers also have observed a tendency for group members to settle into a *comfort zone* (Maher, 2005), or to gravitate toward *kindred spirits* within their groups (Beck & Kosnik, 2001).

Theme 3: Increased Differentiation: *The second year felt like a different model*

Candidate 9 expressed the following:

I felt the cohort and the support the first year, that we were all in this together. We went to the ACA conference together as a cohort. We did things outside of classroom time to bond, whether going out to eat, have a drink, or to chat. After the first year, it almost seemed competition-like with some people. My idea of what a cohort is supposed to be sort of went away. There was almost a sub-grouping within the cohort. I can pinpoint when that happened. We were very cohesive, and then separated to do the personal growth group. Our recommendation was that personal growth group be with the whole cohort to keep supporting the cohort model. I felt more as a cohort the first year. After that, it felt like it had gone by the way. To me, it felt like a cohort program the first year, and an independent program the second.

A change to a more autonomous work process during the second year of the program was a welcomed change for some of the informants, who found completing assignments and projects collaboratively more time-consuming and frustrating than working

individually. In Candidate 1's words, "It was a little bit rocky, the working together with different people with different approaches. . . Later in the program, there was less of that, so it was more that we could focus on just being together and supporting each other, and not having to work on group projects so much of the time. For me, that made it easier."

Another view was shared by Graduate 10:

It seemed like the first year and a half there was more of a feeling of *a band of brothers*. . . .By the second year, there was a stronger taste of factionalism, but when comps [comprehensive examinations] came around, we rallied as a group. By the time we got to the third year, there were factions that started to crystallize more and more. There was a collective sense of unity early on, which seemed to break down. There were just *different collective senses*, one here, one there. I think that had to do with people working on different semester projects. By that time, everyone just seemed focused on finishing up and getting done.

A similar perception was shared by Candidate 11:

My cohort started off our first year really tight. We socialized inside school and outside of school. We went to conferences together. We were really *packed*. By the third year, it really disintegrated. Individual people started to emerge. There were two people you couldn't teach anything to. They knew it all. If you needed support, or to consult with them, they would be willing to help you in that way, but nobody could teach them anything. Then, we had one person who was really annoying. We just kind of broke off by the third year. . . .The strange thing about the cohort, even though we became divided, was if you needed someone's expertise, everybody was *Johnny-on-the-spot*.

While five of the informants were precandidates, and were not yet qualified for comprehensive examinations, the candidate and graduated informants identified the successful completion of comprehensive examinations at the end of the second year of the program as a significant milestone in their journeys through the program. Reaching this marker signified not only that two-thirds of the program was now behind them, but also a change in status from doctoral student to doctoral candidate. Doctoral candidacy meant that group members could begin work on their dissertations. With the exception of one candidate, who stated, “I think part of the reason I’m still *ABD* is because I haven’t gotten past the *I’m not-sure-I-should-be-here* thing” (C10), the informants also related doctoral candidacy to increases in self-confidence and self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1986) noted that efficacy beliefs are experience-based and fostered through a history of achievements, and also are a powerful source of motivation.

Regarding doctoral candidacy, Graduate 6 stated, “At that point, you have some confidence in what you’re doing. After a couple years in the program, faculty know you, you know them and where you stand, and it works. I wasn’t concerned that if I wanted to say something I couldn’t. Candidate 1 expressed what doctoral candidacy meant to her:

It’s up to me now. I’ve always had the perception that what I want to accomplish, and when I want to accomplish it, is up to me. I’m not married and I don’t have kids. . . I don’t have as many thing things pulling at my attention, so I know I can focus and get done. But, especially after the comprehensive exams, where I know what is left is my internship and cognate, there’s not going to be any more group projects. There’s not going to be anything else, so I can participate fully in the program, but my focus is on getting finished.

Candidate 10 went on to say:

Now that I'm through comps, I feel that now it's *my thing*. I proved myself. I'm through with what I needed to get through. Hopefully, everybody else will get through too. . . . There's a whole slew of people out there who have their doctorates in this area, and they're going to be competing for jobs. You begin to wonder, am I falling behind? You start to put your vita together. I got *these* thing, but I don't have *these*, but my cohort member has lots of *that*, and I don't . Am I okay? Do I measure up? Am I going to be marketable?

As candidates were preparing to tackle the final stretch of the program, and looking ahead to what lies beyond the program, it also was common for them to look back on how far they had come in the program, and how their relationships had evolved:

There were more rough spots then than what it's like now. . . . I can look back now and say I've made some really good connections. I have met a lot of really nice people. There still are some people whose personalities just don't click, and you know you'll never be close to them, but that's just life. I think it's definitely been a worthwhile experience, especially the cohort piece. I managed it. Our group managed it. . . . Something I think about is when the program is over. How deep are those connections? A lot of times we're sharing things about what's happening at Duquesne [University]. I don't know what's going to happen once we're gone, but I have to say I think we've managed. We managed to get through some of those tough growing pains. Now we look at each other pretty positively. (C1)

Theme 4: The End: *The spirit of comraderie lives on.*

The informants who had completed the cohort experience, and had either graduated or continued to work on their dissertations, offered the following perspectives:

In the end, I think it was the spirit of comraderie with my group. I think it would be for *any* members of my group, who would ask for help to get done with whatever, or needed something like a word of encouragement. I think that piece of it still lives on. When you see people doing different things, you can't help but be supportive. I always feel connected to them, rooting for them. (Graduate 10)

The relationships formed during the cohort experience often extend beyond the temporal and spatial parameters of a program, and are a powerful impetus for continued contact (Lawrence, 2002). According to Graduate 9, "Geography and other aspects of our lives fraction us, but I think the bond is still there. The idea of asking for and granting help continues among cohort members, and happens even today."

"Although some of us are finished in terms of graduated, and some of us are still working on dissertations, I still have this sense of us being a cohort. The feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood is still there, although we're no longer in a formalized aspect of it" (G5).

Graduate 7 offered his perspective:

I still stay connected with many people. It [cohort experience] inadvertently served a purpose beyond those three years of course work, because I formed relationships with individuals that I still have. Those relationships also helped me with the dissertation. Even afer the cohort ended, there was still support there, and I grabbed onto that.

In Candidate 7's words:

Even today, I feel as though there's any member of the cohort that I could call and would be there for me. I feel close enough to them to be able to pick up the telephone and call for anything that I might need, and feel they would sincerely and genuinely rally to whatever it was I needed. That's very gratifying, and feels very supportive. These are friendships that will continue for a lifetime.

Graduate 6 expressed how he experienced the end of the cohort experience:

I see it as a sort of natural progression. The cohort still exists as a theoretical construct even though we haven't met for years, but I identify with that group, because that's who I was here with. I don't mourn that. You stay in touch with the people you're going to stay in touch with. I was here doing what I wanted to do and what I wanted to pursue at the time, and that helped me get to where I am, and what I'm doing now. It was a successful experience. I don't want to go back to the cohort. I still see people once in a while, and we run into each other at conferences. The three-year piece of it is done as it should be. I also was fifteen years old once, but I don't want to be fifteen again.

Graduate 6 went on to say:

After my cohort experience ended, the way I tried to stay involved was with the next cohort. I would try to attend other's defenses. One of the best experiences of my time here was all of the people in the next cohort who got involved in my research for my dissertation. . . I was leaving my cohort at that point, but always felt I got to step into the next cohort even in a tangential way.

The Phenomenological Experience of Spatiality

As the hubs of group experiences in the ExCES program, the informants described their cohorts as spaces of context and meanings, where “a lot of personal-life stuff was shared” (G9), and “we knew everybody’s quirk” (G4). Three informants perceived school as “a nice escape” (C10), “there was something about it that felt like sanctuary” (G9), and “This was a running away place in some respects, where I knew what was due, and what was ahead of me next semester” (C11).

While a majority of the informants experienced their cohorts as places where they felt known and validated, expectations did not always match reality for others. Life in a cohort was not always ideal, but “the reality was you were with these people for better or worse” (C1).

Three themes describe the phenomenological experience of spatiality in a cohort model: *Our little microcasm*, *Faculty swim in and out*, and *Personal growth*.

Theme 1: *Our little microcasm*

In the words of Precandidate 6, “I’m not sure if it’s completely representative of a cohort, but you need to be able to work with other people. This is our little microcasm.” The broad theme, *Our little microcasm*, encompasses the informants’ experiences related to diversity, group processes, perceptions of risks and safety, the faculty’s relation to the cohort, and personal growth. Sub-groups also were a relatively normative feature of a cohort’s landscape, and were not necessarily perceived as “subversive” or exclusionary, except by three individuals.

The findings for the lived space existential revealed a common perception of shared spaces as feeling like one is in a position of strength with respect to accomplishing the work, learning about oneself, and using a collaborative process to address group needs.

Graduate 6 stated:

I think we're in a better position of strength when we're in a group of like-minded people. Whenever your professional formation as a counselor or counselor educator is individual, it's you following the program of studies, and maybe intersectiong occasionally with other people in the same course. That *has* to be a different experience than whenever you have [number removed] people together, who are living, eating, breathing, swearing, and crying, and maybe doing some other things like teaching, writing, and supervising together. I think that's a very empowering experience. . . . You've got a mix of people in a cohort, and whichever way you slice it, you just learn to work with that, and isn't that what we're trying to do here, I mean in counseling, the broader profession?

The informants described their cohorts as diverse relational spaces, where “everyone was best at something” (G5). As P2 related, “We're all strong in certain areas. We're not strong in the same areas, and that's a nice balance in our cohort.” Within the group's membership, there were diverse educational and cultural backgrounds, and “clinical interests and theoretical orientations” (P4). The diversity within the groups “provided a whole-systems perspective” (G1), which was viewed as enriching the learning process.

Group members had access to competent peers, who were perceived as possessing shareable knowledge, and capable of providing academic support, direction, and meaningful feedback. The findings support that doctoral peers serve as *expert others* for learning new tasks and skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Members' contributions of different academic skill sets and professional expertise enabled the groups to direct their own learning processes, and perform many of the duties traditionally prescribed to faculty

members (Lawrence, 1996). However, differences in personalities and scholarship, and multicultural issues also had the potential to lead to misunderstandings at times.

From Graduate 10's perspective, "Most of the people we had in our group were coming in from different places professionally, and they were very solid in terms of their experiences. There were unique, specialized areas represented within the group, and they were *good*. I was not disappointed." Overall, the informants indicated that there was "tons of mutual respect for areas of expertise within the cohort, and people giving each other their due about what they did and how they did it" (G9). However, one informant identified scholarship as an issue:

We had a huge range of experience and ability, and strengths and weaknesses. I found the group projects extremely frustrating, because I felt like there were two group members who were kind of substandard. . .having to any kind of paper with this one person was excruciating, because not only was so much of my time taken up with actually trying to deal with grammar, but even just trying to understand what this person was trying to communicate. . .I just had no idea. . .I'd have felt really uncomfortable to talk about why I was feeling something was unsatisfying. I don't know how I'd look at someone and say, *I feel like your skills are substandard and I'm feeling like I have to teach you, and that's not why I'm here*. Not that you can't learn something from teaching, but grammar? I mean, that's not why I'm here. Sentence structure? No. (Precandidate 4)

Precandidate 4 went on to say:

I thought this was *finally* the place for going crazy in the pursuit of my ideas and what I wanted to accomplish. It's frustrating for me that it's not the case to the

extent that it could be. . . I don't think it's what an ideal cohort situation would be, where there's a sense of *really* working together and feeding off of each other's ideas and work. I think that would be great. I'd *love* to have that, but I haven't met many people who I think I would have that kind of connection with, so that might just be my legacy of not fitting-in all the time.

The group itself provided a vehicle to collaboratively approach the faculty to address issues of concern, or to advocate for the group's interests, which was one way group members learned about leadership and advocacy:

"Part of who we advocate for is not only the counseling profession itself, but us. I think that's a powerful form of advocacy. . . . Where does a group get the confidence to approach the faculty? That tells me the model works. The model is developing and empowering competent counseling professionals" (G6).

Graduate 7 provided the following example:

When our group was upset, bothered about something, which I think was comps [comprehensive exams], we literally stopped class. To me, it felt like a union meeting. We sat in class and talked as a group about the things that we wanted to see happen regarding comps, because we weren't getting a clear picture from the faculty. I clearly remember us writing down what we wanted, our expectations, so we could communicate with faculty about this in a professional manner. We wanted to speak to these issues as a group. They [faculty] came in later that day and said, *You're right, makes sense*. When we had a concern, we came forth as a group, and it was well-received.

The informants discussed both parallels and inconsistencies between the events that occurred in their groups and their expectations given the level (doctoral) and culture (counseling) of the program. This often drew their attention to members' personal attributes and "self-in-counselor" (G6) issues. Corey (1996) suggested that the *person* and the *counselor* cannot be separated. Graduate 6 shared the following perspective:

You really are modeling a set of assumptions about the profession with your cohort. Do we treat each other respectfully despite our disagreements? Are we there to cry on one another's shoulders when we need to be? I think it's those kinds of experiences that help us form as counselors. Ultimately, *self-in-counselor* issues are just so vitally important to the work we do. There's two ways to learn about yourself. There's going off into a cave and meditating, or there's being with a whole lot of other people, who share those same kinds of interests and are going generally in the same direction. . . . I have a deeper value for that experience having been through a cohort program.

From Graduate 8's perspective, "there was some really bad stuff going on in there." We have all these people together on a doctoral level, but whenever there was a group issue, we weren't workable. Even though there were people with their Masters in counseling, and were working as counselors, they weren't therapeutic. That was probably the most disappointing, upsetting thing. I was incredulous. . . . Maybe that's just the way it is in a group, because sometimes when I'm at work, the same thing happens with the peer supervision model. There are certain people who clinically *know* so much, but when it comes to themselves, they're blind. Other informants also had witnessed attitudes and behaviors in their groups, which

they did not believe were consistent with the “spirit” of a cohort model, and “who a counseling professional is” (P1), and “It’s really in your face at times” (C11).

While there were advantages to being in a cohort group, there also were some risks. Perceived risks can color experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005), raise the stakes, and in rare cases, threaten one’s desire to continue in the program.

In the words of Candidate 1:

What is the heart of a cohort? Is it the groupwork? I’m not really sure. Is it the way that the faculty progresses this group of people along in the program? I don’t know. What’s the expectation? They [faculty] want that bond to be formed, but maybe they don’t understand. You’re trying to form a bond, and yet, it’s like you have to look out for yourself too, because I’m thinking doctoral program, competitive, the expectations are going to be high.

Candidate 5’s experienced lived space “like being thrown into the water, and there are things above us. It’s up to us to fight our way to the surface to breathe. Even though it’s a team model, and we *could* rely on people to help us get to the surface, I don’t take anything for granted.”

Group members perceived a variety of social/emotional and academic risks, and group members used a range of self-protective factors to shield themselves from negative influences. Several group-protective processes also were identified. The findings support that a cohort group can be self-protective, or a threat, with respect to diffusing some of the stresses of doctoral study. Yalom (1999) observed that groups can provide refuge from the stresses of everyday life. However, when risks were perceived to come from within a cohort group, sub-groups offered members some protection at times.

A summary of the perceived risks and protective factors identified by the inquiry are provided in Table 15.

Table 15

Summary of the Perceived Risks and Protective Factors and Processes Identified by the Inquiry

	Perceived Risks	Protective Factors/Processes
Social/ Emotional	Invalid personal judgements	“backed away” from full participation in class/group
	Labelling (“resistant,” “difficult”)	“I go to my personal support network”
	Social Pressures - self-disclosure, conformity - support, prove oneself	“making a clique”
	Multicultural biases	Supportive relationships with faculty members
	Exclusionary sub-groups	Do not “take ourselves too seriously.”
	“Favoritism” by faculty members (“ <i>What’s wrong with me?</i> ”)	Supportive peers
	Insensitive comments/behaviors “Speak up” or “Stay quiet”	“an <i>allowance</i> to be wherever they were at any given time.”
	Unresolved conflicts	“Practice what we preach”
	“Acting out” by group members	Self-confidence/Efficacy
	Passive-aggressive group members	Emotional distancing Strong commitment to goals
Academic	Incompatible work styles	“I don’t take anything for granted”
	individuals/groups “that would work together constantly”	“I need to voice my needs too.”
	“Substandard” group members	“jump through the hoops”
	Class time used to bring some members <i>up-to-speed</i> (Inadequate background knowledge)	“You pull together or you die.”
	“tiny threats of being kicked out of the program.”	“Humor kept us alive.”
	“Held back” by some group members.	“work as hard individually as you do as a group.”
	Run-ins with certain faculty members (i.e.; cultural issues, power issues)	Strong academic skills Stay ahead of deadlines (“backwards plan”)
		“You needed to take care of yourself academically.”

Theme 2: *Faculty sort of swim in and out*

The second theme describing lived space, *Faculty swim in and out*, was summed up in a few words by C6: “We teach each other, and faculty observe and offer feedback. Faculty sort of swim in and out of the cohort.”

Generally, the faculty was not considered part of the group. Instead, “the faculty surrounds us, and watches and teaches, and they’re looking at the dynamics” (P5). However, the faculty was perceived as much more than part of the context, and the faculty’s influence was considerable. As Graduate 8 remarked, the faculty is “on the periphery, but I didn’t think they were totally separate either. They were all involved with what we were doing,” and “if you needed something, they were *right there*” (C11).

The informants regarded the faculty as a vital part of the doctoral experience: Part of how we learn is through the intensity with faculty. . . .The intensity my cohort went through morphed a bit by the time the next cohort came along two years later. After the third cohort is when the program went to the every year thing. I just wonder sometimes if one of the things that the every year cohort model does is help to dilute the intensity of interaction between the cohort members with faculty. I think that’s a negative. (G6)

Group members relied on the faculty for feedback to assess individual and group performance. While the informants believed that they received adequate feedback on individual work, some of the informants expressed a desire for more feedback on group processes.

All of the informants believed that the faculty encouraged group autonomy. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy is the degree of self-direction provided a

learner, or group. There was a general consensus among that informants that the faculty “do a good job supporting everyone to be cohesive and supportive, and don’t engender competition the way they could” (P4). The faculty was perceived to support individual development by providing individual feedback on assignments, and encouraging students to take on leadership roles within their groups. The faculty also was perceived to support group autonomy by expecting group members to “find a way to work through conflict” (C3). While many of the informants had some frustrations with the faculty not intervening in some group situations they thought they should have, there also was a general sense that “if I want individual support from a faculty member, I have no doubt that I could have that if I sought that out” (P1).

The following quotes provide a variety of perspectives with regard to the faculty:

There was a personality issue between us at one time. The professor said we had to work this out ourselves, and left [the classroom]. I recall that, because I thought we’d fall apart right then, which of course was *my* stuff. The message from the faculty felt like, *We’ll be supportive, but you’re all going to be counselor educators, so go at it, and figure out how to make it work.* After that incident, we took it up ourselves, and when we had an issue with something, we’d tell faculty to go away, and we came up with an alternate proposal. (G4)

Candidate 2 expressed that she thinks the faculty needs to be more “proactive:”

I think that if the faculty want us to be a cohort, then they need to get their hands dirty. . . They need to address their perceptions of the cohort. . . . That should be ongoing. They expect us to be cohesive. They expect us to work together, yet they

took no part. . . .They absolutely sit back, and nobody really takes the lead in making sure that happens.

Much of the literature on cohorts suggests that over-reliance on the faculty is counter-productive to the cohort process (Witte & James, 1998). Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett (1996) proposed that successful cohort processes rely on the faculty to act as skillful monitors, who eventually place the responsibility for group leadership into the hands of the group members. While placing power into learners' hands invites and allows insecurity, ambiguity, and sometimes conflict, it also creates an environment in which students take the reins, and direct their own learning and group processes, rather than relying on the teacher as the leader and knowledge-maker (Bruffee, 1995). The literature on cohorts also identifies the appropriate use of authority in a cohort model as empowering cohort groups. As defined by Paisley and Hayes (1998), empowerment is the act of helping others use information in the service of reaching their goals. In essence, empowerment is the use of power to enhance other's power, regardless of position or status. According to Follet (1942), the collective ability of groups to enhance or transform themselves rests on a *power with* orientation, rather than a *power over* orientation toward power.

Candidate 7 offered a different perspective:

I think they [faculty] walk a fine line with how much to be *in* and *a part*, and how much to separate and be professors, guides. I felt they were in with us when they could be, encouraging us to go to the conferences, and being supportive of us there. And then there were times that were necessary for them to step out and allow us to be who we needed to be to develop and grow, and do our thing. I think they did

that. . . .There were times I felt the faculty should have supported me and they didn't. Now I see it would have been detrimental. They let us do what we needed to do, and process what we needed to process, to come out on the other side. While I didn't feel that while it was occurring, I can respect that as an afterthought.

Theme 3: Personal Growth: *you learn a lot about yourself too.*

Personal growth was mentioned frequently by the informants. As Candidate 2 stated, “When you process, you learn a lot about yourself too.” The personal growth group also was mentioned frequently. As the laboratory component of the Group Theories course, the informants described the personal growth group as an influential lived space within the program. Given the situatedness of the personal growth group as an experience that occurs early in the program, many of the informants viewed the experience as a helpful way to familiarize group members with one another, support the development of unity and communication among members, and to support the group's awareness of their dynamics and processes. According to a majority of the informants, explicit dialogue of this nature did not usually occur among group members outside of the personal growth group.

While the personal growth group felt “artificial” (P3) to several of the informants, it also was viewed as magnifying “the actual relational dynamics” (C1) within cohort groups, and “supports group members being able to work through conflicts” (P3). Some individuals identified the personal growth group as helping them work through some personal issues (C6), and “reframe some things I myself sometimes don't see” (C1).

Precandidate 2 described the personal growth group as

a place where we really are pushed into the situation to get to know each other,

deal with some serious issues, trust each other, validate each other, support each other in an artificial environment. . . .I do like that we have personal growth group together, because as much as I'm getting to know who I do and don't connect with as well, I'm still learning about the people I'm with. I think I'll have a better relationship with them in the model than if we were just thrown in a class together. It's just the tip of the iceberg now, but it's still more of a relationship than I'd have experienced if I was in a regular classroom without a cohort. That has been supportive, and I know what to expect from them in class, because I know them better.

Precandidate 4 expressed a different view:

There's this boundary, at least that exists for me, in the personal growth group. It's like having a personal growth group at work. I mean, these are people that I'll be working with for two and one-half years. I think I was different than I would have been in a growth group in another context. That is a confounding thing.

Personal growth was not limited to the personal growth group. There were many naturally-occurring situations which occurred in cohorts, which led to increased self-awareness and personal growth, often in unanticipated ways. Personal growth was identified as an effective strategy to deal with conflict and the cohort model:

I continued to have conflict with one individual in the cohort. Once I worked on myself, and decided I needed to change my interaction and how I think about this individual, which I think we should do, I could let a lot of stuff go. Once I resolved myself to the fact that I can't fix other people, and applied all the things we learn as

helper-people to that situation, I was able to go on and focus on all these other wonderful people I've got in the group. Personal growth is helpful to deal with conflict and the cohort model. Having a counseling background, it came down to practicing what I preach, processing it, then taking care of myself. I had to come to that, because I started off fighting that. (C7)

Personal feedback often was valued. Precandidate 2 shared that “when [group members' names removed] give me information about how I'm coming off, I learn and grow from that. I want to be around people like that. I'm doing my job giving difficult feedback. . . I feel it's part of my responsibility as a professional, and to the cohort.”

While some group members were more receptive to peer feedback than others, peers generally were perceived as having significant roles in the informants' personal growth, because they were able to provide feedback from another perspective. A majority of the informants discussed personal growth and self-awareness as meaningful aspects of their peer relationships, and ongoing professional development. Counseling professionals have an ethical obligation to engage in self-examination, primarily to protect the individuals they serve professionally; that is, to be able to anticipate how one's actions and values may affect their clients (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). According to Nelson and Neufeldt (1998), self-awareness in a group setting is an important aspect of counselor education for the purpose of developing students' “very humanness” (p. 6) in the process of becoming competent counselors. In this sense, personal feedback was considered culturally-relevant dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978) among doctoral peers.

The Phenomenological Experience of Relationality

The phenomenological experience of relationality was broken down into three areas of lived relations within the program: Lived relations with group members, lived relations with the faculty, and lived relations between cohort groups.

Lived Relations With Group Members

The findings revealed that group members related to each other as intellectuals, scholars, friends, quasi-family members, mentors, and colleagues. Overall, lived relations with group members were characterized by comraderie, collaboration, support, expectations, conflict, models, and motivation. The following examples illustrate some of the perspectives found in the data:

“I developed a familial system. What I did was I adopted everyone. That’s how I did it, so everyone in the cohort was part of my family. When someone either didn’t want to be, or wanted to take the gravy but not do the work, or wanted the benefits, but not share or chip it, it didn’t sit well with me. Get out of my house” (G9).

“We all evolved individually and yet cycled together. It felt like a good marriage, where you have independence, but at the same time, you also have a dance that you do with some members at some times, and sometimes with everyone“ (G4).

“Because I have had the experience that most people are not dependable, probably the most meaningful thing for me now has been developing these relationships, and feeling that I can start to depend on these people. That’s a new experience, and that’s been very meaningful” (P5).

From Precandidate 3’s perspective:

I think we do well leaning on each other academically. This constant push for

intimacy isn't necessary to have in a cohort. You can get along to work together. You can respect each other as individuals and scholars. . . We don't have to all get along on an emotional friendship level. I think we're cohesive the way we're supposed to be.

Regarding her group relationships, Precandidate 3 also went on to say:

I feel like I'm making a clique, which I don't intend to do, but I need [group members' names removed]. I'm not going to compromise that. . . . I wasn't real popular in high school. I was never the prom queen or any of that, so I certainly don't have that background coming in here, but that's what I'm feeling like, like I'm making this *popular group* clique, and *you can't be in it*.

Candidate 10 expressed another perspective:

The best part for me is never before, nor since, have I been with a group of professionals with whom I shared and they shared as much, and that knew as much about each other as that group seemed to. Still if I have a question or problem, I'm shooting emails in different directions. It was a great experience in terms of knowing people seemingly better than I had ever before.

Candidate 9 felt "related" to group members: "I'm an only child, and I don't have the experience of siblings in a family. This is the closest thing I can imagine about what it's like to be close to so many people, and related to them."

Two themes fully describe the informants' lived relations with group members:

Being accompanied: It's good to be on the journey with someone and *We had our warts*.

Theme 1: Being accompanied: *It's good to be on the journey with somebody*

Precandidate 2's statement, "Even though we're at different places with it, it's good to be on the journey with somebody else," represents the common perception of peers as supportive, empathetic, and knowledgeable companions on the journey through the doctoral program. With the exception of one informant, who would have preferred a traditional doctoral program, being accompanied by doctoral peers meant "I never felt alone," "there was always someone there," and "there was strength in having someone with you."

In the words of Graduate 7, "For me, this was very much a community, a family atmosphere in going through it, because you're *there*. . .you know, this sucks. It's eight o'clock in the morning, we're tired. . .and when you say that to the others, you don't have to go into it. They *just* understand. "

Graduate 6 shared his view:

These people were important to me. I spent more time with these people doing things and talking about things, and experiencing things here as part of our educational program, that quite frankly, I can't share with my spouse. She doesn't know what that is. Not because she's not interested or doesn't care, but she just doesn't know what that is. So the cohort was a very, very important experience going through it. I can't imagine doing it any other way.

For some of the informants, the opportunity to interact with other counseling professionals filled a void in their everyday professional lives:

"We're all kind of *smart rats*, working with a high level of autonomy, private practice, supervision. We don't always get opportunities to be with others like ourselves"

(G9). Candidate 1 expressed a similar perspective:

I had the opportunity to share some of my struggles with them, some of my own doubts, and things like that. I experienced my cohort as very supportive. Just connecting with people, that's one of the things I didn't have in my job in terms of other people who were doing counseling work. It was just kind of me doing my own thing, feeling kind of alone. So to have the opportunity to be with a group of people that I can learn from is a pretty positive experience.

Support was identified as a meaningful aspect of peer relationships in a cohort model: It's that support. I think when you're in school doing your own thing, there's some doubt that everyone seems to know what they're doing. In a cohort model, it's not that way, because on some level, we all talk about insecurities and validate each other that we're still learning. That's something that 's absent in just a classroom model. (P3)

Peer support was identified as the reason "I'm continuing to strive on my dissertation" (C6), and "If I wasn't part of the cohort model, I'd never have completed" (G3). Peer support took a variety of forms, including "mutual cheerleading, like *We can do this*, and mutually *talking each other out of* leaving the program at different times" (P1). As one informant related, "There was always the discussion in our group, *What are we going to do when we hit the ABD/dissertation stage?* Because then, there was no one there at eight o'clock in morning, eating donuts, drinking coffee, and saying, *We've got to get this done*" (G7).

There were times I was cognizant of one's ability, or the group's ability, to be more present for another. It's like that whole *herding* component. If there was a weaker

animal, the herd could come in and help. There were times our herd was like, *You're on your own*. It was tough, but when it came down to finals, we pulled together and helped each other out. (G9)

One informant did not think support was necessary: "Support is nice, it really is, but I don't think it's a necessity. I'd complete the program regardless" (P5).

In addition to emotional support, the informants had access to knowledge sources from whom they drew experiences, motivation, and the drive to keep striving in the program.

Being accompanied by peers meant "I didn't feel the need to be the best at all we had to do. I didn't need to have all the answers. There was someone to call on" (G5).

Without the others, "it would be really easy to walk away, you know, to say, *I have a lot going on. I have a really full life. I don't need this*" (G2). Informant C10 indicated that "the cohort is what allowed me to maintain my dedication. Without the cohort, I probably would not have made it much past two terms." Seifert and Mandzuk (2006) found that cohorts create both intellectual stimulation and emotional ties among learners.

Precandidate 4 offered a different perspective:

My experience has been that other people tend to want to get done what they needed to get done as quickly as possible so they then could just go home and work, and have their personal lives. I didn't feel like I could relate to that level of scholarship. I felt kind of alone in that. So again, having to do group projects with people who were saying stuff to me like, *Why are you putting so much work into this*, or *You're getting carried away*, was really frustrating to me.

While Candidate 5 "learned a tremendous amount in all aspects of the program," he

also expressed that he felt “cheated” out of more gratifying, supportive relationships with his group members: “It’s a shame, because I want that. I embrace that. I want those kinds of relationships in my life. I would have made it so much more enriched.”

Several individuals discussed the relationships developed with peers in a cohort model as consistent with the counseling profession’s position that “counselors are not solitary beings,” and the model “you understand that, and to be able to work collaboratively” (P1). Graduate 6 echoed a similar view: “We’re not *Lone Rangers*. Even if you’re in private practice, you’re not a Lone Ranger. You can’t be. I think the cohort model lends itself much more readily to this position about the profession itself.”

Theme 2: *We had our warts*

Disagreements, tensions, and conflicts emerging from both the working and personal aspects of group life were part of the informants’ lived experiences. In Graduate 10’s words, “There were times people would get really stressed out, like the end of a semester, or a major project. That’s when you would get the emotional responding, or charge, but it would peak, and then die down. We didn’t really have any ongoing animosity. Don’t get me wrong, we had our problems, we had our warts.”

Being part of a cohort group unleashes conflict, and conflict is an expected and normative feature of group life (Lawrence, 1996; Norris & Barnett, 1994). Positive cohort experiences involve more than developing supportive relationships; they also involve dialoging across differences, and working through conflicts (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001).

Perlman (1957) described a relationship as more than merely being together in a time and place, or of pleasant, comfortable communication:

Relationship leaps from one person to the other at the moment when emotion moves between them. They may both express or invest the same kind of emotion, they may both express or invest different or opposing emotion. . . . Whether this interaction creates a sense of union or of antagonism, the two persons are for the time connected or related to each other. (pp. 65-66)

Graduate 10 went on to describe his perception of group tensions this way:

People got snippy with one another, bickered, and there were tense moments in classes, little blowups, but the fire would die down. It was never an ongoing feud. There were times when you knew a couple people didn't get along. There were times there was a certain level of dissension, but it never bubbled up over the top. Somehow or another, the lid stayed on. We didn't let that get to the point where we let that interfere with one another, or upstage one another. We didn't always completely understand each other, and that was okay, I mean, nobody likes everybody. At the same time, there was a certain respect for distance.

Graduate 8 thought her group had "the most warts:"

We were the first group. We were sort of inventing and creating the program as we went along. It was a little confusing around here. They [faculty] didn't seem to know sometimes exactly where we were going, and what we were going to do. That was so frustrating, and expectations didn't always meet reality. We were really rebellious. There were times I was embarrassed to be part of the cohort. . . . I loved the academic piece, and I liked a lot of the people a lot. However, it was a really dysfunctional group. It was the worst dysfunctional family I've ever seen in my life. There were times I could not believe the level of immaturity, and some of

the lousy things people said to each other, *and* the judgement that went on in there. It felt like back-stabbing.

Candidate 2 related that she “felt like it was going to high school and kindergarten. It was like *who is best friends with who, who’s going to stick with who*. . . .I think we need to be honest that there’s always going to be cliques, and there’s always going to be personal agendas.”

While effective cohort groups work together to overcome obstacles and find solutions (Holmes et al., 2008), group issues did not always end in satisfactory resolutions. Conflict was perceived and managed in different ways by different groups:

“We never got past a conflictual-type of stage. We always bumped up against it, but never pushed past it. We never really experienced being able to roll past it” (C5).

“We’d fight, get it out of our system, and move on. It wasn’t anything I felt a strong need to hold onto. It’s about the good, the bad, and the ugly. Even though I had my difficulties with this one person, I still feel equally connected to that person. They’re still part of the family. I wouldn’t trade it in” (C7).

“We had someone [a group member] who would describe for us what was going on in terms of group process, so that no matter how bad it was, and it was bad at times, we were able to recognize we were at a certain stage and say, *Our reactions are normal, and if we’re healthy we’ll get through it*. . . .There might have been times the faculty should have gotten more involved, but as a team, we had to take it up ourselves, understand what’s happening during the group process, and how it should be resolved. (G5)

Graduate 1 provided the following perspective:

I think there was just a flow in our group. We just kind of flowed nicely together. During the times that there was disequilibrium, we didn't fall away. I don't think the tension between anybody was ever so great that it affected the whole system, like in a bad marriage, where the kids pick up on it and the house has this tension to it. When members had something with someone, it was unknown to me for the most part.

Precandidate 1 described "an animosity" and growing polarity between sub-groups within her cohort, and stated, "I doubt I'll change my views on the inappropriateness of the attackingness, mean-spiritedness, or lack of sensitivity, empathy. " She made sense of the difficulties confronting her group in the following way:

We look at counseling and we say thirty-percent, at least, of the success of counseling is based on the therapeutic alliance. I think the success of a cohort is based on the alliance of the cohort. That requires certain factors, inherent factors, that you don't learn in textbooks, like the capacity for empathy, desire to understand people who are different from you. . .like curiosity about different cultural backgrounds, mutual respect. These are factors that are extremely important, and are extremely important in the selection process too.

Despite their differences, a majority of the informants believed that when it came to doing the work, their groups laid aside personal differences, and "personal issues seemed to melt away when someone needed help" (G9).

Lived Relations With the Faculty

Theme: *We're colleagues. . .to a point*

One theme, characterized the informants' lived relations with the faculty. As Graduate 8 stated, "We're colleagues, to a point. They're giving a grade and the doctorate."

With the exception of one informant, who was angry with the faculty, because she believed they "took no part" and needed to be "more proactive" (C2), the informants described the faculty as "accessible, available, and friendly" (P5). The informants felt cared about:

"The organization is supportive in terms of wanting everyone to be successful. I was used to hearing about the Pitt model, and some of the other models. It was like a fraternity hazing, and who would survive. Here, I felt like every faculty member wanted you to succeed" (G3).

The informants felt they were "taken seriously" (G6), believed they "had a voice" (G10) with most of the faculty, and felt *heard*, "sometimes more by the faculty than group members" (G8). As G10 related, "I never saw a faculty pay as much attention as when we collaboratively addressed an issue."

While it took time for the informants to *feel* they were colleagues with the faculty, they appreciated that the faculty viewed them as colleagues, and believed they were "treated like professionals right off the bat, which was a very welcomed thing" (G6). This was important to the informants, as many of the informants entered the program with impressive work experience and job titles:

The faculty talked a lot about the learning community, and the collegial nature of what they wanted, how different we were from masters students, how they were looking forward to us, how we were going to have positions as part-time faculty. I was thinking I just hope they're serious about this collegial thing, because if they're not, I'm up the creek without a paddle. In my view, it turns out they were serious about it. . . .The collegial speech the faculty give was powerful. (G6)

However, an issue raised by this research concerns the parameters of healthy collegial relationships between students and the faculty. As one informant stated, "I understand we're all seen as colleagues, because we all do achieve, but there needs to be boundaries" (C2). The informant spoke of close relationships and socializing between some group members and faculty members as "isolating" to those group members who did not have these types of relationships with faculty members. The informant believed that fraternizing between students and the faculty "contaminated" a cohort by creating "sub-groups" and concerns about "favoritism," which had the potential to compromise fairness and impartiality with respect to grading and evaluation.

All of the informants recognized a power differential between themselves and the faculty: "There's a clear division, of course, between students and the faculty. In some ways, there's a joining, but there's certainly a power differential. Anyone who didn't recognize that wouldn't be getting the whole picture" (P1). The informants perceived a power differential as "they hold the strings," and have the power to make this "a pleasant or unpleasant" experience (P5). P5 stated, "It's okay to share theoretical preferences and things like that, but I would be very uncomfortable to disagree with anything they [the faculty] would have to say."

As mentioned previously, a majority of the informants believed that the faculty supports the development of cohesiveness, rather than competition among group members. The informants also identified another strength of the faculty as supporting students' development in the area of professional leadership. The informants felt encouraged to seek licensure and other credentials, join and support professional organizations, and to attend and present at professionals conferences.

The informants perceived the faculty as having multiple roles. In addition to viewing the faculty as content experts, the informants perceived the faculty as mentors, guides, gatekeepers, group experts, models, and *risk managers*. The informants believed that “the faculty has a responsibility to protect every member of the cohort” (P1), and to ensure that the learning space is a safe place for all group members.

While the informants perceived the faculty as providing structure, guidelines, and deadlines for assignments, and believed that they received adequate feedback on individual work, approximately half of the informants expressed a desire for more feedback from the faculty regarding group process issues. This was identified as one way the faculty can meaningfully “join” (P1) with group members to support the development of meaningful dialogue, especially during difficult times, or group conflicts. This also was identified as an important aspect of modeling, with respect to learning “what it means to be a counselor educator” (C1). Students looked to the faculty as models for how to give and receive constructive feedback, and also how to confront certain behaviors. Neglecting to address these issues can be confusing to students. For example, as one informant remarked, “if you don’t call it out, don’t expect it not to be confusing” (C2). The findings suggest that it cannot be assumed that students feel comfortable

engaging in difficult conversations with their peers regarding work quality issues, or feel safe to confront certain behaviors observed in their groups.

Lived Relations Between Cohort Groups

Theme: *a bond of mutual understanding*

Groups are not just entities in their own rights; they also exist in relation to other groups (Brown, 1988). A group-in-relation perspective was evident in the informants' descriptions of their groups as "the first," "the best," "the smallest," "the only group that never achieved cohesiveness," and "the guinea pigs for the new [admission] model."

While other cohort groups, or individuals affiliated with the other cohorts in the program, were not mentioned by *all* of the informants, they were mentioned frequently by many of the informants, which suggested influential lived relations. References to cohort groups were evident in statements such as, "There are different flavors of cohorts," (G7) "Every cohort is different in dynamics," (P3), "There are different cohort effects on different cohorts. We heard about your motto the first day" (C5), and "I think the faculty would say the cohorts in the program were very different. They took on their own *It*. They're very different" (G7). The findings support that individuals and cohorts ahead in the program are influential models and third parties, or exosystems.

The informants had "heard about" the other cohort groups, and it was not unusual for some faculty members to share "stories" about cohort groups. Cohort groups ahead in the program provided models for social comparisons, which supports vicarious learning as a feature of the cohort experience (Bandura, 1977a). This is not unusual in cohort programs, as cohorts that function well often serve as precedents for the faculty and

students (Hill, 1992). Holmes et al. (2001) found that each group in a cohort program created its own niche in the cohort pipeline, leaving its mark in the program.

From the informants' perspectives, cohort comparisons were not always enthusiastically received: "There was a faculty member who would do it multiple times. We didn't want to always be compared. We were going to make sure we were different and unique" (G5), and "like that's the standard they expect of us. Meanwhile, there were only [number removed] of us in our group, and we couldn't even figure out when to get together to do an assignment" (P4). From Precandidate 3's perspective, "They're [faculty] really excited about the [cohort group name removed] cohort. I think they really valued that. . . It's not that there's *not* a cohesion in our cohort, but I don't think we're ever going to be the [cohort name removed] cohort, and I think that's okay."

While the cohort groups in the ExCES program function relatively autonomously in relation to each other with respect to learning activities, many informants spoke of an implicit bond and *esprit de corps* among all ExCES students by virtue of their affiliations with the same doctoral program and profession. Many of the informants referred to a norm of helpfulness, and "general sense of comraderie and support" (P4) among the students involved with the program:

"There's a bond of mutual understanding between cohorts. If there's something I can do to help someone out, I'll do that" (G9).

"The cohort model is what made me committed to participate in your study, because you were a following cohort" (C 10).

"It must be that whole journey thing that bonds us as cohorts. I hadn't met you but once in passing, but I wanted to help by participating in your study. I don't feel like I

have the time to spare, but I did it anyway. There's a bond among us, a bond among cohorts" (C 11).

"One of the things I saw from the beginning of the model was an openness to sharing information, and resources and stuff. That didn't just come from my cohort, but from people who were a year or two ahead of me, who were willing to share resources. That was a really positive part [of the program]" (C1). In the words of another informant:

I'm definitely getting support and all the little pieces of helpful information, but I'm getting it from other cohort members. . . .As the newbie, members of other cohorts would make a point of coming over when they'd see us to ask how we're doing. . . .I felt really comfortable, like I could go up to anybody and say, *Can I talk to you a minute about what's going on with me?* Anyone I approached would be more than willing to do that. (P4)

Graduate 6 discussed the relationships between cohort groups from another perspective:

We were looking forward to the second group coming along. Part of it was because it helped diffuse some of the tension from us. Bringing along other people is part of what this is supposed to be about, part of what we do. We finally got another group of people coming in here besides us. It takes a little pressure off us, but it's partly like having a responsibility that the *bigger brother* feels for the *little brother*. Sort of a sibling responsibility.

Individuals ahead in the program were perceived as informal mentors, experienced guides, and secondary sources of social support in the program. In this sense, these individuals also served as *More Knowledgeable Others* (Vygotsky, 1978), because they

were perceived as sources of information and knowledge about what *lies ahead*, and is *yet to come* in the program based on personal experience.

The Inter-Relationships Among the Lived Existentials

It should be noted that while the emergent themes and supporting data for each theme are discussed separately, many of the themes are inter-related. van Manen (1990) reminded us that while research provides an opportunity to examine lived experiences in their differentiated dimensions more closely, in the everyday lifeworld, the existentials are indivisible; that is, they exist in unity as an integrated *whole*. This sense of integratedness was evident not only in the informants' significant statements, but also is reflected in the themes identified in the inquiry. Several examples of the inter-relationships among the lived existentials can be noted.

The relationship between time and space is noticeable in statements such as, "On Saturday mornings the place was buzzing," and "it felt like a different model the second year." Temporal and spatial experiences also impacted group relationships. For example, as the work process in the group became more individuated over time, many of the informants also perceived a diminishing sense of collective group unity.

Another example of the connections among the existentials is illustrated by the following statement: "When I come back now I think, *where is everybody?* It is a stunning experience compared to how the place was when I was here. It feels different since my cohort experience ended" (Body-Space-Relation-Time). Similarly, other examples include the following statements: "I identify with that group because that's who I was here with, doing what I wanted to do, what I wanted to pursue at the time, and

that helped me get to where I am and what I'm doing now" (Relation-Space-Time-Body), and "I feel fortunate to have been there at that time" (Body-Space-Time).

The Research Questions and the Findings

This inquiry was guided by a primary research question and three subsidiary questions, which were posed to examine and further inform the primary research question. Relevant findings were derived by addressing the primary and subsidiary questions, collecting adequate data to reach saturation, and validating the findings.

The primary research question was: What are the lived experiences of Counselor Education doctoral students in the cohort model at Duquesne University, and how do they make meaning of their *university*, and other *world*, experiences?

This inquiry used an existential framework (van Manen, 1990) to explore, describe, and understand the lived experiences of Counselor Education doctoral students' lived experiences in a cohort model. The emergent themes in the four existential dimensions (corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality), and descriptions of the themes, reflect the common lived experiences in a cohort model for a purposive sample of twenty-six informants. The themes were inductively derived through an analyses of the informants' subjective experiences as provided in the eight protocols. As is characteristic of an inductive process, the analysis moved from the informants' concrete experiences to the illumination of the broader themes within the data. The aim of data analyses was to achieve the greatest degree of generality without compromising the richness in the data.

Each protocol was read multiple times, significant statements were extracted, and meanings were formulated for the significant statements. The combined formulated meanings from the eight protocols were used to develop theme clusters, and eventually

the emergent themes. I attempted theoretical triangulation by using an inter-related set of theoretical concepts, including literature related to social support.

Subsidiary Question #1: How can students' lived experiences in the ExCES program be described in the differentiated dimensions of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relationships?

The existential framework proposed by van Manen (1990) was used to examine and describe lived experiences. The answer to this question was expressed in the informants' significant statements as they related to lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations, and the meanings ascribed to the significant statements. The informants' descriptions of their perceptions and experiences were captured in eight protocols. The informants' subjective experiences were summarized in a narrative, and the significant statements and formulated meanings were presented in a separate table for each protocol.

Subsidiary Question 2: What are the common ways students make sense of their lived experiences in the ExCES program?"

The answer to this question is expressed in the emergent themes, which describe the common corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences in a cohort model. Within each theme there is a range of interpretations. However, the themes in each experiential dimension (analytical category) represent the commonalities among the informants' experiences. Together, the eleven themes describe the structure of the phenomenological experience in a cohort model:

The Corporeal Experience: Theme 1: *A full body experience*

The Temporal Experience: Theme 2: *A period of adjustment and observation*

Theme 3: *It was showing up on a Saturday*

Theme 4: *The second year felt like a different model*

Theme 5: *The spirit of comraderie still lives on*

The Spatial Experience: Theme 6: *Our little microcasm*

Theme 6: *Faculty sort of swim in and out*

Theme 7: *Personal Growth*

The Relational Experience:

With Group Members Theme 8: *Being accompanied*

Theme 9: *We had our warts*

With the Faculty Theme 10: *We're colleagues. . . to a point*

Between Groups Theme 11: *A bond of mutual understanding among cohorts*

Subsidiary Question 3: What contextual influences can be identified, and how do these bear on students' experiences in the ExCES program, and the meanings of those experiences?

The contextual findings identified by the inquiry provide the faculty with insights which they may have taken-for-granted, and can be used to examine program strengths and address areas for growth. While many of the contextual influences identified by the inquiry require no further explanation, several findings warrant further discussion.

Time constraints are contextualizing influences on students, cohort groups, and academic programs. The program itself adheres to an academic calendar, and the practices and processes that occur in the ExCES program are subject to these constraints. In addition to their academic lives, the informants have personal lives, and often a *full-plate* of other roles, responsibilities, and obligations beyond the university, and their student roles. As one informant stated, "I don't think there's time to carve out to just

manage the cohort experience. You're trying to work and get assignments done, and figure out how to have a personal life in the mix." All of the informants were consciously aware of the time commitment involved in doctoral study, and also of a need for "balance" between their personal and academic lives. The findings further suggest that many of the insights students generate introspectively are necessarily always shared due to time limitations. Similarly, *finding time* "to debrief, talk or whatever, shoot the breeze" is an ongoing challenge for group members.

An interesting finding was *Graduate Assistantships*, which was mentioned by several of the informants, who had positions as Graduate Assistants. These individuals had opportunities to "develop relationships with the faculty [which] members of the cohort did not get to experience" (C11), felt closer to the everyday lives of the faculty members, and also had more opportunities to interact with members of the other cohort groups in the program. Graduate assistantships afforded students unique knowledge and relationships, which they valued. As an informant stated, "On Thursday nights there would be quite a few doctoral students [from other cohort groups] gathered in the GA office downstairs. I know not everyone felt comfortable, probably because I was a GA, but we were a group talking and sharing experiences, and it was good to be about that."

The distance between the university and students' homes also was identified as a contextualizing influence, particularly with respect to the formation of *work* groups within cohorts. While the opportunity to work with a variety of individuals with different personalities and learning styles is considered ideal in collaborative learning situations (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991), students' work partner choices often were based on more pragmatic considerations. For example, students' work schedules, availability, and home

residences in relation to one another frequently dictated who-worked-with-who in a cohort group, because “arranging to work together in a small group is difficult. It’s not like you’re at your job, and you’re all there at the same place. . .that’s forced alliances in my group. I’d like to have more of a choice.”

The findings suggest that the size of a cohort was un-related to sub-grouping within cohort groups, as sub-grouping was relatively normative; that is, all of the informants noticed the formation of “clusters,” “segments,” “factions,” or “different collective senses” of individuals within their groups over time. In smaller groups, where it is more difficult to withdraw or hide (Mercurio and Weiner, 1975), this tended to be felt more intensely. As a precandidate informant remarked, “I wonder if it wouldn’t be better to have a larger cohort. I don’t think the sub-grouping would be as apparent and powerful.”

Cohort size was highly influential in one informant’s experiences, who shared a cohort with only one other member. In this situation, member attrition dramatically affected one cohort group in the ExCES program, and their lived experiences. The types of experiences that occurred in this cohort contrasted sharply with those of the other informants in this inquiry, and felt less like a cohort model. While fewer resources were available within the group, there was an appreciation for the support and information provided by members of other cohort groups. The faculty were perceived as somewhat “lax” in setting up start times for classes, and structure and deadlines for assignments, and group members had less of a group voice when advocating for more structure. In the words of an informant, “It’s been very frustrating trying to advocate for more structure from faculty, but so far it hasn’t happened.”

In the words of a graduate from the first cohort group in the program, “This was a new experience for *everybody*.” *Faculty experience* was identified as a contextual influence by the informants who were members of the inaugural cohort group. These individuals believed that the faculty’s inexperience was a factor in their group experiences. They were entering a *new* doctoral program, and interacting with faculty members who had not worked with doctoral students, nor a cohort model, previously. While these informants described many positive experiences, they also shared similar perceptions, such as “It was a little confusing around here,” “We didn’t have a lot of direction,” “It felt like winging it,” “group management was inconsistent at times,” “We were creating and inventing the program as we went along,” and “I don’t think the faculty knew what to do with us at times.” Members of the first cohort group believed that the experience gained by the faculty was beneficial for the following cohort groups: “We were *the first*, so whatever pathologies are there are going to be there, and whatever strengths are there, are going to be there. . . .I think we very clearly saw a *lightening up* of *the parents* on the second cohort group, which I think was necessary.”

Two informants shared the perception that the annual admission model currently used in the program is “losing something, maybe the distinct cohesion from cohort to cohort,” which was based on their personal observations from the “outside looking back in,” rather than personal experience. A program graduate expressed the following view:

There are certain outcomes from the original model [biennial admission to program] that are changed if you change the elements of the model. The intensity my cohort went through morphed a bit by the time the next cohort came along two years later. After the third cohort is when the program went to the every year thing.

I just wonder sometimes if one of the things that the every year cohort model does is help to dilute the intensity of the interaction between the cohort members with faculty. . .I think that's a negative.

As is consistent with the findings of previous inquiries of cohorts (Lawrence, 1996), the findings suggest that each cohort group in the ExCES program is a separate working system within the program. Accordingly, there are “different flavors” (G7) of cohorts. As sites of context, interpretation, and meaning, each group reflects the blend of a unique set of learners (Lawrence & Mealman, 2000). As a biological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and biographical system (Lawrence, 1996), each individual member contributes context to a cohort group. As Mealman and Lawrence (2000) observed, cohort groups cannot be expected to develop predictably, because the process flows from the interaction among members.

In this inquiry, members of other cohort groups in the ExCES program also were influential in contributing context, which further reveals the complexity of contextual influences on students' lived experiences in a cohort model.

The Findings and the Theoretical Concepts

Understanding the findings through the lenses of theoretical concepts strengthens an inquiry, and also provides sound theoretical rationales for intentionally contextualizing aspects of the cohort experience.

Four theories were used for the inquiry: 1) Social cognitive learning theory; 2) Sociocultural theory, 3) Self-Determination Theory, and; 4) Bio-ecological systems theory. Additionally, social support was considered a relevant theoretical construct.

Lived Experiences and Social-Cognitive Learning Theory

The mechanisms of development and socialization identified by Bandura (1977a; 1986) were evident in the informants' lived experiences, particularly with respect to modeling, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. The data support that the faculty and doctoral peers, including individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program, are influential models. As Saltiel (1998) observed, *the other* is a model for envied traits. While both desirable and less desirable behaviors were modeled in cohort groups, students took their cues from the most competent models available in their groups. Group members provided models of scholarship, academic prowess, and proficiency in teaching, counseling, supervision, and research, which students used as yardsticks to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and to "strive for excellence." Group members also provided models of behaviors which they considered more, or less, "therapeutic" and consistent with their ideas of what a counseling professional is. Some of the behaviors observed within their cohorts roused concerns and questions regarding student selection procedures, the importance of personal attributes, and self-in-counselor issues.

The informants had many opportunities to observe other's work through the completion of collaborative projects and assignments as well as class presentations and team-teaching activities. The statement, "You're watching everyone else and thinking, *Is our presentation going to be as good as theirs?*" is an example. Small group class presentations provided students with models for different ways of being collaborative, including creative ways to interpret similar assignments, and present them to the class.

The findings support that the faculty also serve as models, especially with respect to the informants' future roles, and what it means to be a counselor educator. The faculty's words and behaviors, and attention and inattention to certain phenomena in cohort groups had weight on students' perceptions and lived experiences. Other cohort groups in the ExCES program, and individuals affiliated with those groups, also provided models for social comparisons, particularly with regard to group cohesiveness and support.

As both an individual and group concept, self (and group) efficacy is acquired through experience, and fostered by a history of achievements in a specific domain. Self-efficacy also is influenced by observing what others are able to accomplish, which resulted in "a belief that this can be done." A pinnacle in self-efficacy was the successful completion of comprehensive exams leading to doctoral candidacy, and a *can do* attitude, which provided the additional fuel needed to navigate through the remainder of the program and the dissertation writing process.

Perceptions of group-efficacy influenced the informants' lived experiences in a cohort model. Being able to depend on one another individually, and pull together as a group to accomplish tasks, were important to develop a sense of group unity and faith in the collaborative process. Group efficacy was apparent in statements such as, "We do good work together," "As colleagues, I believe we're solid," "We did the work. We got it done," and "we can do this." Group-efficacy was demonstrated in the informants' use of a group *voice* and a collaborative process to approach the faculty with issues of concern, and to advocate for the group's interests and needs.

Lived Experience and Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky (1978) understood intellectual development as not only taking place with social support in interaction with others, but also as involving the transmission of culturally-relevant ways of thinking and behavior. The findings clearly support that the faculty are regarded as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), who “have so much knowing.” In addition to being content experts, group members look to the faculty as group experts, who can provide guidance related to group processes. It is also clear that doctoral peers serve as MKOs to one another, primarily as a means to do the work in cohort groups. In diverse groups, where “there’s a lot of really intelligent people,” and “everyone was best at something,” group members have access to “unique specialized areas of expertise,” which is precisely what enabled group members to teach each other and direct their own group processes. Not having to know all the answers because “there was someone to call on” relieved some of the pressures the informants put on themselves. Moreover, the findings support that individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program also serve as MKOs, particularly individuals who are ahead in the program. Many of the informants perceived these individuals as possessing knowledge of *what lies ahead* in the program, based on personal experience.

Feedback is an important aspect of the MKO. Many of the informants believed that they “received a lot of feedback I would not have gotten in a non-cohort program.” While the informants believed that could receive feedback from their peers, the informants were not necessarily comfortable with the “evaluative component” of their relationships, especially when work quality was perceived as “substandard.” Given that

“these are the people I have to work with” for a three-year period, these types of conversations between group members can be difficult at times.

The findings also revealed that individuals with highly-developed skills, and perceived themselves as producing consistently higher quality work than their peers, often found themselves in the roles of MKOs. Cultivating relationships with the faculty was one way these individuals’ needs for intellectual challenges were met beyond the cohort group.

Lived Experience and Self-Determination Theory

An analysis of lived experiences from the perspective of Self-Determination theory provided a lens to examine the impact of the social context on motivation. Mastering challenges and psychological well-being are fully expressed in social contexts which support the development of self-determination, and self-determination motivates students to achieve their goals. According to the theory, the relationship between goals and the satisfaction of the core needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is key (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The findings support that students’ core needs can be satisfied in a variety of ways in the ExCES program. However, the satisfaction of core needs is not necessarily limited to the context of a cohort group.

Autonomy Needs. Autonomy is the degree of self-direction provided the learner, or group; that is, “the feeling of volition that can accompany any act, whether dependent or independent, collectivist or individualist” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 74). One informant’s analogy illustrates the concept of group autonomy: “The coach doesn’t have to coach because the group has taken it on themselves.” Given that many of the informants were

used to working with a relatively high level of autonomy in their professional lives, a perception of autonomy in the learning process was important to the informants.

While an emphasis on collaborative pedagogy had the potential to limit perceptions of autonomy during the first year of the program, the work process was perceived to become increasingly more individuated and autonomous following the first year. Consequently, some of the informants perceived greater time and opportunities to pursue their personal goals and ambitions, which included collaboration with faculty members on research and publication opportunities. According to Schein (1996), group learning situations should include opportunities for individual development and interests in order to counter a common misconception of collaborative pedagogy as the subordination of individual goals to a mindset of *groupism*. In cohort programs, personal goals and achievements can contribute to a collective sense of accomplishment developed within a cohort group (Lawrence, 1996).

All of the informants believed that the structure of the program and work process encouraged a high degree of *group* autonomy with respect to the latitude given groups to direct their learning and group processes. While the faculty determined assignments and the structure for classroom activities, work and deadlines, “We didn’t have a lot of direction,” “Faculty let us work out our own issues,” and “We taught ourselves.”

In group situations generally, there is tension between autonomy and relatedness (Kegan, 1982), and between self-interest and group-interest (Bruffee, 1995).

Relatedness Needs. While there was a sense of affiliation with their groups, and a high degree of intellectual relatedness among group members, the informants’ relatedness needs often were met through smaller sub-groups within cohort groups. Beck and Kosnik

(2001) observed a tendency for students in cohort programs to gravitate toward *kindred spirits*. Relatedness needs varied among the informants, although all of the informants indicated a desire to feel connected and accepted by group members. Relatedness needs were expressed in comments such as, “You’re not going to relate to everyone on the same level of intensity, or passion,” “You’re not going to genuinely like everyone and want to be friends with them,” “some people do relate more to some than to others,” and also in statements such as, “I didn’t want to be an outsider,” “I wanted to be seen as someone who is easy to work with,” and “I wanted to position myself so if I decided to apply to the program, the faculty wouldn’t be like, *Who is this girl?*” The findings suggest that relatedness needs are reflected in the ways group members perceive their peers, and the words used to express their understandings of peer relationships. For example, doctoral peers were perceived as mentors, colleagues, friends, teams, scholars, and as “family,” which also influenced the informants’ expectations of their fellow learners. For example, while one informant stated, “In our group, sharing academic information is fine,” and “we’re cohesive the way we’re supposed to be. . . I don’t think we’ll ever be the [cohort name removed] cohort and support everyone,” another informant “made every member of the cohort my family. . . if you wanted the benefits without chipping in, it didn’t sit well with me. Get out of my house.” It is possible that the individuals who experienced greater isolation in their professional lives may have had greater relatedness needs than group members who may have viewed their personal social networks as the primary contexts for meeting relatedness needs. The findings suggest that relatedness needs can be negatively affected by a perception of “pressured relationships,” which can feel artificial and unnatural, and also by cliques and sub-groups when experienced as

exclusionary. Similarly, behaviors that were regarded as immature, disrespectful, and judgemental also influenced relatedness needs, and group members' desires to be affiliated with a particular group.

Competence Needs. Competence is one's perceived ability to effectively execute a task or activity. Competence needs were met over time by doing the work, receiving feedback, and achieving doctoral candidacy. The informants related competence to motivation and persistence, being "anal about getting things done," and "knowing my limitations." While one's own role in fulfilling competence needs also was evident in statements such as, "I have to work hard," "I've always had the perception that what I want to accomplish, and when I accomplish it, is up to me," and "I'm not the smartest person in world," the findings suggest that competence also is an emerging capacity constructed through relationships with others and the environment (Peavy, 1996). In the words of the informants, "I learned a lot in all areas of the curriculum," and "I felt challenged in my courses." The faculty's confidence in the informant, which was felt as having "a voice," "being heard" and "taken seriously" was influential in the informants' development of competence. As one informant stated, "the collegial speech faculty give was as powerful as anything else."

The feedback received from peers and faculty members during their supervision-of-supervision meetings was particularly meaningful to the informants, who expressed having competence needs in that particular training area: "I really needed and desired some kind of professional development around supervision. My cohort members participated in that."

Overall, the findings suggest that the expression of self-determination can be supported by relating classroom activities to core professional values, or educational rationales, acknowledging students' feelings and perspectives, providing students with sufficient information, offering students choices when appropriate, and supporting a process of critical feedback among group members.

Lived Experiences and Bio-ecological Systems Theory

An examination of lived experiences from Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) perspective illuminated the complexity of the person-environment dialectic, and the influence of all levels of the ecological system on everyday lived experiences.

The interaction among systems. Bronfenbrenner's theory places the doctoral student at the center of the ecological model, where the innermost layer of context surrounding the student is the microsystem. The proximal processes that occur within the microsystem reflect the interaction between the developmentally instigative characteristics of the individual and the developmentally instigative characteristics of the environment. These processes invite, permit, or inhibit engagement and activity in the setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Perceptions of differences in the dynamics and "flavors" of cohort groups in the program illustrate differences in the proximal processes that occur in cohort groups. While students do not perceive the faculty as part of the cohort group, the faculty are part of the microsystem, and their influence is significant.

As microsystem-shapers, the faculty help to shape the microsystem through their accessibility and availability, power differential, boundaries, and a set of expectations based on their visions for the program. Faculty also influence the microsystem via the structure used for assignments, work process, and classroom activities. The faculty's

attention and inattention to particular phenomena in the groups also was influential in shaping the microsystem. The intensity of the learning relationship between students and the faculty, and faculty feedback, were regarded as highly influential, desirable, and valued aspects of their program experiences.

Mesosystemic influences were apparent in statements such as, “Work is work and home is home,” “I don’t have the time,” “Time management is tough,” “I wanted to be part of the group and I think I was an effective part of the group, but I have a life too and that was a big deal,” “It’s demanding for those of us with families,” “this is a running away place,” and a perception of school as “sanctuary.” Individuals with spouses and children were aware of needing to balance their time between home and school, and to manage their priorities carefully.

Exosystemic influences were evident in references to third parties such as other cohort groups, and individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program. Individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program were perceived as guides, informal mentors, and secondary support systems by some of the informants. Other examples of exosystemic influences included decisions regarding student selection, and the program’s admission model.

A broader culture, or macrosystem was evident, not only with respect to cultural influences related to race, ethnicity, and gender, but also in relation to the influence of the broader academic and counseling communities, or cultures. The clinical nature of the program influenced some students’ expectations regarding the attributes of their peers and the faculty, including personality characteristics and social behaviors.

As the component of time that addresses the dynamic, interdependent interaction among the ecosystems over time, the chronosystem provides the big picture of changes occurring within the individual, setting, or both. Arguably, some of the differences between the precandidates', candidates, and graduates' experiences are attributable to temporal influences, because the precandidates had not been in the program long enough to accumulate the range of experiences the other informants had.

Risks and self-protection. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) belief that people find ways to shield themselves from negative influences, the findings of the inquiry revealed that there are some risks involved in a group-learning experience. The informants identified social-emotional risks and academic risks, which are illustrated by the following examples. One informant felt "like a misfit" in her group, and did not feel "safe," which she attributed to not feeling backed-up by the faculty, and excluded by certain group members. Another informant felt the need to "self-protect" in a group she described as "divided," and also in relation to some group members perceived as judgemental. All of the informants perceived a power differential between themselves and the faculty. While some of the informants perceived risks in speaking up and challenging "injustices," others perceived a greater risk in *not* speaking up. One informant was concerned with boundary issues between the faculty and students, which she perceived as contaminating a healthy cohort, and potentially threatening fairness with respect to performance evaluations and grades.

The findings support that a variety of self-protective and group-protective factors and processes were used by the informants and groups to mitigate the impact of negative influences on development.

The findings further suggest that self-protective strategies do not necessarily enhance participation and learning. For example, while taking risks in the classroom can be perceived as a risk to some students, not taking risks to challenge certain behaviors, biases, and practices in a cohort group also had the potential to create a different type of risk for the individual.

Continual interaction with risk factors over time created a greater risk of negative outcomes. One informant stated that she would consider leaving the program if the polarity between sub-groups worsened, and “became incredibly vicious.”

Lived Experiences and Social Support

The relevance of social support as a theoretical construct for this inquiry was detailed in Chapter II. All of the informants perceived support as available within their groups, and also through faculty members and individuals affiliated with the other cohort groups.

The four types of support identified by House (1981) were evident in the informants’ lived experiences; that is, emotional support, appraisal support, informational support, and instrumental support. While some group members were perceived as more emotionally invested and supportive than others, all of the informants described a high degree of academic support within their groups. Academic support was described as “pulling together” to do the work, “personal issues melted away when someone needed help,” and “if you needed someone’s expertise, everybody was Johnny-on-the-spot.” Generally, academic support was perceived as more widely available, and exchanged more freely among group members than emotional support. Emotional support was perceived as more streamlined, provided through certain individuals, or smaller groups of individuals within a cohort, who had developed closer relationships. In some cases, sub-

grouping was a means of intentionally ensuring that one's needs for academic and emotional support were met.

As is characteristic of appraisal support, relationships with peers and the faculty included an "evaluative component," and the informants believed that they could receive meaningful feedback on individual work and performance. Informational support was available through group members, faculty members, and members affiliated with other cohort groups in the program. Informational sources of support took the form of "little bits of helpful information," guidance on tasks and assignments provided by group members with knowledge and expertise paralleling particular areas of the curriculum, and "drawing from experiences" of the others. Copying journal articles for one another was identified as an example of instrumental support.

The data suggest that group members are the primary sources of social support in the ExCES program, with the faculty serving as an auxiliary support system for cohort groups and individual students as needed. Faculty members were perceived as providing meaningful support through their accessibility and availability. A majority of the informants felt cared about, and believed that the faculty genuinely "wanted you to succeed." The faculty "did their best to support everyone being cohesive," rather than competitive, and encouraged group autonomy. The collegial relationship between the faculty and students also was viewed as supportive and motivating.

Members of other cohort groups were perceived as secondary sources of information, guidance, and emotional support. The informants identified supportive group relations as helping to "maintain my dedication," "helped me get through the dissertation," work through some personal issues, master the coursework, learn new skills or improve on

existing skills, such as writing, and pull individuals into alignment and not let someone “fall out” of the system.” One individual believed that while support “is nice,” it was not a necessity in terms of her ability to complete the doctoral program.

Overall, the findings of the inquiry suggest that cohort groups function as social support networks. The informants related positive social interactions within their cohort groups to positive perceptions of social support, and the cohort model, generally.

Implications for Practice

van Manen (1990) wrote, “Ask not what qualitative research can do for you, ask what qualitative research can do with you” (p. 45), and what can be done better with qualitative findings. The phenomena illuminated in this inquiry hold implications for educational practice and research.

From a phenomenological perspective, theories do not capture the detail of *everyday* life. Instead, the real value of phenomenological findings to educators lies in the relationship between real life experiences and the ideas that guide practice. Similarly, given that no experience has pre-ordained meaning or value (Dewey, 1934), there are practical implications in understanding the educational experience from the student’s perspective. This inquiry has provided descriptions of students’ everyday lived experiences in the corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational realms, which inform our understanding of how students perceive and experience their everyday worlds in the ExCES program. These descriptions can be used by the faculty to guide practices, and to intentionally contextualize aspects of the program which are under their control. The findings provide the faculty with insights, which they may have taken for granted, and also an opportunity to examine programmatic strengths and areas for growth. Until now,

there was no researched data to assist the faculty in making decisions that affect the everyday experiences of ExCES students. The descriptions also provide the faculty in other cohort-based programs with access to data which was heretofore unavailable. Overall, the findings empower the program faculty, because they offer “a window through which to view aspects that would have remained unknown” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1372).

This information is important because to function well, “cohorts need guidance from educators who understand the specific concerns of the students as individuals and as members of a group” (Maher, 2004, p. 23), including students’ perceptions of risks and safety, and the impact of group members’ roles, and faculty roles, on their academic lives. The descriptions of students’ corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences offer the program faculty an opportunity to examine program practices from the perspectives of students in these differentiated dimensions.

The findings also empower students, because they were generated by individuals like themselves, including those who have made it to *the other side*. When individuals are aware of shared meanings, it is easier for them to understand and make sense of new information, activities, and events that arise within a group (Vygotsky, 1987).

Implications for Corporeality

Students’ descriptions of corporeality suggest that the cohort experience is far more than an intellectual experience. It is textured with emotions, sensations, and thoughts. Being part of a cohort group can trigger and intensify emotional responses in ways which students may not have anticipated. The close proximity and interaction of diverse personalities, course content, and individual biographies, create an intense experience.

The findings suggest that emotional responses color students' perceptions, and influence proximity and distance among learners. Emotional distancing was a self-protective response. While there were differences in the intensity of emotion experienced by the informants, they were not likely to complete a cohort experience without feeling transformed in some ways. For some individuals, the transformations took the form of substantial shifts in their self-in-relation perspectives, and included new insights, or self-revelations. In some situations, students identified particular events in their groups "turning points," which they described as "life changing." For others, the transformations were less dramatic, and included coming to new understandings and increased self-awareness. A majority of the individuals believed that they had grown educationally, intellectually, and emotionally as a result of their cohort experiences.

The findings highlight that a cohort experience can be an intense experience, which students often underestimate (Maher, 2005). The findings also point to the importance of processing incidents and emotional experiences when they occur, which can prevent them from becoming risks.

Implications for Temporality

The findings revealed four themes that characterize the temporal experience in the program. Three of those themes characterize students' temporal experiences over a three-year period. The first semester is a period of transition, or induction, into the doctoral program and cohort group. This period is characterized by expectations, new "pressures," finding one's place in the group, and figuring out "how the game works." This is a particularly stressful time for students as they are acclimating to their groups, *learning the ropes*, figuring out how to relate to one another, and establishing strategies

to effectively manage the workload in the program. Beginning doctoral study in a cohort-based program was a new experience for nearly all of the informants. Many doctoral students had been away from school for a while, and were not be familiar with concepts such as constructivism and collaborative pedagogy. Most of the informants entered the program with a very limited understanding of the cohort model, a collaborative work process, and what they were supposed to be doing together. Greater information in terms of the faculty's expectations, faculty and student roles, and the work process in the program can demystify some of the anxieties related to the *unknown*.

Students' experiences during the first year of the program are consistent with previous findings of cohorts, which identified the importance of early experiences (Lawrence, 1996). The first year felt like a cohort model, which was important to the development of supportive relationships, and a network of peers to turn to as needed as the work process became increasingly more individualized as they moved through the program. The support network developed early in the program also was beneficial later when group members were working on their dissertations. Several factors were instrumental in facilitating a sense of group unity, which included faith in peers' academic abilities, participation in the personal growth group experience, group mottos, the energy and *aliveness* of place (i.e., on Saturday mornings), talking about their anxieties, shared visions, group motto, doing social things together "even if only on campus," and opportunities to work with different group members. Sub-grouping that began early in the program hampered group members' sense of unity. While participation in the personal growth group helped acquaint members, The group motto was a good starting point for a group, because it establishes a unique identity, serves as

an informal pact among group members about how they are going to related to each other and go *about business*, which is important to bringing individuals *on board*, and also to develop shared visions. Without shared visions, it is easier to complete assignments individually than to negotiate for an uncertain outcome that is likely to take more time. A strong group identity also contributes to competence (Dorn et al., 1995).

Over time, Saturdays took on new meanings, and supportive relationships became a choices, rather than “pressures.”

The temporal experience in the program suggests that doctoral candidacy is a major milestone in students’ progress, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and motivation, because it suggests that students have successfully navigated through a series of experiences (Bandura, 1977b), and have achieved new understandings. An interesting finding is that achieving doctoral candidacy was related to the resolution of insecurities and doubts about one’s competence, because it signified “I proved myself.” This contrasts with Hughes and Kleist’s (2005) finding that doctoral students frequently resolve doubts within several months of beginning a doctoral program. This suggests that doubts can persist for as long as two years, or prior to reaching candidacy status in a doctoral program. Doctoral candidacy was characterized as a time of looking back at how far one has come, and simultaneously, how far one has yet to go before graduation. The findings suggest that doctoral candidacy was a time of *taking stock* of program experiences, and preparing for the final leg of the journey. Doctoral candidacy not only changed one’s outward social status from student to doctoral candidate, but also one’s self-perception. At this time, the informants felt more as colleagues with the faculty.

The work on rites of passage may offer insights that can provide a fuller understanding of doctoral candidacy as a symbolic time structure. van Gennep (1960) coined the term *rite of passage* to describe the complex social structures involved in the successful transition by which one ascends to a social status, and the understanding that accompanies the new status. Rites are often associated with these passages to mark the transitions. Individuals going through a rite of passage together often develop strong personal bonds, which signify a community of equals.

van Gennep argued that rites of passage are likely to involve three stages: separation from one's known state, a state of liminality, or in-between-ness, and ultimately, rejoining society with a new identity and status. The process of rites of passage has been studied from the perspective of the idea of thresholds (Land, 2008). Threshold concepts involve a shift in subjectivity and identity; that is, the *cross-over* nature of understanding, signifying an opening up of a new way of thinking and being (Land, 2008). The findings suggest that doctoral candidacy bears some resemblance to the notion of crossing-over, because it is an event that is full of meaning to the doctoral candidate.

Implications for Spatiality

As sites of context and meanings, the themes describing lived space identified by the inquiry hold several implications for practice, particularly with regard to the collaborative work process and the faculty's role in group management.

Students learned about the academic and professional cultures primarily through participation and collaboration with doctoral peers and the faculty, rather than through didactic forms of learning. As the primary pedagogy, the strength of the collaborative work process was the group's diversity, which provided group members ongoing access

to *expert others* (Vygotsky's, 1978), who could provide guidance and feedback as learners moved through the curriculum. While individual *learning curves* are perhaps best addressed through collaboration between individuals with different approaches and knowledges, work partners often were selected based on other factors, including similar personalities or work styles. The work process in some groups suggests a veneer of collaboration, rather than *real* collaboration, where there is a sense of “*really* working together and “feeding off of each other’s ideas.”

Overall, the findings support that being in a cohort is being in a position of strength with respect to leaning on each other academically, receiving peer feedback, and learning about leadership. Students learned about leadership by leading themselves through the curriculum, taking responsibility for addressing their issues, and using the collaborative process to approach the faculty to advocate for themselves. The informants believed that they had a voice, and felt heard by the faculty. Cohorts became spaces for expanding abilities and identities as leaders, advocates, and collaborators. The informants identified the program’s emphasis on professionalism as one of its strengths, and perceived the faculty as encouraging leadership development by seeking licensure, joining professional organizations, and taking an active role in attending or presenting at professional conferences.

The informants perceived the faculty as encouraging group autonomy. While the informants enjoyed being able to direct their own learning processes, they also believed that greater feedback from the faculty on group process issues would be helpful. The findings suggest that the faculty can address some of the risks identified by the inquiry by taking a more active role in promoting a process of group reflexivity. Sharing

observations of group processes with cohort groups provides feedback, which groups can use to regulate their group processes. While this can be most useful early in the program, individuals further along in the program also believed that ongoing feedback from the faculty would be beneficial.

Faculty feedback was also desired, because the processes and behaviors that occurred in some groups was not always “in keeping with the spirit of a cohort model.” The findings revealed that multicultural issues, including a perception that diversity was “politically-motivated,” had the potential to lead to misunderstandings, and divisions among the members of some groups. Multicultural competence is an ongoing area for development. Several of the informants commented, “there needs to be more work on what is, and is not, a multicultural issue,” and “what is offensive.”

Implications for Relationships With Peers

Being accompanied through the program by fellow learners meant that there was always a shoulder to cry on, someone to lean onto, and others to remind one another of the reasons they are *doing this* when they are tired, or their commitments begin to waver.

Being accompanied through the doctoral program by supportive, knowledgeable peers meant that academic and emotional support was always available. The quality, rather than the quantity, of relationships developed within a cohort group was significant, and “it’s amazing what just one person can do for another person.”

The findings also support that individuals affiliated with other cohort groups in the program also have roles in group members’ socialization and enculturation, and are *the other More Knowledgeable Others*.

An interesting finding is that students' relatedness needs influenced their expectations of peers, which also revealed the potential for conflict in cohort groups.

The individuals who described the most positive group experiences and gratifying peer relationships were not members of groups without conflict. Quite the contrary; conflicts and support were part of all of the informants' lived experiences. However, the findings illuminated the importance of openly dealing with conflict, and having strategies to handle group tensions and conflict. In other words, successful cohort experiences relied on group members' attitudes toward conflict, and a *game plan* to address and manage conflict. At times, the most challenging relationships had the potential to lead to the greatest personal growth. Individuals who believed that conflicts were a sign of a *bad* cohort, or of "deficiencies" in their interpersonal or clinical skills, were more concerned about how group conflicts might reflect poorly on them. In this inquiry, conflict management was the single most important factor between positive and less-than-positive cohort experiences.

Palmer (87) argued that we need to think about conflict in educational settings differently than we do in other settings. In education:

community allows us to confront one another critically over alleged facts, imputed meanings, or personal biases or prejudices. . . .conflict is open, public and often very noisy. . . a public encounter in which the whole group can win by growing. What prevents conflict in our classrooms is. . . a fear of exposure, of appearing ignorant, or being ridiculed. (p. 25)

What can be learned from individuals who expressed the most positive, growthful experiences is the importance of group members taking their time to get to know one

another, respect, including a respect for some distance, tolerance, and an “allowance” for everybody to be wherever they are at any given time.

In the words of an informant:

We look at counseling and we say thirty-percent, at least, of the success of counseling is based on the therapeutic alliance. I think the success of a cohort is based on the alliance of the cohort. . .that requires certain factors, inherent factors, that you don't learn in textbooks, like the capacity for empathy, desire to understand people who are different from you like curiosity about different cultural backgrounds, mutual respect. These are factors that are extremely important, and extremely important in the selection process too.

Implications for Relationships With Faculty

An effective faculty responds to students' concerns in meaningful ways (Maher, 2005). The findings of the inquiry suggest that one of the ways the faculty can address this is by moving in and out of different roles based on the needs of each cohort group. The faculty can assist students' adjustment to the program and group context by making expectations explicit, and ensuring students' understanding of the cohort model in the program. The faculty can support group unity and the development of the cohort alliance by maintaining healthy boundaries, which are necessary for groups to function effectively, and accomplish their work. The faculty can support effective group processes by providing feedback to groups to stimulate meaningful dialogue among members, and healthy group processes. The faculty's expectations should reflect those appropriate for the doctoral level and culture, and how members will be held accountable.

As gatekeepers to the wider academic and professional communities, students perceived the faculty as doing a good job in the area of leadership development, and students felt prepared to step into leadership positions upon graduating from the program. Students did not feel as well-prepared to interview for faculty positions, and believed that this aspect of the program could be strengthened.

The findings suggest that the faculty in cohort-based *doctoral* programs face some unique issues, including those related to the collegial nature of the relationships between the faculty and group members, and a power differential, which can feel like incongruent concepts to students.

Students hold high expectations of the faculty. In addition to their roles as content experts, the faculty are expected to be group experts, gatekeepers, models of healthy group processes, and risk managers. Students felt strongly that it is the faculty's responsibility to ensure the protection of each group member, and the integrity of the learning space and cohort model. Faculty can provide protection by sharing their observations of group processes with the group to promote a process of group reflexivity, which can be used by the group for self-regulation.

The faculty in doctoral programs will always be needed to model skills (Saxe, 1986), such critical feedback, and how to handle inappropriate behaviors. In much the same way that boundaries protect the client, healthy boundaries are needed between students and the faculty for optimal development. Admittedly, this can be challenging in a cohort-based doctoral program, where students and faculty members tend to develop closer relationships, and the relationships are collegial. However, while socializing between individual group members and the faculty may appear harmless to the faculty, from the

perspectives of group members who do not have these types of relationships with the faculty, the findings suggest otherwise. Some students felt isolated, and perceived the potential for “favoritism” to compromise fairness and impartiality in the classroom with respect to evaluation and grades. Similarly, these relationships also were seen as contaminating a healthy cohort, because peers “then have conversations with the rest of us.” The findings suggest that it behooves the faculty to consider the impact of their behaviors from a perspective beyond their own skin, and that cohort groups are empowered when the primary emphasis is on supporting the relatedness among group members.

Recommendations Based on the Findings

Sandelowski (2004) stated that “qualitative findings do not exist as objects independent of users, but rather become what they are in use; they become meaningful in a unique user context” (p. 1380). The findings of this inquiry become the text for our understanding as educators. This understanding can be transformed into thoughtful action to build the capacity of the program as a place where students can achieve their best work and goals. Several program-based recommendations can be made regarding the implementation of the findings.

Ensure Students’ Understanding of Cohort Model

The faculty are in a position to ensure that prospective students give serious consideration to the structure of the program as a cohort model prior to entering the program. While the cohort group is the hub of students’ classroom experiences in the ExCES program, the structure of the program as a cohort model had no bearing on the informants’ decisions to pursue doctoral study in the program. The informants

anticipated the intellectual and academic rigors of doctoral study, but often were surprised by the emphasis on group work during the first year of the program. It is clear from evidence that supporting collaborative instructional strategies with research findings and an educational, or professional, rationale would be meaningful to prospective students.

The findings support that students will benefit from having concrete information about faculty and student roles, and a description of the cohort model before committing to the program. Similarly, ensuring inasmuch as possible that the students selected for the program are *on board* in terms of a general understanding of the program's philosophical and pedagogical values can help pave the way for a positive group experience. Previous research supports that individuals are more likely to work together as a group to support the goals of the program, and to be successful in their efforts, when they understand the cohort philosophy and the expectations that accompany participation in a cohort program (Clifton, 1999; Maher, 2004). The description provided by this inquiry can be used for this purpose.

Regarding the collaborative model, Bruffee (1995) stated, "The university instructor should help students cope interdependently with the challenges generated by and within this encompassing community of uncertainty, ambiguity, doubt" (p. 16). Students will benefit from understanding where *the line in the sand* is with regard to student and faculty roles, and how conflict and group issues are expected to be handled.

Collegiality as Relevant Goal for Peer Relationships

While cohesiveness is a group attribute, and a term the informants frequently encountered in the program, the findings suggest that collegiality may be a more relevant

goal and guiding concept for the development of peer relationships among doctoral students, because collegiality reflects the norms and style of living among members of an academic community. Many ExCES students aspire to join these discourse communities upon graduation from the program. Within an academic community, interactions are reciprocal, and support is both social and intellectual, with a high degree of sharing information and ideas, and critique of work and ideas (Bode, 1999) “without getting personal, or taking criticism personally” (Rosser, 2004, p. 32).

Collegiality is not a matter of liking one another personally, or having similar perspectives, or personalities. Instead, respect is the glue that holds collegial relationships together (Rosser, 2004). In this inquiry, the concept of cohesiveness had the potential to be interpreted as emotional intimacy by some of the informants, which led to resistance and misunderstandings among peers at times.

The concept of collegiality, rather than cohesiveness, illuminates the professional relevance within the collaborative cohort model, and legitimizes the roles of disagreement, healthy conflict, and critical discourse among group members. Clearly, an emphasis on collegial relationships between students will not eliminate tensions, and personality and work style differences, but it *does* provide a guide for interpersonal behaviors based on the responsibility of the relationship, and offers a rationale that is likely to make sense to ExCES students.

Space for Personal Growth

Personal growth was identified as a significant aspect of the cohort experience, and the personal growth group was identified as a significant lived space in the ExCES program. A personal growth group experience in the program was beneficial for a

variety of reasons. In addition to acquainting students with one another, students learned about “the actual relational dynamics” within their cohort groups. This information was potentially valuable for students’ regulation of the learning and group processes within their groups. The personal growth group also provided a space for students to dialogue about their relationships and processes, including how they make decisions as a group. Several of the informants indicated that the personal growth group experience was instrumental in facilitating the formation of bonds and support among group members early in the program, and also to increase self-awareness.

Time to Manage the Cohort Experience

Arguably, time management is a challenge for both students and the faculty. However, the single most contextually meaningful recommendation emerging from this research is to build time and space into the program for students to engage in a freer dialogical process about their cohort experiences outside of a regular course and classroom. Teitel (1997) suggested the use of integration seminars to assist students’ integration of learning experiences into a *bigger picture* as it comes together over a program. This also seems relevant to ExCES students. As Paisley and Hayes (1998) noted, an experience itself is not sufficient for growth; there must also be opportunities to reflect and process the experience. To the students involved in the ExCES program, the cohort model *itself* is an experience, not just a vehicle for having experiences.

Implications for Research: Suggested Directions for Future Research

The descriptions of the *everyday* lived experiences provided by this inquiry have prompted more curiosities than closure. The findings provide descriptive data that can be utilized to guide future research, formulate new hypotheses, and construct new theories.

Coupled with the insights presented by the inquiry, and the limitations of the inquiry's scope and depth, there are opportunities for a wider exploration of this research topic, and related topics. Several directions for future research seem particularly promising.

While the findings of this inquiry reflect the perspectives of first, second, and third year doctoral students, and program alumni, the inquiry did not specifically address how the phenomenological experience in the ExCES program may evolve and change over time. Future investigations of students' lived experiences using a longitudinal or cross-sectional research design with multiple informants and multiple interviews would provide a more robust picture of students' lived experiences across the entire lifecycle of a cohort, and a fuller understanding of everyday phenomena from a developmental perspective.

The themes identified by the inquiry offer a focus for further study, and are potentially quite valuable in the process of building theory. A second study can be conducted which reflects on the themes from this inquiry with either a sample of current students in the ExCES program, or with a more diverse sample of participants in other doctoral programs. Similarly, a quantitative study developed from the themes identified by this inquiry can be used to survey a larger sample of doctoral students in cohort-based programs.

Another rich line of inquiry for future research is the lived experiences of ExCES students from a multicultural perspective. What are the similarities and differences in the lived experiences of ExCES students based on gender, ethnicity, and race? In what ways does culture influence the experience and meaning of corporeality, temporality, spatiality, and relationality to counselor education doctoral students in the ExCES program?

This research focused only on students' lived experiences in the ExCES program. An interesting direction for future research is an inquiry of the everyday lived experiences of the faculty in the ExCES program, particularly with regard to the faculty's perceptions of the themes identified in this inquiry, including the risks that accompany participation in a cohort model identified by students. In what ways are faculty members' perceptions of their roles and students' roles similar and different than students' perceptions of roles? What does collegiality mean to the faculty with respect to relationships with doctoral students? What types of challenges are involved in teaching doctoral students in a cohort model?

Future investigations of students' experiences in cohort-based programs from the theoretical perspectives of *third space theory* and *concerns theory* (Hall & Hord, 1987) may be worthwhile. According to Bhaba (1990), a third space is collectively enacted into existence when people are brought together into new spaces and relationships, giving "rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation, meaning, and representation" (p. 211). Third spaces are sometimes called hybrid spaces, because they are characterized by the blending of individual knowledges, discourses, and voices into a space of collective knowledge (Bhaba, 1994).

According to *concerns theory*, there are qualitatively different types of concerns among individuals at different stages in their professional growth and development, and these concerns follow a discernible pattern of self-concerns, task-concerns, and impact-concerns (Hall & Hord, 1987). What are the concerns of counselor education students as they move through a doctoral program? Do they follow a pattern of self, task, and impact concerns? What factors are important in the resolution of concerns?

This research has generated hypotheses, which can be used to formulate questions for future research of the cohort model.

Hypotheses Generated by the Inquiry

1. Cohorts are hybrid spaces, which reflect the individual and collective attributes of the membership, and directly bear on the *cohort alliance*.
2. The ExCES program meets students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and supports the development of self-determination.
3. Participation in a cohort model involves a degree of risk for students.
4. The first year of the ExCES program follows a cohort model.
5. Subjective meaning-making in a group context reflects the social processes within a group.
6. Negative emotions and phenomena in cohort groups motivate a decrease in affiliation and identification with a cohort group, and an increase in emotional distancing.
7. Students involved in cohort programs hold the faculty to a higher standard with regard to ensuring protection from risks. One of the roles of the faculty in cohort-based programs is *risk manager*.
8. The cohort model in the ExCES program is a dynamic, evolving model, which reflects the faculty's experience working with doctoral students in a cohort program.
9. The supportive relationships established within cohort groups continue beyond the completion of the cohort experience.
10. Achieving doctoral candidacy via the successful completion of comprehensive examinations at the end of the second year of the program is a rite of passage.

11. The faculty are instrumental in promoting a process of individual and group reflexivity and self-regulation through the regular use of group feedback, and the sharing of their *participant observations*.
12. Doctoral candidacy is a rite of passage.

Quality Enhancement Strategies

In qualitative inquiries, there are no benchmarks to establish reliability in the traditional sense (Merriam, 1988); that is, qualitative findings would be expected to be different if the same research process was used with different participants (Robson, 2002). It also is possible that phenomenological findings could be different if the same inquiry process was repeated with the same informants at a later time, because subjectivity is always in a state of flux, and experience is always open to reassessment and reformulation over time and through conversation (Usher, 1993).

The traditional notions of reliability as the constancy of phenomena, internal validity as the accuracy of the findings, and external validity as the generalization of the findings to other populations and settings are inappropriate goals for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In their place, I relied on the concepts of quality provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985); that is, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In qualitative research, the term *credibility*, or trustworthiness, replaces the traditional notion of internal validity when dealing with the question of how accurately the findings reflect participants' reality, and capture what is *really there* (Merriam, 1988). The credibility of the findings relies on procedures that make sense (Merriam, 1988) and produce evidence that demonstrates links between the research questions, data collected,

and conclusions drawn (Yin, 1989). Above all, the findings must be “credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 (p. 296).

The credibility of this inquiry was established using words rather than statistics. Therefore, it was imperative that my findings were well-grounded and supported. Care was taken to ensure that the analysis was not compromised by personal biases. I articulated my epistemological stance and personal connection to the research context, and made my presuppositions transparent to readers in Chapter III. I used a journal to document and monitor my biases and reactions throughout the research process. At each step of the analysis, I validated my understanding against the responses to open-ended questions given by informants in their original descriptions. I stayed as close as possible to participants’ original words when formulating meanings, and used multiple, verbatim quotes to support my interpretations of the data. Overall, my interpretations were based on trustworthy evidence, because they were derived directly from narratives provided by a purposefully-selected sample of individuals, who are experts of their own experiences.

Transferability

The term *transferability* replaces the traditional notion of external validity as the generalization of findings to other populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The subjective nature of the experiences explored in phenomenological inquiries are not intended to generalize to other populations, including a wider population of counselor education doctoral students in cohort-based programs. Instead, the type of generalization of the findings that occurred was from the subjective to the intersubjective experiences and meanings of the participants within a single program, which were examined in relation to theoretical concepts, contextual influences, and the research questions. However,

because all phenomena is a *possible* human experience, the findings do allow for validation of the phenomena in the lifeworld, and the understanding that emanates from this exploration (van Manen, 1990). Insofar that individuals in similar situations may resonate with the findings the same way individuals can empathize with the experiences of fellow humans, the validation of the findings may lie in their “reliability” (Bassey, 1981, p. 85).

Transferability was enhanced by purposive sampling, the use of multiple informants and data sources, description of the research setting, and as much description of subjective experiences as possible without jeopardizing the identities of the informants.

Dependability

The notion of dependability is applied to qualitative findings to determine if the process or decision trail of an inquiry is acceptable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I documented my methodological decisions, and vigilantly followed the systematic procedures proposed by van Manen (1990) and Colaizzi (1978) to gather and analyze data, and to validate my interpretations against the informants’ descriptions. The dependability of the findings was strengthened by attempting methodological, analytical, and theoretical triangulation, and through a coherent of presentation of the findings.

I attempted methodological triangulation by using multiple informants and data sources. Data obtained through individual interviews, dyad interviews, and focus group discussions were triangulated with secondary data sources, which included participant observations and entries made in my journal regarding my emerging insights and impressions as I worked closely with the data.

Analytical triangulation was enhanced through the use of multiple philosophical and theoretical concepts. I described the phenomenological philosophies that underlie the inquiry, and stated the theoretical parameters of the research in Chapter II. Analytical triangulation was enhanced by my direct knowledge of the research context. I attempted theoretical triangulation by bringing multiple theories to bear on my interpretive insights, and discussed the connections between the findings and the theoretical concepts examined by the inquiry in Chapter V. Given that the important criterion when making analytical interpretations is that they are “defensible, systematic, and verifiable” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 161), I used portions of the transcripts and interview logs, including verbatim quotes made by the informants, to substantiate what I saw in the data. I continuously moved back and forth between the parts and the whole of the data during data analyses, and then again at the completion of each procedural step of the analyses to validate the accuracy of my interpretations.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the quality and acceptability of the findings, or interpretations, of a study. The confirmability of the findings was strengthened by *referential adequacy*; that is, the use of material to document findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was protected by audiotape and videotape recordings of my encounters with the informants. Following the transcription process, I verified the accuracy of the protocols used for the analysis against the recorded data. I have retained the videotapes, original transcripts, and interview logs, including the copies used to extract significant statements. I also have retained copies of email correspondence between myself and the members of my dissertation committee regarding my methodological decisions.

Confirmability of the findings was enhanced by presenting the findings for each of the eight protocols used for the analysis in a separate narrative and table, which was constructed for each protocol. I provided a full, final list of the significant statements and formulated meanings distilled from the protocols, which served as a basis for the development of theme clusters and the emergent themes. I also provided tables which illustrated the interpretive, inductive process used to derive the themes from the data.

Despite attention to these concepts of quality to ensure the rigor of this research endeavor, several limitations exist which must be acknowledged.

Limitations

This research was exploratory, providing the first description of students' lived experiences in the ExCES program. When considering the findings of the inquiry, the limitations of purposive sampling should be kept in mind. The data reflect the perspectives of a purposive sample of individuals, who volunteered to share their experiences with me. It cannot be assumed that their perspectives and experiences are representative of all students in the ExCES program, nor of the individuals who chose not to participate in this inquiry.

Purposive sampling is not intended to make broad, sweeping generalizations, nor to have global implications; it is intended to provide a deeper understanding of fewer, purposefully-selected individuals, who have had a specific experience. Readers will need to judge for themselves the appropriateness of applying the findings to another sample profile or setting. However, if a reader can relate to the findings existentially, spiritually, or materially, it is possible that this research has “a *naturalistic generalization*, meaning that it brings *felt* news from one world to another and provides opportunities for the

reader to have a vicarious experience of the things told” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For individuals who have had a similar experience, the findings of this inquiry may “serve as a mirror that allows them to reflect back on and reframe the experience” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1372).

It is possible that individual responses in the dyad interviews and focus group discussions could have been influenced by the other participants. The informants’ sense of freedom and safety to share particular information may have been inhibited by the presence of others with whom they shared a cohort group, especially for individuals who were engaged in an operational cohort at the time of data collection. The risks involved in disclosure may have been perceived differently by these individuals than by the individuals who had already completed the cohort component of the program.

This inquiry was dependent on the interpretive and constructivist processes typical of qualitative research. While this may be viewed as a limitation, it also is an unavoidable and basic condition for understanding meaningful experiences (Barritt et al., 1985). The interpretation involved in the analyses was inevitably double as I independently extracted significant statements from the protocols, and then ascribed meanings to them. The findings reflect my understanding and reconstruction of informants’ understandings of their lived experiences. Other researchers may have interpreted the data differently.

While multiple informants and data sources were used, the informants were interviewed or participated in a focus group once, which captured their understandings at that time only. The findings do not purport to represent the totality of the informants’ lived experiences in the program, and the meanings of those experiences. As van Manen (1990) wrote:

A rigorous human science is prepared to be soft, soulful, subtle, and sensitive in its effort to bring the range of meanings of life's phenomena to our reflective awareness . . . [but it] is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal . . . full or final descriptions are unattainable. (p. 18)

If one conceives of doctoral study as a journey as many of the informants did, the lived experiences described in this inquiry may be most usefully viewed as a snapshot of the journey taken along one stretch of the road. While the picture captured the essence of the informants' *everyday* lived experiences at a single point in time, it cannot be ignored that the scope and focus of the inquiry may have omitted other meaningful parts of the trip.

The phenomenological researcher is not altogether separate from the phenomenon under investigation, and personal beliefs and biases have influence. While I constructed a bias statement, and monitored my presuppositions closely, to some extent phenomenological descriptions are always limited by the researcher's orientation, interest, questions, and circumstances. Merleau Ponty used the term *finitude* in reference to the limits of understanding placed on us by circumstances. Like the informants in this inquiry, I also am bound temporally, bodily, and socially to a present time. Finitude is an inherent limitation, because understanding is constrained by these inescapable circumstances (Barritt et al., 1985).

Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenologically-oriented inquiry was to explore, describe, and understand the lived experiences of Counselor Education doctoral students in the cohort model at Duquesne University. The findings add to a growing body of research on the cohort model, and the counselor education doctoral student.

Lived experiences may lack sharpness while one is standing in the world, and it is often in the reflective pause and backward glance that experiences, places, and relationships seem saturated with significance (Tuan, 1977). Lived experiences illuminate the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. From van Manen's (1990) perspective, the lifeworld itself is an intrinsically corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational world. In this inquiry, the informants were the illuminating *presence* to the world I sought to describe and understand. The findings have revealed that the phenomenological experience in a cohort model in the ExCES program is a corporeal, temporal, spatial, and relational experience, which can be described and understood by themes. The lived existentials, and the themes that characterize them, are bounded, meaning that each one does not explain the whole experience, but only a specific, related aspect of the whole. However, together, the phenomenological themes provide a picture of the structure of the cohort experience. This inquiry also has provided insights into the contextual influences which bear on students' *everyday* lived experiences.

Dewey (1934) stated that all direct experience is qualitative, and qualities are what make life experience itself precious. At the conclusion of this research, the goal is the same as it was when gathering phenomenological data. My aim is not to offer explanations, but to explicate the multi-faceted wholeness of students' lived experiences.

The findings themselves, rather than the conclusions, can have transformative influence on students' everyday lives, because they reveal aspects of experiences which may have been overlooked.

The cohort model challenges the familiar folkways of education, including the *undoing* of reliance on the faculty. The cohort experience in the ExCES program was unlike any of the informants' previous educational experiences, including those of individuals who had completed their master's degrees in cohort-based programs. The findings support that there are many ways to be a student and a group in the ExCES program. This is not surprising in a constructivist-based counselor education program, where students are viewed as meaning-makers, and producers of their own development. The informants felt encouraged by the faculty to take on the responsibility for directing their own learning and group processes. Life in a cohort group is not without its challenges, but students indicated that the benefits of participation in a cohort model outweighed the challenges.

The cohort experience is much more than an intellectual experience. Being part of a cohort group is a full-body experience, which can lead to personal growth and transformation in ways students had not anticipated at the beginning of doctoral study. The individuals who shared the most positive cohort experiences were willing to stretch outside of their comfort zones and into the dynamics of a shared experience, where new learning occurred. What began as a personal journey to obtain a doctoral degree was transformed into a shared emotional journey through the program. Being accompanied by knowledgeable, empathic, and like-minded peers enriched the learning experience, as well as opportunities for personal growth. While rigorous, a majority of the individuals

believed that hard work, motivation, and persistence were more important than being “smart.” They appreciated being accompanied by others from whom they could learn. Many were grateful for what the others offered, which they did not know they needed at the beginning of the program.

Peer relationships were important sources of motivation and support. Relationships lie at the core of the work counseling professionals do, and counseling professionals can underestimate the personal impact of support provided through a group like-minded peers “even with all my counseling and group background.” While students accomplished the work and moved through the program by drawing upon group members’ diverse experiences and knowledges, they also drew strength and confidence from their peers, including “a belief that this can be done.” Successful cohort experiences rest on shared visions, which support the development of the cohort alliance, and the spirit inducted in cohorts.

In this inquiry, cohorts were spaces for meeting students’ needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence over the program’s time frame. Within the program, students had opportunities to develop both professionally and personally, and they believed that both aspects of development were important aspects of counselor education. Students identified the program’s emphasis on professionalism as one its strengths, and believed that they were prepared to answer the profession’s call for leadership.

While the work process initially emphasized collaborative pedagogy, the work process became increasingly individualized as students moved through the program. The first year felt like a cohort model. However, the peer support developed early in the program continued throughout the remainder of the program, and following the cohort

experience. Many students developed relationships with group members and faculty members, which they valued, and believed would last for many years. Peer support helped get individuals through the dissertation writing process. Regardless of the length of time since the end of the cohort experience, a majority of the individuals believed support was only a phonecall, or an email, away.

Overall, the findings support that the cohort model is a holistic approach to learning. The diversity within a cohort group provides a whole-systems perspective, which enriches the learning process. Students believed that the cohort model is cultivating and empowering competent counseling professionals, who can work together collaboratively.

The findings of this inquiry support that a majority of students believe that a cohort-based learning experience is “important,” and “worthwhile” in a counselor education doctoral program. A cohort experience offers students an opportunity to be with others like themselves, and is consistent with the profession’s position that counselors are not solitary beings.

While some individuals believed that they would have completed a doctoral program without a cohort, others could not imagine being a doctoral student any other way. One individual would not choose to do a cohort program again.

During an interview, one informant asked, “What is the heart of a cohort? I’m not really sure. Is it the way that the faculty progresses this group of people along in the program? I don’t know.” Perhaps the answer lies in the conclusions drawn by the informants themselves. It is fitting that they have the final words in this research, which *speak for themselves*:

“I felt enriched, with some surprise about what I got without really expecting or knowing what the experience would bring” (G1).

Intellectual development will happen in any program. That’s not necessarily specific to a cohort program. I’ve grown and developed professionally, and I’m sure some of that can be considered cohort experiences, but things such as writing and what it means to be a counselor educator are not necessarily confined to a cohort program. (C1)

“I cannot put a price tag on the experiences, friendships, and my own personal growth” (G5)

“I was having a serious conversation with one professor once who said he saw in our group a profound ability to use humor to diffuse that which would have been able to grind us up. Humor kept us alive” (C4).

“The program provided the opportunity to come together with a diverse group of people and to grow educationally, emotionally, intellectually, and to *expand*, and recognize the goodness of people. That’s what we *do* [as counseling professionals]” (C7).

Closing Reflections

While this research began with a fragment from the horizon of my own cohort experiences, it has ended as the collaborative effort of twenty six voices. In undertaking this endeavor, I encountered individuals whose paths I may not otherwise have crossed. We had a doctoral program and profession in common, but we also shared curiosities about the cohort experience, and a desire to leave something of our experiences and learning behind for current and future students, and the faculty. The spirit of

collaboration which is fundamental to the cohort process also was fundamental to this research.

The process of completing this dissertation was more than an academic exercise and the fulfillment of a final requirement; it also was a reflexive journey. van Manen recognized the transformative effect that phenomenological research can have on the researcher. The process that brings the researcher closer to the lived experiences of others also moves the researcher closer to one's own experiences, making him or her more critically self aware (van Manen, 1990). The transformative dynamic for me is layered with professional and personal meaning. Bits and pieces of the informants' experiences also had been a part of mine. I have a renewed appreciation for my cohort experience and the faculty, and a deepened respect for the nineteen members of my cohort group, who taught me the importance of "sharing our toys" (Bruffee, 1995, p. 14) and "learning to feed each other with long-handled spoons" (Yalom, 1995, p. 12). I will take the empowered understanding I have gained from all of my collaborators into my future teaching endeavors.

In a sense, this was living research, because I needed to create a space to explore lived space, provide sufficient time to explore lived time, and rely on a relationship with the informants to explore lived relationships. This research called for the attention of my entire being to explore what it was like for the informants to be themselves in the world. My experience as a researcher was similar to Schmidt's (2005) conceptualization of the research process, which he described as "spiraling through phases of enthusiastic engagement leading to confusion, intellectualism, letting go, contemplation, phases of

knowing, not knowing and occasional insight. . . . keeping him forever awake, alive and connected with what matters in life” (p. 131).

Kenyon and Randall (1997) wrote, “To be a person is to have a story. More than that, it is to be a story” (p. 1). How do I use language to make the richly textured, personal experiences entrusted to me understandable, when these are always more enigmatic and complex than any words can do justice? The responsibility felt overwhelming at times. While this research captures the informants’ lived experiences to the best of my ability, it is with the understanding that the complexity of experience itself invites further investigation, because “no story stands still” (Lather, 2001, p. 209); that is, understandings are never established in a finite sense. It is my hope that this glimpse into Counselor Education doctoral students’ lived experiences will stimulate greater research attention to the counselor education doctoral student.

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Appendix A: Guide Questions for Participant Reflection

Guide Questions for Reflection in the Interview and Focus Group Discussion

1. What has it been like to move through the doctoral program as a member of a cohort?
2. What types of experiences have you had in your cohort?
3. Describe an experience that stands out most vividly to you.
4. Which aspects of cohort membership have been particularly meaningful to you in your journey to obtain a doctoral degree in the program?

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in a Research Study

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: The Lived Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Students in the Cohort Model at Duquesne University

INVESTIGATOR: Shirley Devine, 3830 Hickory Hill Rd., Murrysville, PA 15668
Home: 724-733-7476 Cell: 724-516-4122
Email: devine 49@juno.com

ADVISOR: William J. Casile, Ph.D.
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education
School of Education, Duquesne University, 412-396-6112

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. Degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in this research project because You are a current or former doctoral student in the ExCES program at Duquesne University. This study seeks to explore, understand, and describe the lived experiences of doctoral students in cohorts and the meanings of those experiences to students in the ExCES program. You will be asked to provide minimal demographic data for descriptive purposes (see attached), and to share your perceptions and experiences as a cohort member in a focus group with other ExCES students. The length of the focus group is set at two hours and will be extended only with your permission. Focus group discussions will be video-taped and analyzed for content. I may ask you to allow me to interview you individually in a subsequent one-hour interview. Individual interviews will be audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed for content. I may ask to contact you to verify my analysis. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

**RISKS AND
BENEFITS:**

Your responses to focus group questions may be of a sensitive nature. You are free to withhold any information you prefer not to discuss and can choose the personal experiences you wish to share. You may request a personal interview with me. Possible benefits for you include the value of reflecting on your experiences. You will have the opportunity to discuss this topic with interested fellow students. You may experience some satisfaction in having a 'voice' in the first study of this nature undertaken in the ExCES program or any other Counselor Education doctoral program.

COMPENSATION: Participation in this research project will require no monetary cost to you, and there is no monetary compensation to participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY: No information that identifies you personally, or the identities of others you mention, will be included on interview transcripts, and no personal identities will be made in the data analysis or subsequent publication of this research. All identifiers will be removed during the transcription process; your name and responses will be replaced by a code that identifies you only as a member of a cohort at the early, middle, or late stages of program completion, or as a graduate of the program. At no time will your identity be discussed with program faculty. All video-tapes, audio-tapes, transcripts, demographic data, and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Audio-tapes will be transcribed and then destroyed. Video-tapes and transcripts will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. All other data will be destroyed immediately at the completion of the study.

**RIGHT TO
WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study and participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your grades or academic standing in the ExCES program, School of Education, or Duquesne University.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, my signature certifies that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Shirley Devine, Principal Investigator (724 516-4122 or devine49@juno.com); Dr. William Casile, Dissertation Advisor (412-396-6112); or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396 6326).

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C: Participation Request Letter

Dear Counselor Education Doctoral Student or Former Student:

Hello! I am a doctoral candidate at Duquesne University, and I am inviting your participation in a research study. For my dissertation, I am interested in learning about the lived experiences of students in the cohort model in the Executive Doctoral Program in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University. I am especially interested in the perspectives of former and current members of a cohort in the ExCES program since the doctoral program began in 1997. As a current or former student in the ExCES program, your experience is important to me, and I hope you will have time in your extremely busy schedule to share your perceptions and experience in a cohort with me.

Involvement in the study is completely voluntary and will require your participation in a video-taped focus group with other students in the ExCES program between the months of November 2006 and January 2007. You may also be asked to allow me to interview you individually. Length of time for the focus group will be set at two hours and will be extended only with your permission.

The purpose of this research is to understand and describe what it is like and what it means to students to be a member of a cohort in the ExCES program at Duquesne University. As the first study of this nature, the benefit of the research is that you will be helping to inform current and future doctoral students as well as faculty about the meaningful aspects of the cohort experience from the student perspective. Your identity will remain confidential, and will not be disclosed to anyone associated with the ExCES program at any time.

In recognition of the incredibly busy nature of the life of a doctoral student, I wish to extend my tremendous appreciation for your consideration. If you would like to participate in this study, please carefully read and sign the consent form and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by November 4, 2006. You may contact me by email: devine49@juno.com, or phone: 724-516-4122 if you have any concerns or questions about the study.

Appreciatively,

Shirley Devine, M.A., LPC, NCC, NCP
Ed.D. Candidate

William Casile, Ph.D.
Professor
Dissertation Advisor/Chairperson

Appendix D: Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT

As part of the participation in this study, I am asking that you provide me with minimal demographic data which will be used for descriptive purposes only and to assist me in understanding the issues important to doctoral students' lived experiences in the cohort model in the ExCES program.

I have been informed that participation in this study involves participation in a video-taped focus group and/or an audio-taped individual interview. I understand that responses from participants will be used in a doctoral dissertation and subsequent journal publications appropriate for this research topic. I understand that no information that identifies me personally, or the identities of others I mention, will be included on interview transcripts. Although direct quotations may be used, I understand that no personal identities will be made in the data analysis or subsequent publication of this research.

I have been informed that participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty.

My signature certifies that I understand what is being requested of me, and on these terms, I am willing to participate in this research project.

(Signature)

(Print Name)

(Date)

Shirley S. Devine, M.A., LPC, NCC, NCP
Principal Investigator
3830 Hickory Hill Road
Murrysville, PA 15668

Appendix E: Agreement of Confidentiality

Agreement of Confidentiality in the Focus Group and Dyad Interview

I have agreed to participate in a dyad interview or focus group discussion that is part of the following study: The Lived Experience of Counselor Education Doctoral Students in the Cohort Model at Duquesne University; the principal researcher is Shirley Devine.

I already have signed a *Consent to Participate in a Research Study* form. The purpose for now signing the Agreement of Confidentiality is to assert that I will not discuss information disclosed in the dyad interview or focus group with anyone outside the group. I understand that to do so would be to violate the confidentiality of other members of the group or dyad.

Participant's Name (Please print)

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Name (Please print)

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix F: Demographic Data

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Code Assigned: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Status (check one): Current student in ExCES program

Former student in ExCES program

Month/Year graduated: _____

Name of cohort in which you are/were a member: _____

Is this your first experience in a cohort? yes no

Age: _____

Sex: male female

Ethnicity: _____

Marital Status: single married Children: yes no

Current occupation: _____

Appendix G: The Semi-Structured Protocol

1. **Introductory Question:** What types of experiences have you had in your cohort? What is it like to move through the doctoral program as part of a cohort?
2. **Transition Statement:** As you reflect on the experiences you have had in your cohort, describe an experience that immediately comes to mind or that stands out most vividly to you.
3. **Meaning Question:** Considering the experiences you have shared, is there something that stands out as particularly meaningful to you?
4. **Closing Question:** Is there anything you came wanting to say but have not yet had the opportunity to discuss?

Appendix H: Final List of Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings for Lived Body

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
1	1. It's also been a painful experience (P1).	1. Some experiences have been painful.
	2. You are surrounded by intellectual energy. (P1).	2. Intellectual energy was stimulating.
	3. I'm very conflicted (P1).	3. Self-protection is creating a conflict.
	4. I don't understand why this is occurring (P1).	4. Feels confused.
	5. I feel myself becoming more assertive (P1).	5. Becoming more assertive.
	6. I understood that experience very well (P1).	6. Empathized with a group member.
	7. I just really felt, <i>Okay, self protect</i> (P1).	7. Feels vulnerable.
	8. I was completely at a loss for words (P1).	8. Shocked and speechless.
	9. I certainly didn't feel like I was alone, because for a while I did (P1).	9. No longer feels like she is alone.
2	10. They drain my energy (P2).	10. Feels emotionally-drained.
	11. this underlying guilt. . .I don't care (P2)	11. Feels guilty she does not care more.
	12. I <i>still</i> feel overwhelmed (P2).	12. The demands are overwhelming.
	13. They might keep me behind (P2).	13. Thinks others could hold her back.
	14. I feel like I'm going to be shamed (P3).	14. Thinks she may be shamed.
	15. I feel I can't say that except in my own smaller group where it's safe (P3).	15. A smaller sub-group feels safe.
	16. sneaking around. . .like cheating (P2)	16. Feels guilty she excluded others.
	17. having these juvenile thoughts (P3)	17. Her thoughts seemed juvenile to her.
3	18. I'm having these flashbacks (C1).	18. Old feelings and issues resurfaced.
	19. I didn't want to be an outsider (C1).	19. Wanted to fit in.
	20. Once I became aware of that, things changed for me (C1).	20. Self-awareness led to change.
	21. I need to voice my needs too (C1).	21. Used voice to get needs met.
	22. I wanted to come across as somebody who is easy to work with (C1).	22. Tried to project a positive image.
	23. You needed to look out for yourself (C1).	23. She needed to look out for herself.

	24. it's just this feeling of constraint (P4).	24. Feels constrained.
	25. Doing any kind of paper with this person was excruciating (P4).	25. Disliked working with some group members.
	26. I like to sink my teeth into what I'm doing. That's just how I'm gratified (P4).	26. Gratified by doing a good job.
	27. I don't like the stress of waiting (P4).	27. Prefers to work ahead to avoid stress.
	28. It's just really slowing me down (P4).	28. Works faster by herself.
4	29. I don't feel safe (C2).	29. Does not feel safe in the group.
	30. I feel very angry with the faculty (C2).	30. Angry with the faculty.
	31. I felt kind of isolated (C2).	31. Felt isolated from the group.
	32. It's exhausting (C2).	32. The program demands are exhausting.
	33. I felt like some kind of mis-fit (C2).	33. Felt out of place.
5	34. It was a full-body experience (G4).	34. It was a full-body experience.
	35. I see the table where we all would sit (G4).	35. Could visualize people in places.
	36. I butted heads with some faculty (G5).	36. Clashed with some faculty members.
	37. I could fall apart and it would be okay (G4).	37. Safe to have emotional experiences .
	38. I had to give myself permission that I didn't need to know everything (G5).	38. Realized didn't need to know everything.
	39. I didn't have to be the smartest (G3).	39. Success relied on more than being smart.
	40. hearing challenges spurred me on (G3).	40. The challenges were motivating.
	41. I felt threatened and vulnerable by a person I felt I had to prove myself to (C5).	41. Felt vulnerable.
	42. I came in with fears (C6).	42. Afraid cultural differences would be an issue.
	43. I experienced it as picking me up (C4).	43. Felt picked up.
	44. The anxiety was overwhelming (G3).	44. Overwhelmed with anxiety.
	45. We'd laugh and laugh, and we cried a lot of tears (G2).	45. The group experienced a range of emotions together.
	46. I felt enriched, with some surprise (G1).	46. Surprised it felt so enriching.
	47. That big entity pushes you on (G9).	47. The group's power was motivating.

	48. took ourselves too seriously (C5).	48. Took himself too seriously.
	49. Humor kept us alive (C9).	49. Humor was a protective factor.
	50. I felt embraced by the cohort (C6).	50. Felt accepted by group members.
	51. I thought they would be running all over me (C8).	51. Expected to feel intimidated due to age differences.
6	52. we're not getting the designation of <i>adjunct faculty</i> . . .that's a disappointment (P5).	52. There are some disappointments.
	53. The little frustrations I have are with some of the personalities (P5).	53. Some personalities are frustrating.
	54. the dependability surprised me (P5).	54. Surprised she could depend on others.
	55. There's never been anyone there to need anything from (P5).	55. Relying on others is a new experience.
7	56. I had barriers around me (G7).	56. He felt closed-off.
	57. It felt like a release. It felt safe and I didn't stop myself (G7).	57. Experienced an emotional release.
	58. The sense of relief was palatable (G6).	58. Felt very relieved
	59. I'm getting a little emotional now thinking about it (G6).	59. Thinking about it raised emotion.
8	60. I was tired and I was angry at times, and I was glad to do it (G9).	60. Felt tired and angry at times.
	61. Little snap-shots pop up (G9).	61. Re-living experiences as he talked.
	62. I was so offended (G8).	62. Some behaviors were offensive.
	63. I was embarrassed to be part of the cohort (G8).	63. Embarrassed to be affiliated with her group.
	64. That really pissed me off (G9).	64. Some group members angered him.
	65. I don't identify myself as strong scholastically (G9).	65. Does not perceive himself as strong scholastically.
	66. How long can I fake this one? (C11).	66. Lacks confidence in what she knows.
	67. I ended up crying like a baby (G8).	67. Cried in response to painful event.
	68. I have like a visceral response to it, like a funny feeling in my stomach (G8.)	68. Visceral response to emotional event.
	69. You just didn't want to hear some group members talk anymore (C11)	69. Grew tired of some group members.

Appendix I: Final List of Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings for Lived Time

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
1	1. There were a lot transitions with entering a doctoral program (P1).	1. Beginning doctoral study is a major transition.
	2. There's an appropriate way to storm (P1).	2. The first semester is an unsettling time.
	3. Hopefully what now I perceive to be a lack of sensitivity and empathy will develop (P1).	3. Hopes her perceptions will change over time.
2	4. There's this pressure (P3).	4. There are pressures.
	5. Knowing I'm going to see the group on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday makes it easier to work together on group projects (P3).	5. Regular contact with group members throughout the week makes it easier to complete groupwork.
	6. At the beginning of the semester I was all over the place (P2).	6. It takes time to feel organized.
3	7. I found it to be really time-consuming (P4).	7. Group work can be more time-consuming.
	8. There were more individual projects the second year (C1).	8. The work process changed during the second year.
	9. looking at finishing, looking at jobs (C1)	9. Looking ahead to finishing and jobs.
	10. Something I think about is what will happen when the cohort ends (C1).	10. Wonders how relationships will be affected when the program ends.
	11. We managed to get through those growing pains (C1).	11. The group experienced growing pains.
	12. Now that I'm through with comps, it's up to me. I proved myself (C1).	12. Achieving doctoral candidacy is a major milestone.
	13. At the beginning I was trying to figure out my place in the group (C1).	13. Finding one's place in the group is part of the transition.
	14. What I want to accomplish and when is up to me (C1).	14. The work process became increasingly more autonomous.
	15. Am I going to be marketable? (P4).	15. Taking stock of skills acquired.
	16. Later in the program it was more that we could focus on just being together (C1).	16. The group felt more supportive over time.
	17. We're therapists. We don't <i>have</i> to work in groups (P4).	17. Questioned an emphasis on group work for therapists who have a choice.

4	18. I would have liked to have done this program in ten years, taking my time (C2)	18. Would have preferred a traditional doctoral program.
	19. I can't wait until the end (C2).	19. Looking forward to the end.
5	20. We called ourselves the <i>Nine Miners</i> . We were going to be there for each other (G5).	20. Group mottos unified the group.
	21. The first semester is unique because of the Ignorance of really what's to come (C5).	21. The first semester is memorable.
	22. It was showing up on a Saturday (G1.)	22. Saturdays took on new meanings.
	23. After the first year it seemed almost competition-like (C9).	23. Group cohesiveness was greatest during the first year.
	24. We all had jobs. . .different professions. that itself provided a cohesiveness (G1).	24. Commonalities provided a foundation for group cohesiveness.
	25. I felt the cohort and the support the first year (C9).	25. The first year felt like a cohort model.
	26. Why am I doing this (G5)?	26. Commitment wavered at times.
	27. The group just fell apart (C5) .	27. Group unity diminished over time.
	28. I'd get in and get out being as independent as I could be (C3).	28. Thought she would be able to avoid getting involved in the group dynamics.
	29. the feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood is still there (G5).	29. A sense of sisterhood and brotherhood persisted over time.
6	30. It's been a period of adjustment and observation (P5).	30. The first semester is a period of adjustment and observation.
	31. We're all struggling to find our niche (P5).	31. Finding their niches in their groups.
7	32. on Saturday, the place was buzzing (G6).	32. The place came alive on Saturdays.
	33. I was going into my third year then. At that point you have some confidence (G6).	33. Self confidence increases as one moves through the program.
	34. After the cohort ended, there was still support there (G7).	34. Support was available following the end of the cohort experience.
8	35. I thought for sure they had made a mistake accepting me into the program (G9).	35. Group members share some insecurities.
	36. The feeling of comraderie lives on (G10).	36. The feeling of comraderie lives on.

Appendix J: Final List of Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings for Lived Space

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
1	1. Multicultural issues are widespread (P1).	1. Multicultural issues are widespread.
	2. It's more what's safe to do and what's not safe to do (P1).	2. There are some risks.
	3. I was not expecting things like attacking comments, lack of sensitivity, empathy (P1).	3. Encountered behaviors she had not anticipated in a counseling doctoral program.
2	4. The personal growth group here is the biggest component (P3).	4. The personal growth group is a significant experience in the program.
	5. We're not strong in the same areas and that's a nice balance in our cohort (P3)	5. The group's strengths are diversified and balanced.
3	6. The faculty do their best to support everyone being cohesive (P4).	6. The faculty do their best to encourage the development of group cohesiveness.
	7. You needed to take care of yourself academically (C1).	7. You needed to take care of yourself academically.
	8. You were with these people for better or worse (C1).	8. You were together for better or worse.
	9. I thought this was finally the place (P4).	9. The experience did not fully live up to her expectations.
4	10. you learn stuff about yourself too (C2).	10. Gained greater self-awareness.
	11. Certain groups of individuals would work together constantly (C2).	11. Some group members always worked together.
5	12. I have gotten a lot of feedback I would not have gotten in a non-cohort setting (C3).	12. Received a lot of peer feedback.
	13. Everyone was best at something (G4).	13. Everyone had something to contribute.
	14. The group was a tool for me to work through some of my stuff (C6).	14. The group was a tool for personal growth.
	15. We taught ourselves. Faculty sort of swim in and out (C6).	15. Group members direct their own processes.
	16. There were times that were necessary for them [faculty] to step out (C7).	16. Group members were responsible for working through their issues.
	17. There were little sub-groups, but there was never a <i>locking out</i> (G1).	17. Sub-grouping was not necessarily exclusionary.
	18. Personal growth is helpful to deal	18. Personal growth is helpful.

with conflict and the cohort model (C7).

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| 6 | 19. This is our little microcasm (P5). | 19. The cohort is our space. |
| | 20. The faculty is accessible, supportive (P5). | 20. The faculty is accessible and supportive. |
| | 21. We are the cohort and the faculty surrounds us (P5). | 21. The faculty is not part of the cohort. |
| 7 | 22. Part of how we learn is through the intensity with the faculty (G6). | 22. The faculty brings intensity to the learning process. |
| | 23. You've got a mix of people in a cohort. You just learn to work with that (G6). | 23. Group members learned to deal with diversity. |
| | 24. We model a set of assumptions about the profession in our cohort. (G6). | 24. We model a set of assumptions in our cohort. |
| 8 | 25. This was a <i>running away place</i> (C11). | 25. School was a haven from other life stresses. |
| | 26. If you needed something, they were right there (C11). | 26. The faculty was responsive to students' needs. |
| | 27. There was a lot of knowledge that we had about each other (C10). | 27. A lot of personal-life information was shared among group members. |
| | 28. We had to move in and out of small groups (G10). | 28. The work was accomplished by cycling in and out of smaller groups. |
| | 29. There was some really bad stuff going on in there (G8). | 29. There was some bad stuff too. |
| | 30. I don't think they [the faculty] were totally separate. They were involved with what we were doing (G8). | 30. The faculty were more than part of the context. |
| | 31. There were people in there. . .and they weren't therapeutic (G8). | 31. Counseling professionals do not always behave in expected ways. |
| | 32. There was a respect for distance (G10). | 32. There was a respect for distance among group members. |

Appendix K: Final list of Significant Statements and Formulated Meaning for Lived Relations With Group Members

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	
1	1. The success of a cohort requires certain factors that you don't learn in textbooks (P1).	1. Personal attributes are important.	
	2. It's not my goal that I have every member of the cohort as a deeply close friend (P1).	2. The goal of the cohort is not to develop friendships.	
2	3. It's good to be on the journey with somebody else (P2).	3. Being with others on the journey is beneficial.	
	4. I respect them as intellectuals (P3).	4. Respect is essential.	
	5. We're cohesive the way we're supposed to be (P3).	5. Interpretations of cohesiveness vary.	
	6. There's always someone who's going to pick you up (P3).	6. Support was readily available.	
	7. There are some people I don't necessarily want to work on a relationship with (P3).	7. Some relationships are closer than others.	
	8. We talk about our insecurities and we validate each other that we're still learning (P2).	8. Members share insecurities and validate one another.	
	3	9. I like being a beginner with other people (P4).	9. Beginning the program as a group is beneficial.
		10. I've made some good connections (C1).	10. Values the connections developed with group members.
4	11. There are lots of cliques and conflicts.	11. Cliques and conflicts can occur.	
5	12. We just kind of flowed nicely together (G1)	12. Group members flowed together.	
	13. There was strength in having someone with you (C5).	13. Gathered strength from the others.	
	14. there was <i>the group</i> (G1).	14. <i>The group</i> is the most vivid part of the overall doctoral experience.	
	15. It felt like a good marriage (G4).	15. Interdependence and independence were important.	
	16. I feel cheated (C5).	16. Feels cheated out of more gratifying relationships.	
	17. All of us together became a new entity (C4).	17. A new, larger entity emerged.	
	6	18. I can depend on these people.	18. Positive group experiences rest on

- being able to depend on one another.
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| | 19. There are a lot of personalities and some work better than others (P5). | 19. Dealing with different personalities can be challenging at times. |
| | 20. As colleagues, I believe we're solid (P5). | 20. The collegial process in the group was solid. |
| 7 | 21. They just understand (G7). | 21. The others understand and can empathize. |
| 8 | 22. We had our warts (G10). | 22. There were interpersonal challenges |
| | 23. Personal issues seemed to melt away when someone needed help (G9). | 23. Personal issues were laid aside when someone needed help. |
| | 24. It was the worst dysfunctional family I've ever seen in my life (G8). | 24. It felt like a dysfunctional family. |
| | 25. We were really rebellious (G8-3). | 25. It felt like a rebellious group. |
| | 26. It's amazing what just one member can do for another person (C11-5). | 26. The quality, rather than quantity, of peer relationships was significant. |
| | 27. I adopted everyone. . .everyone in the cohort was part of my family (G9). | 27. The relationships developed with doctoral peers had a familial quality. |
| | 28. It felt feudish in the cohort at times (G9). | 28. Interpersonal conflicts and issues were part of the group experience. |

Appendix L: Final List of Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings for Lived Relations
With the Faculty

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
1	1. The faculty has a responsibility to protect every member of the cohort (P1).	1. The faculty is responsible for ensuring the protection of group members.
	2. If I want individual support from a faculty member I have no doubt that I could have that if I sought that out (P1).	2. Faculty members are supportive when sought out individually.
	3. In some ways there's a joining. There's certainly a power differential (P1).	3. There is a power differential.
	4. That person is somebody I feel really comfortable talking with (P1).	4. Feels closer to some faculty members than others.
2	5. They're still a mystery to me (P3).	5. The faculty is a mystery.
	6. They have so much <i>knowing</i> (P3).	6. Respects the faculty's knowledge.
	7. We get so much encouragement that we're such a great cohort, but it's superficial to me (P3).	7. The faculty is encouraging.
3	8. Professors are gatekeepers (P4).	8. Professors are gatekeepers to opportunities.
	9. It was definitely to my advantage to cultivate that relationship (P4).	9. Cultivating relationships with the faculty is advantageous.
4	10. They expect us to become cohesive, they expect us to work together, yet they took no part (C2).	10. The faculty took no part.
	11. The faculty needs to be more proactive (C2).	11. Believes the faculty should be more proactive.
	12. Some faculty [members] suppress conflicts in the cohort (C2).	12. Faculty members can suppress conflicts.
	13. Faculty members show favoritism. I've seen it (C2).	13. Favoritism is an issue.
5	14. There needs to be boundaries (C2).	14. There needs to be healthy boundaries.
	15. I felt every faculty member wanted you to succeed (G3).	15. Felt cared about.
6	16. We would challenge when the faculty would say, <i>That's the way it is</i> (G5).	16. Felt free to challenge faculty members.
	17. They hold the strings (P5).	17. The faculty holds the strings.
7	18. We were treated as professionals right	18. Students were treated as professionals.

off the bat, which was a welcomed thing (G6).

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| | 19. The collegial speech the faculty give is empowering (G6). | 19. Collegiality is empowering. |
| | 20. The expectation that we were all going to jump together was unrealistic (G6). | 20. Some expectations were unrealistic. |
| | 21. The faculty never dealt with doctoral students before (G6). | 21. The faculty had no experience teaching doctoral students. |
| | 22. The mentorship from faculty was significant (G7). | 22. Faculty are mentors. |
| 8 | 23. we had a voice (G10). | 23. Students had a voice. |
| | 24. We're colleagues.to a point (G8). | 24. We're colleagues to a point. |
| | 25. Sometimes I felt more heard by the faculty than by group members (G8). | 25. Faculty were more responsive than group members at times. |

Appendix M: Final List of Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings for Lived Relations Between Cohorts

Protocol	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
2	1. Every cohort is different in dynamics (P3).	1. Each cohort has its own dynamics.
	2. I know the [group name removed] cohort has trouble getting together personally, and that was okay for them (P3).	2. Some cohorts have difficulty getting together personally.
	3. We heard about the [group name removed] being there for each other and sitting in if someone was defending [a dissertation] (P3).	3. Cohort groups provide models.
	4. I don't think we'll ever be the [group name removed] cohort, and support everybody (P3).	4. Cohort groups provide standards.
3	5. [faculty member] would tell stories about other cohorts like that's the standard they expect of us. Meanwhile, we couldn't even figure out when to get together to do an assignment (P4).	5. Students heard stories about other cohort groups in the program.
	6. I'm getting support and the little pieces of helpful information, but I'm getting it from other cohorts (P4).	6. Other cohorts are sources of information and support.
5	7. There are different cohort effects on different cohorts. We knew [group name removed] our first day (C5).	7. There are cohort effects on cohorts.
	8. We wanted to be unique and different. We didn't want to always be compared (G5).	8. Groups do not necessarily like to be compared.
8	9. A responsibility that the bigger brother feels for the little brother (G6).	9. Individuals ahead in the program feel a responsibility for following cohorts.
	10. I developed a cohort-to-cohort bond with a particular person who became like my little sister (G7).	10. Cohort-to-cohort bonds are not unusual.
	11. There's a bond there among us, a bond among cohorts (C11).	11. There is a bond among cohorts.
	12. There's a bond of mutual understanding among cohorts (G9).	12. There is a bond of mutual understanding among cohorts.