We are the Gap: One Cohort’s Reflection on the Impacts and Outcomes of Their Interdisciplinary Ed.D. in Leadership Program

Kristine Baker

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We are the Gap: One Cohort’s Reflection on the Impacts and Outcomes of Their Interdisciplinary Ed.D. in Leadership Program

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Kristine Baker

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2021
We are the Gap: One Cohort’s Reflection on the Impacts and Outcomes of Their Interdisciplinary Ed.D. in Leadership Program

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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To Brenda who has been there for my kids while my husband and I worked and went to school, who made it possible for me to selfishly focus on my own accomplishments: Your support and love of my children made it possible for me to take on this challenge and many others. Without you, I would be lost. To my friends and former colleagues at the University of St. Thomas, AnneMarie, Jerome, and Sushant: thank you for your friendship throughout the years. Finally, to my editor, for her late nights, careful review, and clarifying suggestions: It is better because of you.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore the career impacts and learning and development outcomes experienced after participating in an Ed.D. leadership program at the University of St. Thomas by a single cohort of nontraditional educational leaders. Qualitative data was gathered from nine members of one cohort who completed 15 in-depth interviews. A focus group was used to triangulate and validate research findings. The primary research question was what are the career impacts and learning and development outcomes of non-traditional educational leaders participating in and graduating from a cohort-based Ed.D. program in leadership. Themes emerged from the responses that highlight the collective and transformational impacts the program had on participants. The primary research findings identified three themes: (a) direct career impacts, (b) transformative learning outcomes, and (c) program learning outcomes. Ultimately, the program led to direct career impacts for several participants. The program resulted in participants becoming scholars; experiencing transformation of their worldviews, perspectives, and lives; and developing confidence in or greater refinement of their strengths and abilities. Finally, data analysis identified participants’ learning and development aligned with the five program learning outcomes, revealing that the program’s intention and impact aligned. Secondary research findings identified how participants used the highly sought credential post-graduation, and how the cohort structure influenced participants in their learning and development. The credential was used liberally as part of four cohort members’ professional identity. The credential was identified as providing legitimacy and authority for several members of the cohort. The cohort had a foundational role in supporting participants in completing the program and
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provided a community of scholars. Overall, the program led to transformational learning across all participants, clear attainment of intended program learning outcomes, and positive impacts on the careers of several participants.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIP</td>
<td>Classification of Instructional Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPED</td>
<td>Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPEDS</td>
<td>Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCES</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSF</td>
<td>National Science Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Program Learning Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO #1</td>
<td>Challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement by you, faculty, and fellow students and come to more complex understanding of yourself and your students or clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO #2</td>
<td>Form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of continuously changing world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO #3</td>
<td>Form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO #4</td>
<td>Improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO #5</td>
<td>Seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Survey of Earned Doctorates</td>
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical Background of the Problem

The United States granted its first doctoral degrees in 1861 (Thurgood et al., 2006). The first Ph.D. in education was awarded in 1893 from Teachers College, and the first Ed.D. was awarded in 1920 by Harvard University (Prime & Johnson, 2015; Wergin, 2011). The Ph.D. in education is described as “a research degree, designed for the preparation of researchers and professors who would generate new knowledge” (Prime & Johnson, 2015, p 112). The Ed.D. was created as a “practitioner’s degree designed to prepare administrators, policymakers, and professionals for the management of the education enterprise. Its focus is on the development of practical competence” (Prime & Johnson, 2015, p. 112). While the degrees were intended to be distinct from one another, the implementation of the degrees at universities across the U.S. has varied, creating confusion and calling into question the purpose and impact of these two degrees. To further compound this issue, data are not consistently collected across the nation on Ed.D. programs, meaning even baseline information is not readily available (Kot & Hendel, 2011). To date, the categorization of the Ed.D. as a professional practice degree or a research degree remains inconsistent.

The Department of Education funds the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which provides data through the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS), which produces nationwide datasets on postsecondary institution’s enrollment, graduation, financials, and other measures. Institutions supply data to the IPEDS for inclusion in these nationwide datasets. Currently, the IPEDS allows institutions awarding the degrees to determine whether a doctoral degree will be classified as a professional practice doctoral degree, defined by IPEDS as a “doctoral degree that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and
skills for the recognition, credential or license required for professional practice” or a research/scholarship doctoral degree, defined as a “Ph.D. or other doctors degree that requires advanced work beyond the master’s level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement” (IPEDS Glossary, n.d.). This flexibility means that some institutions classify their Ed.D. as a research degree while others classify their Ed.D. as a professional practice doctoral degree. The most recent figures from IPEDS identified 13,020 doctoral degrees were conferred in the field of education during the 2018-19 academic year (IPEDS Completions Survey, 2020). This number includes both Ph.Ds. and Ed.Ds. but not necessarily all Ed.Ds., making it nearly impossible to summarize national trends specific to the Ed.D. To date, no organization publishes comprehensive data specific to the number of students enrolling in or graduating from Ed.D. programs (Perrone & Tucker, 2019) let alone any data identifying post-graduation outcomes.

The National Science Foundation conducts a Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) to solicit demographic makeup, educational history, financial support, and post-graduation plan information from graduates earning research doctorates at U.S. academic institutions. The purpose of the SED is to provide data on major trends in doctoral education. The SED defines a research doctorate as one that includes a dissertation or an equivalent concluding project and is not focused on practice in a profession. The inclusion of the Ed.D. in the SED is inconsistent with some Ed.Ds. considered a research doctorate and others considered a professional practice doctorate. Again, the ability to identify trends in Ed.D. graduates demographics, educational history, financial support and post-graduation plans is indistinguishable from Ph.D. graduates in the SED. No U.S. organization currently produces data specific to Ed.D. graduates, meaning no
historical quantitative context can collectively be provided as to graduates’ demographic makeup, educational history/preparation, or post-graduation outcomes. Even though the Ed.D. has been in existence for nearly 100 years, very little has been done to track, understand or assess the success of Ed.D. doctoral degree recipients. Ed.D. graduates are either excluded from data or merely lumped in with Ph.D. graduates in education regardless of their distinct aim to prepare practitioners not researchers. Furthermore, any research conducted on the career impacts or learning and development outcomes of the Ed.D. generally focuses on principals and superintendents (Wergin, 2011), leaving other program participants’ voices absent from the discussion.

**Problem Statement**

Despite the longstanding existence of the Ed.D. and the attempts to clearly define the Ed.D.’s role in developing practitioners, little is understood about the impacts and outcomes of these programs on practitioners (McCarthy, 2015). This lack of clarity is highlighted when students make the choice of the Ph.D. even when their career aspirations and prior experience suggest that the Ed.D. with its practice-focus might better prepare them for their future as leaders (Prime & Johnson, 2015). Several studies in the past 30 years have called for the reform of or the ultimate elimination of the Ed.D. (Levine, 2005; Shulman et al., 2006; Prime & Johnson, 2015). These recommendations are derived from limited data specific to Ed.D. graduates’ outcomes and impacts. Most of the calls for reform are due to the persistent confusion between the Ph.D. and Ed.D., the perceived redundancy of the two degrees, and the inability to separate program data in analysis. Very little research has been collected to better understand what impact Ed.D. programs have on graduates’ learning, development, or career outcomes (Orr, 2007). My research findings would help inform reform discussions as opposed to the current research, which tends to
overgeneralize the impacts and outcomes of educational administration programs by reviewing Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs collectively as opposed to recognizing their distinct differences. Additionally, the focus of the research on principals and superintendents’ learning and development leaves a gap in the research (Arafeh, 2015). These programs serve a variety of constituents whose voices and perspectives should be considered when evaluating and reforming these programs. While no nationwide data currently exist to identify what percentage of Ed.D. participants fall outside the roles of principal and superintendents, these programs serve a greater variety of educational leaders (Arafeh, 2015).

Despite all recent efforts that call to reform or to eliminate the Ed.D., there are not enough existing data specific to the Ed.D. or the wide-ranging student-base these programs serve. This issue raises the question: What are the program learning and development outcomes and career impacts of Ed.D. program participants who do not serve in principal or superintendent positions? This issue merits dissertation study because it serves to understand the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes experienced by a cohort of non-traditional educational leaders who participated and graduated from an Ed.D. program in leadership. This research aims to better understand the impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. programs on a wider variety of leaders across educational settings. The findings in this research could lead to understanding how the Ed.D. develops non-traditional leaders and the impact the program had on their careers providing a rich explanation as to the multidimensional impacts of these programs. These data allow for a more complete and specific understanding of how the Ed.D. prepares practitioners in education, helping inform continuous improvement or reform efforts.
The Purpose of the Study

Developing educational leaders, both traditional and non-traditional, is foundational to the success of our educational organizations (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). The history of developing educational leaders through higher education programs is long-standing and yet not fully understood. The confusion between Ph.D. and Ed.D. program offerings and intended outcomes are persistent. Studying the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. programs on non-traditional educational leaders allows for a broader understanding of how these specific Ed.D. programs develop and impact all types of educational leaders. Acknowledging the experiences and perspectives of non-traditional education leaders who participate in these programs is relevant and crucial to evaluate the success of these programs more fully, which better informs reform and continuous improvement efforts.

Research based on the program learning and development outcomes and career impacts of non-traditional educational leaders participating in an Ed.D. leadership programs is limited (Kot & Hendel, 2011). In response, I researched the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort of non-traditional educational leaders who participated in an Ed.D. program in leadership. The learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. programs can be better understood by examining the experiences of program participants during and after completing the program. This research established an opportunity to recognize the perspectives of non-traditional leaders in education and how an Ed.D. leadership program impacted their learning, development, and careers as practitioners in K-12 schools/districts, higher education institutions, and other non-profit organizations with an educational focus.
Research Questions

1. Primary research question: What are the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of non-traditional educational leaders participating in and graduating from a cohort-based Ed.D. program in leadership?

2. Secondary research questions: What influence did the cohort structure have on participants’ learning and development? In what ways do participants use the credential as part of participants’ professional identity? How do program graduates describe the impact of the credential?

Personal Motivation

When I began the Ed.D. program in leadership as a member of Cohort 28 in July of 2014, I was a mother of two small boys, Tyler (4) and Avery (1). I had been married to my husband for seven years and had worked at the University of St. Thomas for five years in various positions. At the time of enrollment, I was Associate Director for Institutional Effectiveness. For me, this context plays an important role in my experience of the program, but before I go into the impact of the program, I provide some context on my background with education and insight into my life.

I do not remember ever having an interest in furthering my education beyond the bachelor’s level. In fact, I somewhat disliked school and saw it as a means to an end. I struggled through my undergraduate program with mediocre grades and subpar engagement in my courses. It’s not that I did not understand the content; I was just a poor student. I could do the bare minimum and get by. I acknowledge my lack of academic achievement not as something I am proud of but rather as an opportunity lost now that I understand all that there is to gain from education.
However, my interest in furthering my education changed when all the jobs I worked post undergraduate graduation gave me very little in the area of personal fulfillment or purpose. I dreaded the idea of having a job for the sole purpose of creating financial stability. At one point, while working as a preschool teacher, I decided I wanted to go back to school to get my master’s degree to become an elementary teacher. Originally, as an undergraduate student, I had wanted to become a teacher but was terrified I would not be very good at it, so I decided to go into something else. However, while working as a preschool teacher, I enrolled in the Master of Arts of Teacher Education at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls. I took two courses and realized quickly that earning my degree was going to be expensive. So I started looking for jobs at universities knowing many institutions provided tuition remission benefits.

About a year later, I landed a position at the University of St. Thomas in the Registrar’s Office and immediately started looking into master’s programs. After six months at the University of St. Thomas, I had switched my interest from teacher education to leadership in student affairs. In that short time, I felt passionate about higher education and wanted to learn more. At that point, I developed an interest in understanding how graduate programs impacted graduates. I experienced transformational growth in my master’s program. My worldview (a word I would not understand until my doctoral program) changed dramatically. I participated in the world differently. I found I was much better at thinking critically, reflecting, and considering alternative perspectives when I was engaged in learning about leadership.

This critical thinking, reflection, and consideration of alternative perspectives made me more engaged and aware in all aspects of my life. One of the first examples of this in my master’s degree program was when I took a course called Feminist Perspectives on Leadership. The course itself was useful; however, coupled with the fact that I had recently given birth to my
first child a few months prior, the learning experience was even more transformative. The course content highlighted the concept of gender socialization, which helped me realize there were underlying assumptions that shaped the expectations of my role. It also highlighted how disproportionate those expectations were to that of my spouse. That semester it was as if the veil of ignorance on gender was lifted.

Prior to having my son, I could do everything because I was not caring for another human being, but then, after I had my son, I realized I was still expected to do it all and be the primary caregiver even though I worked and was going to school just like my spouse. I also realized this was not necessarily something my spouse realized he was participating in. While he benefitted from it, he, too, was subject to gender norms and socialization. The course made me more critically aware of gender inequalities and the gender socialization I was unknowingly participating in daily. I was able to capitalize on my own experiences by using them to analyze the concepts, ideas, and theories we were discussing in class, which ultimately made them more tangible. I remember being angered by this sudden knowledge as it called my actions and the actions of others into question. It made me stop and think critically about what was going on underneath the surface and then act differently. It transformed who I was and how I saw and experienced the world I live in.

I often used that experience to explain the impetus for enrolling in the Ed.D. program. The connection I felt to what I was learning and how it could be applied to what I was experiencing in my day-to-day life was life changing. Besides being drawn to the learning, my work environment generally required terminal degrees as a prerequisite for leadership positions. Additionally, I had faculty in my master’s program and my boss spurring me to take the next step in my education. I did not realize at the time, but another reason for enrolling in the program
became about earning the credential in hopes of joining the “club.” This desire became even clearer as I neared completion of the program. What was spurring me on was no longer the connection to the learning but rather earning the credential.

As I near the end of my doctoral program, I can still name some of the transformational moments where my lived experiences were so much clearer because of the content of the Ed.D. coursework. These were moments where my understanding was deepened and my eyes were truly opened to what was taking place around and within me. As Green (1988) states:

> It is through and by means of education, many of us believe, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p. 12)

One of those moments was when reading Horton’s (1990) book *The Long Haul* and Green’s (1988) book *The Dialectic of Freedom* and writing a paper on reimaging education. These two books set the foundation for much of how I approach my work in higher education today. If someone met me today, they would hear me talk about the importance of learning being a shared experience, how important it is to know your audience making it possible to start where they are, developing a common language and creating a space for true dialogue. These understandings started with Horton and Green but grew along the way, now living in me to guide how I approach my work. These books and my personal experiences helped to deepen my understanding of education and its potential impact. Additionally, they helped me to reframe my
work. Horton helped me realize that much of my work was in the arena of adult education. His approaches to teaching and learning helped me approach my work with a fresh perspective.

Besides those two books, I also remember reading a biography on Jane Adams (Knight, 2010) which taught me the importance of patience, persistence, and compromise when dealing with change. As Knight (2010) put it, “Change often came incrementally, because of persistence and compromise, and only completely when the moment was right” (p. 199). Knight’s book on Adams’ work helped me realize that “Social change started from within” (p. 266) and made me look more critically at my own assumptions, ethics, and moral reasoning. Reading Adams’ story solidified the importance of holding my moral and ethical ground and walking away when my moral/ethical boundaries were crossed.

In a course on Paulo Freire’s work (2005), I took with me the idea of dialogue and have used it consistently in my approach to leadership. I do not always succeed at using dialogue as Freire intended, “nourished by love, humility, hope, faith and trust” (p. 45). However, I try to go into situations where opposing views are present with an open mind, willing to be changed by what some else says. I can also clearly see when dialogue is claimed to be encouraged, but the environment lacks love, humility, hope, faith and/or trust, making true dialogue impossible. I work hard in those environments to encourage colleagues to focus on building a culture of trust, so true dialogue can take place. Freire helped me to understand the difference between communication and dialogue and to be clear on when I am communicating information verses seeking dialogue. I carry this knowledge with me in my day-to-day interactions. It lives in me daily, and it challenges me to do and be better in the roles I represent.

Finally, we read and discussed Rigoni’s book (2002) Teaching what can’t be Taught: The Shaman’s Strategy, which is where I learned about my own worldview: how it was constructed
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and how it changed. Subsequently, through participation in the Ed.D. program, I changed my worldview dramatically. My perceptions on race, gender, capitalism, and leadership were challenged and disrupted. Many times throughout the program, discomfort pushed me to understand something more deeply. I believed in the program’s ability to positively impact my leadership by participating in the rituals required to learn the silent leadership curriculum. As Rigoni (2002) put it:

> There is a micro version of the larger societal belief that nothing bad should happen to us under any circumstances; this belief is amplified in educational settings. What is lost in this thinking is the role that discomfort (and even suffering) play in forcing change. We tend not to discard old views unless they are causing us some discomfort; when we are comfortable, we tend to cling to our comfort. But it is discomfort that causes us change and growth. We do little of either when we are self-satisfied. It is the job of education to provide the grain of sand to students’ oysters and to vicariously produce spectacular pearls. (p. 158)

The concept of worldview modified the way I engaged with others. I now recognize that worldviews can be rigid and that it is only through true curiosity to understand and a willingness to become uncomfortable that I truly have an opportunity to change others’ or my own worldview. I used this concept of discomfort in education as a participant in my children’s school district’s strategic initiatives workgroup. I was a member of the diversity workgroup, and five of the seven workgroup members insisted that all learning opportunities aimed at cultivating diversity and inclusion should make students feel safe and comfortable. I used the knowledge gained in this course to challenge that assumption. While ultimately, I was not successful in
changing the perception, that knowledge will continue to be applied as I work to advocate for authentic diversity and inclusion initiatives that are truly intended to create meaningful change.

The entire coursework of the Ed.D. program solidified for me the importance of people. This understanding transformed my leadership approach encouraging me to lead from the middle, commit myself to true dialogue, and recognize the importance of patience and intentionality in collaboration. The learning and development that took place in the program was strengthened by the intentionality behind the structure of the program, which included a cohort model as a foundational component.

The cohort played an important role in my development. I remember dreading the bootcamp week declaring, “No adult should be forced to stay in a residence hall with strangers for an educational experience.” However, the vulnerability, discomfort, and connection those four days created allowed for open, honest communication and respectful dialogue in the years to follow. Our monthly cohort weekends required an all-in mindset. The level of engagement, connection and discomfort required often made me dread those weekends. However, every weekend we had our core courses I learned from my cohort and found the space we gathered to be like none I had ever experienced. While we brought many diverse perspectives and tackled difficult conversations, our commitment to growth and engagement always created unity about why we were there. The support of my cohort cannot be more apparent than now as they willingly participated in this research. My completion of the program is owed to them. Without their encouragement, support, and willingness to engage, I would not have been able to do this research. I owe my dissertation to them.
Significance of the Research

Studying the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of non-traditional educational leaders enrolled in an Ed.D. program provides valuable information for higher education stakeholders within colleges and universities offering the Ed.D.. The findings from this research help college and university stakeholders understand the impact of the program on non-traditional leaders in education, filling a gap in the existing research, and allowing for a more complete and specific understanding of Ed.D. learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes. This study will provide clarity for current and prospective students on what can be gained from participating in an Ed.D. program, leading to more informed enrollment decisions and clearer delineation between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs. This research will provide focused data specific to the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of an Ed.D. program, informing improvement or reform discussions, and allowing Ed.D. programs to better serve future students. Furthermore, it will provide the missing perspective of non-traditional leaders in the existing literature. This research will allow for a deeper understanding of the multidimensional and transformational impact Ed.Ds. have on participants.

Research Study Overview

This qualitative single case study was designed to examine the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort of non-traditional leaders during and after completing their Ed.D. in leadership. I used the term non-traditional leader in this study to recognize that much of the existing research focuses on the outcomes and impacts of Ed.D. programs on participants in traditional leadership positions such as principals and superintendents in K-12 schools/districts. I collected qualitative data to explore the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of non-traditional educational leaders participating in an Ed.D. program
and conducted 15 in-depth interviews across nine individuals: four leading as teachers in K-12 schools, three leading as faculty and/or administrators in higher education, and two leading in non-profit organizations with an educational focus. Participants were identified because they were members of Cohort 28 in the University of St. Thomas’s Ed.D. in leadership program.

The interviews included background information, illuminating the different experiences participants brought to the program, why they chose the program, and the goal(s) they identified for participating in the program. This data helped to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the program’s impact on individual participant’s intended goals. The interviews collected learning, development, and career gains brought about or strengthened through participation in and graduation from the program. The secondary research questions identified the impact the credential had on participants, the ways they had utilized the credential in their professional identities and how the cohort model impacted participants’ learning and development. This research helped to provide a comprehensive understanding of the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of an Ed.D. program in leadership on a cohort of non-traditional educational leaders.

I first divided interview data into broad themes, and subsequently, I analyzed those data to determine whether they fit within any of the program’s learning outcomes. I utilized the program’s student learning outcomes to guide the thematic analysis after recognizing the overlap in participants’ responses. According to the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. Doctoral Handbook (2015), the program aimed to encourage and prepare graduates to:

1. Challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement by you, faculty and fellow students and come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students or clients.
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2. Form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.

3. Form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.

4. Improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.

5. Seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action. (p. 9)

Following the interviews, I conducted a focus group to collect additional data to triangulate interview data findings. During the focus group, I provided participants with the program learning outcome statements and asked them to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with whether they experienced learning and development in those areas. They were then asked to elaborate on their ratings with examples. The focus group data provided increased reliability of the interview findings.

The data from the qualitative interviews and focus groups revealed three main themes: (a) direct career impacts, (b) transformative learning outcomes, (c) and program learning outcomes. The secondary research findings discovered what impacts the credential had, how participants were using the credential as part of their professional identity, and the impact the cohort model had on learning and development. The research study offered a more specific understanding of the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. participants while simultaneously illuminating the missing voice of non-traditional leaders participating in or completing an Ed.D. program. The research findings concluded that non-traditional leaders who participate in and graduate from a professional practice Ed.D. program experienced transformational learning and development, which often led to direct career impacts. Schools and
colleges offering Ed.D. programs need to recognize, acknowledge, and document the transformational learning and development taking place in these programs and to use the experiences of all participants and graduates to inform best practice and continuous improvement efforts.

Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter I outlined the historical background of the failed efforts to document, analyze, and understand the specific impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. programs. I provided justification for conducting this research study and identified the purpose of the study. I highlighted the primary and secondary research questions. Finally, I provided a summary of the research and data analysis processes. The next chapter summarizes the existing literature in this area, revealing the gaps in the existing research, and justifying the current research.

Definition of Terms

Andragogy: the framework or set of assumptions identifying how adults learn (Knowles, 1977).

Career impact: effects the program had on participants careers including but not limited to advancement in their careers, new career prospects, research opportunities, guest lecturer requests.

Learning and development outcomes: effects the program had on participants, which added to or deepened their knowledge base, transformed their understanding or perspectives, or led to new or improved abilities.

Ed.D.: practitioner’s degree designed to prepare administrators, policymakers, and professionals for the management of the education enterprise. Its focus is on the development of practical competence (Prime & Johnson, 2015, p 112).
Educational administration programs: educational administration and supervision, educational and human resource studies/development, educational leadership, and urban education and leadership (NCES, n.d.)

Nontraditional educational leaders: those leaders practicing in the field of education (K-12, higher education, other non-profit organization) who are not pursuing or do not hold leadership positions as principals or superintendents.

Open Cohort: model of instruction in which the core leadership curriculum is taken with the same group of students over three years. The open cohort model encourages its members to bond as a network of support; academically, professionally, and emotionally (Doctoral Handbook, 2015, p. 9)

Ph.D.: a research degree, designed for the preparation of researchers and professors who would generate new knowledge (Prime & Johnson, 2015, p 112).

Transformational Learning: a process by which individuals engage in the cognitive processes of critical reflection and self-reflection, intuitive and imaginative explorations of their psyche and spirituality, and developmental changes that lead to a deep shift in perspective and habits of mind that are more open, permeable, discriminating, and better justified. Individual change may lead to social change, and social change may promote individual change (Kroth & Cranton, 2014, p. 9).
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to situate this research into the existing body of educational administration Ed.D. program research. To begin, I provide a history of the Ed.D. degree and an overview of doctorates in the field of educational administration. I review the existing literature and calls to reform or eliminate the Ed.D., highlighting the prevalence of existing research that focuses on preparing K-12 building and district administrators. I detail the reforms suggested and actions taken to create stronger and more clearly defined Ed.D. programs. I summarize the existing research on the career impacts or learning outcomes experienced by participants and graduates of Ed.D. programs. Then, I place the University of St. Thomas’s Ed.D. program within the context of the literature. Finally, I provide theories useful for analyzing the experiences, outcomes, and motivations of participants in Ed.D. programs including Andragogy, Transformative Learning Theory, Reflective Practice, and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Historical Trends in Educational Administration Programs

The History of the Ed.D.

The Ed.D. was originally developed in the early 1900s in response to a need for practitioners to hold a doctorate (Wergin, 2011). The intention of the Ed.D. was to be “equal in rigor but different in substance” from the Ph.D. (Mayhew & Ford, 1974, p. 163). According to Wergin (2011):

The Ed.D. is in theory, intended to be the terminal practice degree for educators in the same way the MD is the terminal practice degree for physicians, the DDS is for dentists, and the JD is for lawyers. Holders of an Ed.D. degree are expected to be able to use
existing knowledge to solve educational problems and thus, like the holders of other
professional degrees, situate their profession in practice. (p. 120)

However, the implementation of the Ed.D. across the country has varied greatly, blurring the
lines between the Ph.D. and Ed.D., and confusing potential students, graduates, and researchers
(Shulman et al., 2006). According to Wergin (2011), “The Ed.D. has become the degree of choice
for school administrators looking for a fast-track doctorate to use as a career credential” (p. 119).
The Ed.D. has been termed the “Ph.D.-lite” (Shulman et al., 2006, p. 27) even though these
degrees were intended to inhabit overlapping yet separate categories. Recent research on the
differences and distinctions between Ed.D. and Ph.D. found that regardless of their intentions,
the reality is these degrees have minimal differences in curriculum or dissertation requirements
(Anderson, 1983; Dill & Morrison, 1985; Levine, 2005; Murhy & Vriesenga, 2005; Shulman et
al., 2006; Wergin, 2011). Shulman et al. (2006) summarized it this way: “Instead of having two
separate entities that effectively accomplish distinct functions, we have confounding and
compromise, a blurring of boundaries, resulting in the danger that we achieve rigorous
preparation neither for practice nor for research” (p. 26). The clarity between the Ed.D. and
Ph.D. in education gets further diminished when attempting to comprehend the variety of fields
and individual programs offered within each degree.

**Doctorates in the Field of Educational Administration**

According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED, 2019), commissioned by the
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) and the National Science
Foundation (NSF), the broad field of education includes several fields of study, which are broken
down into more specific fine fields in which a student can earn a doctorate. The broad field of
Education includes the following fields of study and corresponding fine fields:
1. Education administration – fine fields include: educational administration and supervision, educational and human resource studies/development, educational leadership, and urban education and leadership or

2. Education Research – fine fields include: counseling education, counseling and guidance, curriculum and instruction, educational and instructional media design, educational and instructional technology, educational assessment/testing/measurement, educational policy analysis, educational psychology, educational statistics/research methods, higher education evaluation and research, international education, learning sciences, school psychology, social and philosophical foundations of education, special education or

3. Teacher Education – fine fields include: adult and continuing teacher education, elementary teacher education, pre-elementary/early childhood teacher education, and secondary teacher education or

4. Teaching fields – fine fields include: all secondary content area teaching fields or other education, encompassing workforce education and development, education/general, or education/other. (NCSES SED, 2019, Technical Table A-6)

The field of education is broad and encompasses a variety of fine fields. However, this research focuses on doctorates earned in the first category of educational administration, which includes educational administration and supervision, educational and human resource studies/development, educational leadership, and urban education and leadership.

*Evolution of Educational Administration*

Since roughly 1920, interested students could enroll in either a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. in educational administration. The first courses in educational administration were offered between
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1879-1881; the first graduate degrees in educational administration were offered between 1890-1910; and the first two doctoral degrees in educational administration were awarded at Teachers College around 1905 (Levine, 2005). It can be surmised that these first two doctoral degrees were Ph.Ds. as the first Ed.D. was not awarded until 1920 at Harvard University (Wergin, 2011). Around the end of World War II, roughly 125 colleges/universities had educational administration programs, largely due to the increased interest in K-12 education and ensuring leaders in K-12 were appropriately prepared to lead these complex and influential organizations (Levine, 2005, p. 15). According to the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987), the number of institutions offering educational administration programs grew to 505 by 1987 (p.36). These 505 institutions offered master’s degrees, graduate certificates, licensure programs, and/or doctoral degrees in educational administration. Beyond the above information, the history of the Ed.D. in educational administration is hard to track; the U.S. has no streamlined process or collective database to capture Ed.D. participants or graduates, let alone a process or database capturing specific data on Ed.D. programs in educational administration.

Data Limitations

Much of the existing literature groups enrollment, graduation, outcomes, and impact data on Ed.Ds. and Ph.Ds. in education together even though these two degrees were meant to serve two distinct purposes and audiences. Furthermore, when attempting to dig deeper into fields of study and their subcomponents, even less collective quantitative data are available. The U.S. has no collective data available that summarize the number of Ed.Ds. in educational administration awarded in any given year nor the number of institutions offering these programs.
Specifically, the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES), the primary federal entity collecting and analyzing U.S. data related to education, does not break down the total number of institutions offering Ed.Ds. within the field of educational administration. The only two sources available that break down doctoral degree information by fine field of study are produced by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the SED. The CGS (2020) produces the “Graduate Enrollment and Degrees” report, which provides application, enrollment, and degree data by degree level (bachelors, masters, doctorate) and fine field of study. However, the CGS (2020) collects this information via a voluntary survey, meaning it does not represent all students or programs. Plus, the CGS does not make the data publicly available nor does it break down the survey data by degree type (Ph.D. or Ed.D.).

Similarly, the SED collects survey data annually on the number and characteristics of those within the US who have earned a research doctorate. According to the 2019 SED report, there were a total of 55,703 research doctorates awarded by US higher education institutions, 98.4% of the research doctorates awarded were Ph.D.s and 0.8% (473) were Ed.D.s (Technical Tables, Table A-2). Of those earning a research doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) in 2019, 4,635 (8%) were awarded a doctorate in the broad field of education, 839 (18%) earned them in the fine field of educational administration. However, in 2009, 2,146 (33%) of the 6,528 doctorates awarded in education were awarded in the fine discipline of educational administration. This decline is the result of the SED reclassifying 143 Ed.D. programs in 2010. It was determined those 143 programs and graduates no longer qualified to participate in the survey as the programs were not considered to be research focused. Only those degree recipients earning research focused Ed.Ds. continued to be included in the survey after 2009, which means for the past 10 years, the SED no longer included all Ed.D. degree recipients. From the data in Table 1, the largest decline from
2009 to 2010 was in the fine field of educational administration (-707) and most specifically within the fine field of educational leadership (-532), suggesting that a good portion of the reclassified Ed.D. programs were in educational leadership.

**Table 1**

*Doctorate recipients, by fine field of study: 2009-18*


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6,528</td>
<td>5,287</td>
<td>4,670</td>
<td>4,802</td>
<td>4,934</td>
<td>4,789</td>
<td>5,098</td>
<td>5,143</td>
<td>4,826</td>
<td>4,834</td>
<td>4,635</td>
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<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>2,146</td>
<td>1,439</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>1,057</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA &amp; supervision</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; HR studies, development</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational leadership</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>1,029</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban education &amp; leadership</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>64</td>
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</table>

*EA represents Education Administration*

The assumption can be made that the most recent report from the SED does not include the majority of Ed.D. educational administration recipients. Additionally, the study never breaks down any of the other survey measures by type of degree (i.e., Ph.D. or Ed.D.), again limiting the information available on Ed.D. degree recipients and their educational preparation, funding sources, and post-graduation outcomes. At best, the SED provides data on a subset of Ed.D. recipients. However, these recipients graduated from Ed.D. programs defined as research programs, not programs focused on preparation for practice in a profession (SED, 2019). Therefore, the SED excludes Ed.D. recipients graduating from practitioner-focused Ed.D. programs, which was the original intention of the Ed.D. This survey misses an important
opportunity to better understand the potential distinctions between Ed.D. and Ph.D. program graduates and their educational background, financial support, and post-graduation plans, further muting any potential findings specific to the Ed.D. in educational administration.

Another example of the gap of information specific to the Ed.D. is within the Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is the core source of US postsecondary data. The most recent IPEDS data from 2017-18 reports 449 postsecondary institutions conferring doctoral degrees in education (IPEDS Fall 2018, Completions component, February 2020). IPEDS does not provide a breakdown between Ph.D. and Ed.D. granting institutions even though it provides this breakdown for other professional practice doctoral degrees like the M.D., J.D., and D.D.S/D.M.D. As mentioned previously, there are a variety of fine fields in education, yet IPEDS does not provide a breakdown of the number of institutions offering programs within the fine fields of education or a breakdown of graduates within these fine fields.

IPEDS did develop the classification of instructional program (CIP) in 1980 to organize programs more effectively (IPEDS CIP, 2020). IPEDS assigned Educational Administration and supervision a four-digit code of 13.04. There are several six-digit CIP codes within 13.04 which get down to specific areas of focus for a program; for example, 13.0411 superintendency and education system administration; 13.0409 secondary school administration/principalship; or 13.0401 educational leadership and administration, general among several others. IPEDS defines educational leadership and administration, general or 13.0401 as a program that emphases “the general principles and techniques of administering a wide variety of schools and other educational organizations and facilities, supervising educational personnel at the school or staff level and that may prepare individuals as general administrators and supervisors” (NCES CIP
WE ARE THE GAP Code, n.d., para. 1). While IPEDS created this framework for organizing programs, it has not led to a more meaningful breakdown of data being produced on Ed.D. programs, enrollments, and graduates.

In 2018-19, IPEDS reported 13,020 doctorates awarded in education, 12,246 research/scholarship degrees, 233 professional practice degrees, and 541 other degrees (IPEDS Completions Survey, 2020). However, IPEDS does not provide a breakdown of doctoral degrees conferred by fine disciplines in education nor does IPEDS separate Ph.D. awards from Ed.D. awards. This missing data is concerning because over the past several years there have been numerous calls to eliminate or seriously reform the Ed.D. (Brown, 1985; Dill, 1983; Levine, 2005; Morrison, 1985; Shulman et al., 2006). These calls come with limited Ed.D. specific enrollment, graduation, and post-graduation success data. In several studies, programs and program graduates are lumped together even though clear distinctions have been made between these programs, warranting separate and distinct studies. In addition, the research and studies generally focus on the Ed.D.’s ability to prepare school leaders, which has led to a consistent call for reform or elimination of the Ed.D. and other educational administration programs based on a subset of program participants (DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012; Haynes et al., 2015; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; McCarthy, 2015; Perrone & Tucker, 2019; Vogel & Weiler, 2014).

**Ed.D. Reform and K-12 School Leaders**

Principal and superintendent preparation continues to be at the forefront of the calls to reform or eliminate the Ed.D. “A Nation at Risk” (1983) pushed assessment to the forefront of American K-12 schools, stating our schools were failing as were the leaders who ran those schools. This report pushed the importance of K-12 leaders’ roles in improving education and student success to the forefront of legislative and policy conversations.
In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) published, “Leaders for America’s Schools.” The report provided a variety of recommendations for improving the preparation of school leaders, specifically focusing on the roles of the superintendent and principal. It suggests that university preparation programs for educational administration transition from focusing on research to focusing on preparing administrators for the “application of knowledge and skills in clinical rather than academic situations” (NCEEA, 1987, p. 19). This report concludes that preparation programs be designed around five standards: (1) the study of administration, (2) the study of the technical core of educational administration and the acquisition of vital administrative skills, (3) the application of research findings and methods to problems, (4) supervised practice, and (5) demonstration of competence. It goes on further to recommend that roughly 300 of the institutions offering programs in school administration should cease to offer the programs if they are unwilling to provide the necessary financial resources required for excellence (p. 11). “Leaders for America’s Schools” states that fewer programs and program participants should exist focusing on the quality of the program and graduates instead of quantity. This report combined all graduate levels of educational administration programs in its analysis and was not specific to the Ed.D. This report set the foundation for many future calls for reform in preparing principals and superintendents, and, perhaps, contributed to the overall focus on evaluating educational administration programs based on such a narrowly defined participant group.

In the “Better Leaders for America’s Schools: A Manifesto” report, The Broad Foundation and The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (2003) suggest that qualifications be at the forefront of preparing principals and superintendents rather than unnecessary credentials. Overall, the report suggested that more innovative programming be created to develop K-12
leaders with the necessary skills required to lead schools and districts. The report suggests that schools should “Recruit for essential skills and attributes first. Supply the specialized knowledge later” (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003, p. 32). The report goes on to suggest that specialized knowledge could be identified, developed, and taught as part of training programs developed by school systems or through partnerships with corporations instead of through standard university programs. The report insists that credentials like certification or licensure do not adequately prepare K-12 leaders for their roles. The report provides a case for eliminating state certification and licensure requirements for administrators in K-12 schools/districts and adds to the growing concern over university programs aimed at preparing academic leaders. The “Better leaders for American’s schools, and “Leaders for America’s Schools” reports broadly defined educational administration programs while narrowly defining the population served by those programs, which does not provide a comprehensive evaluation of a specific program’s impacts. Both reports include the Ed.D. in their overall remarks and recommendations but are not specific to the impacts of the Ed.D. on school leaders’ preparation.

In 2005, Arthur Levine, a former president of Columbia University’s Teachers College produced the report “Educating School Leaders,” which calls into question the effectiveness of educational administration programs offered by higher education institutions. The study had four parts: the leadership challenge in education, the rise and decline of school leadership programs, a profile of school leadership programs, and the quality of existing programs. The study focused on schools of education offering programs aimed at educating school leaders; school leaders were specifically defined in the report as superintendents and principals. Levine broke down the available programs offered in educational administration by Carnegie classification, which included the Baccalaureate General, Baccalaureate Liberal Arts, Masters I, Masters II, Doctoral
Extensive, and Doctoral Intensive. Therefore, this study focused more broadly on all levels of educational administration preparation programs. While the study ultimately makes recommendations for doctoral level programs, the study did not specifically focus on doctoral programs. Levine included a national survey of deans, chairs, and directors of education schools; education school faculty and graduates; and school principals. This research included 28 case studies of schools and departments of education across varying regions, control types, religious affiliations, and Carnegie types. Levine (2005) focused on a nine-point template for assessing the quality of school leadership programs, including clear purpose, curricular coherence, curricular balance, faculty composition, admissions criteria, degree standards, research quality, finances, and assessment/continuous improvement of the program. Levine concluded that the clear majority of the educational administration programs in the United States were poor. Levine found that the programs were not just lacking in three out of nine or six out of nine of the items being assessed but rather tended to fare poorly in all nine areas (p. 45). Overall, the curriculum was irrelevant; the admissions and graduation standards were pathetic; the faculty members were weak; there was inadequate focus on internships or practicums; inappropriate degrees were granted and there was poor research output (Levine, 2005). Below, I will discuss in detail the findings related to what Levine defined as the inappropriateness of the degrees awarded.

Levine (2005) believed that the degrees being awarded in educational administration were generally inappropriate for preparing school leaders. He cited that there were too many different degrees awarded, and there was not clear distinction or consistency in distinction in how programs were offered, calling particular attention to the inconsistency in Ed.D.’s preparing practitioners at some schools and preparing researchers at others. About 14% of institutions studied offered only the Ph.D., 49% only the Ed.D. and 11% offered both the Ph.D. and Ed.D.
Levine (2005) found “the weaker the research mission, the greater the likelihood that the university awarded only the Ed.D.” (p. 42). Levine went on to state that the quality of the institutions offering these programs is considerably inadequate. Not only were the programs inadequate in the curriculum they offered, but the faculty, research agenda, and rigor of the degree were insufficient. Lastly, the resources provided to these programs were found to be mediocre, often leading to a diminished faculty profile. In the end, Levine called for the elimination of the Ed.D. stating, “The problem is that so many practitioners are working towards a degree that was intended to prepare academic researchers and scholars and that has no relevance to their jobs” (p. 43). Again, Levine’s analysis, much like the proceeding reports and their recommendations, was based on a very broad definition of educational administration programs, yet this report goes on to make program specific recommendations about the programs they broadly define. The study does not provide a breakdown of survey responses by degree awarded or even degree level, treating all programs as equal in their intended outcomes and impacts on graduates.

While the field of educational administration is not new, recent research questions the effectiveness of these programs, the level of preparation they provide educational leaders, and whether these programs should be overhauled or eliminated. The connection between student success and strong leadership in K-12 schools and districts is well documented (Barnett, 2005; Devin, 2004; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2007; Waters et al., 2003). This connection became a driving force for overhauling university programs in educational administration, including the Ed.D. Levine’s (2005) study created agency over the next several years, resulting in more calls for the elimination or reform of educational administration programs, including the Ed.D., based on
their ability to prepare principals or superintendents for their roles (DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Haynes et al., 2015; McCarthy, 2015; Perrone & Tucker, 2019; Vogel & Weiler, 2014). In the end, there is very little information available on the specific impacts of Ed.D. programs on program participants who are not serving as principals or superintendents. These details led me to wonder: what about programs that aim to serve a wider constituent base? Should they be assessed and evaluated on their ability to meet the positional requirements of the principalship and superintendency?

**Ed.D. Reform Ideas and Actions**

Beyond the calls to reform or eliminate the Ed.D. based on the outcomes of principals and superintendents, there are continued calls to reform the Ed.D. because of ongoing confusion between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Shulman et al. (2006) made the recommendation to develop a new degree, eliminating the Ed.D. altogether, to offer the Professional Practice Doctorate (P.P.D.) with the goal of “[restoring] respect for the excellent work of education practitioners and leaders” (p. 28). Shulman et al. believed this new degree could do what the Ed.D. could not: effectively meet the needs of professional practice. They acknowledge that the change of name is to separate the new degree from the past of the Ed.D., its historical expectations, and failures. The P.P.D. would be rigorous, challenging, and respectable. However, it would not culminate in the dissertation, as Shulman et al. did not see that as the best way to prepare practitioners. According to Shulman et al. (2006), “P.P.D’s will learn how to conduct applied research and critically read research reports, and will have serious grounding in scholarship” (p. 30). Overall, Shulman et al. believed that a new degree for practitioners in education would create clarity between the Ph.D. and its professional practice counterpart and bring fresh ideas to how higher education institutions can best serve educational leaders. Several others questioned the
appropriateness of the dissertation as the culminating project for the Ed.D. (Dawson, Keen & Philips, 2015; Hochbein & Perry, 2013; Wergin, 2011;), suggesting there was a better way to prepare practitioners.

Wergin (2011) argues for rebooting the Ed.D., arguing that preparing practitioners is no less valid today than it was when the Ed.D. was created. He suggests a reboot with a concentration on four major principles. First, “Education at all levels has an important emancipating, rather than indoctrinating, function and thus is a powerful tool for social change” (Wergin, 2011, p. 121). Wergin suggests that the powerful ideas of Dewey, Linderman, Horton, and Freire should set the foundation for Ed.D. programs. Wergin believes that Ed.D. programs should stop serving “instrumental learning” or learning that prepares someone to deal with their job responsibilities as school administrators. Instead Ed.D. programs should focus on “learning for the purpose of transforming that environment through social and political means for the purpose of developing a more just and democratic society” (Wergin, 2011, p. 124). Second, Wergin believes that doctoral-level expertise in education is useful for a wider variety of professionals—not just those in K-12 school settings. Colleges and schools offering these programs should stop narrowly focusing on school administrators and recognize the more universal learning and development these programs are able to offer. Wergin challenges colleges and universities to reconsider the mission of education in the modern world.

More than two hundred Ed.D. programs in the United States and elsewhere have at least an espoused commitment to reflective practice and attend to matters of educational justice. But nearly all of them restrict their scope to school administrators, implying that educational leadership—and thus energy for reform—should come from within the schooling system, and from the top of the system. The emphasis of most Ed.D. programs
on teaching such topics as school finance and governance further illustrates this narrow understanding of education today. They effectively ignore the hundreds of other settings that need strong, effective educational practice as well as reflection and inquiry into that practice. (2011, p. 125)

Third, the Ed.D. must extend beyond the master’s degree and emphasize continued scholarship within professional practice, not simply being proficient in practice according to Wergin’s vision. Therefore, Ed.D. programs should incorporate both theory and practice resulting in practice-based theory. Fourth, Wergin sees the Ed.D. not as a less-than version of the Ph.D. but as a program with a distinct purpose, learning outcomes and capstone assessment that demonstrates expertise in practice. Wergin (2011) suggests that the Ed.D. include a signature pedagogy, which focuses on “systematic inquiry into practice, engaging in critical reflection with others in a manner that informs practice and models social action for the profession” (p. 130).

Furthermore, the capstone for the Ed.D. should cease to include a dissertation that focuses on an individual’s pursuit of knowledge and instead be reframed to include the collaborative nature of actual practice. Wergin suggests instead utilizing participatory action research (PAR), which incorporates real issues in practice and focuses on practicality instead of generalizable truth.

Instead of rebooting the Ed.D., Guthrie (2009), in a special issue on the education doctorate, concluded that there is a need to modernize the Ed.D. and establish firm standards for the Ed.D. Guthrie (2009) stated that those who call for a singular doctorate in education are shortsighted and that rather more exhaustive work should be done to separate the two degrees “establishing an individual dignity for each” (p. 8). Guthrie acknowledged that the work will not be easy but some institutions that have committed to these reform efforts have experienced success and others should follow. While Guthrie (2009) recognized a handful of programs
produce high achieving and highly professional graduates, these programs are the exception. Guthrie admitted that to improve the perception of the Ed.D., wholesale changes need to be made at all institutions offering the Ed.D. Guthrie suggested these changes and standards could be developed through the development of an elite compact or a national academy of educational leadership. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate attempted to do just as Guthrie suggested.

In response to the Levine study, in 2007 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching embarked on the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), aimed to make the Ed.D. more relevant for “the advanced preparation of practitioners” and an altogether stronger program (Zambo et al., 2013, p. 125). This was in direct contrast to Levine’s suggestion to close these types of programs indefinitely. In addition, the group aimed to clearly delineate between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D., which many believed caused the diminished view of the Ed.D. (Zambo et al., 2013). At its inception the CPED included 56 colleges and schools of education; together they worked to reaffirm a vision, collaborate, and participate in critical discourse about Ed.D. programs. Collectively, the CPED envisions “Ed.D. graduates as stewards of the practice, scholarly practitioners, capable of blending their practical wisdom with their professional knowledge to identify, frame and solve the problems of practice they face” (Zambo et al., 2013, p. 126). The CPED worked to create a clear delineation between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. by defining the Ed.D. According to the CPED (n.d.) website, the Professional Doctorate in Education:

1. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.
2. Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities.
3. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships.

4. Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.

5. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.

6. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice. (para. 5)

The CPED continues its work today with nearly 111 institutional members. The CPED’s website includes profiles of graduates, highlighting the impacts and outcomes of CPED programs on graduates serving a variety of roles providing informal evidence of the diversity of constituents served by these programs. Zambo et al. (2013) surveyed 296 students participating in CPED institutions to gauge how students felt about their Ed.D. programs. Using a six-point Likert scale (six = strongly agree to one = strongly disagree), participants ranked their program against the six CPED principles the Ed.D. programs aimed to accomplish. Overall, respondents scored the following principles at a 5.0 or above (in highest to lowest order): learning to collaborate and form partnerships, learning to apply what they learned to solve problems of practice, learning to connect theory to their practice, becoming leaders working toward positive change, and becoming scholarly practitioners. The remaining two principles, learning to engage with diverse communities and work toward social justice and learning through authentic experiences, scored 4.73 and 4.55 respectively (Zambo et al., 2013, p. 131). Overall, according to Zambo et al., the changes CPED made were making positive improvements on the programs and the students. This demonstrated that higher education institutions had the knowledge and wherewithal to make the
program improvements and to improve leadership learning gains for students seeking leadership positions. In contrast, according to McCarthy (2015), the efforts by the CPED to distinguish the Ed.D. from the Ph.D. “had only modest success” (p. 418).

The Ed.D.’s history is murky, misunderstood, and complicated. Contributing to the lack of clarity is the absence of baseline data, the misalignment of Ed.D. programs as research degrees, the persistent mix-and-mingle approach to data analysis across degrees and fields of study, the overemphasis on school leader preparation, and the variability of views on how to reform the Ed.D. All these issues beg the question: what could students possibly learn or gain from participating in or graduating from an Ed.D. program? As stated previously, there is very limited research in this area. However, below, I will identify what research does exist which highlights the learning, development, or career outcomes of Ed.D. program participants or graduates.

### Impact of Ed.D. programs on Participants and Graduates

Only a handful of studies (Eidman, 2002; Humphrey, 2002; Thomson, 2018; Vera, 2012;) somewhat addressed the learning, development, and career impacts or outcomes of participants or graduates of Ed.D. programs. In this section, I discuss each study and its findings. Overall, the studies include the experiences and outcomes of program participants beyond the principal and superintendent roles. While these studies do not focus specifically on the experiences of non-traditional educational leaders, their perspectives are included in the findings. Each employed a different methodological approach in their research. Thomson (2018) utilized a Q method qualitative examination to gain understanding as to the perceived benefits the Ed.D. had on 37 individuals across eight CPED Ed.D. programs. Vera (2012) conducted a mixed method study utilizing survey data and interviews with both current students and alumni and their experiences
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of the University of Texas, El Paso’s Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration program. There was a total of 99 participants in the survey of which 43 were program alumni; 12 of the alumni continued in the study and completed an interview (Vera, 2012, p. vi). Eidmann (2002) utilized qualitative telephone interviews in a study of 32 alumni attending one of seven California state universities offering either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in educational or organizational leadership (p. 53). Finally, Humphrey (2003) primarily utilized survey research in a study of 149 graduates of the University of Central Florida’s Educational Leadership doctoral program (p.30).

Thomson (2018) conducted a Q Method qualitative examination on the perceived benefits of Ed.D. programs with current and past students in eight CPED Ed.D. programs. Thomson found that the Ed.D. participants fell into one of six groups, when identifying the benefits they gained from participating in an Ed.D. program. The first group identified gaining skills as researchers as the primary benefit for enrolling in the program. The second group saw the main benefit as increased reflection and self-awareness, with importance on introspection and individual identity. The third group chose the Ed.D.’s ability to increase earnings and open job opportunities. The fourth group sought the credential and recognition; they valued adding the credential to their name or signature. Group five wanted to become change agents interested in changing the status quo. Finally, group six chose the Ed.D. to promote personal change. These findings illuminate the benefits program participants expected or experienced from participating in an Ed.D. program. The study recognized not every participant is seeking licensure as a principal or superintendent as the study includes the perspectives and experiences of participants inside and outside of K-12 education.

Vera (2012) conducted a mixed method research study to better understand the education experience of students and program alumni who were part of an Ed.D. program in educational
leadership. This study looked at both current students and program alumni and included program participants in K-12 education, higher education, government, private sector, and other non-profit organizations. The findings showed that 18.6% of alumni reported earning honors and/or awards post-graduation (p. 104). There was a 17.9% change in employment with mobility to higher education post-graduation, demonstrating the career impacts on graduates (p. 106).

Additionally, 95.3% of alumni surveyed identified gaining knowledge in the field of education as a very important influence for enrolling in the program, and 72.1% identified contributing to society as an educator as a very important influence for enrolling in the Ed.D. (p. 111). Finally, program alumni identified a variety of positive experiences post-graduation including: the ability to apply knowledge, the applicability of research to daily work, and an increase in opportunities after earning the credential.

Eidmann (2002) used qualitative interviews to study the perceptions of alumni who completed an Ed.D. in educational or organizational leadership. The study involved alumni and faculty from seven California universities that offered either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in educational or organizational leadership. The study looked at admission requirements, program curriculum, delivery methods, accessibility, program costs, faculty profile, faculty industry knowledge, completion rate, time-to-degree, alumni post-graduation leadership positions, assessment methods, and alumni satisfaction. The study found that data were not readily available on alumni’s post-graduation outcomes and success; only two of the institutions had complete data available. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) program identified 12% of their alumni as holding site-level leadership positions, 26% district-level, 27% higher education leadership positions, 9% noneducation-related and 23% are administrators or leaders (Eidmann, 2002, p. 104). The University of La Verne (ULV) stated 29% of their alumni hold site-level
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leadership positions, 25% hold district-level, 22 higher education, 10% noneducation related, and
15% superintendents (p. 126).

Alumni identified the type of professional or personal development the program satisfied. The most frequent response was the personal satisfaction they received from obtaining the goal they had set for themselves in completing the program. The next most frequent was the program opening career opportunities and advancement. There was a tie for the third most frequent response from alumni: either applicability of the program to their working lives or acquisition of research skills. This study helped to identify the variety of students these programs serve and the impact and opportunities experienced by alumni.

Humphrey (2003) used a survey, review of archival data, interviews with program administrators, and a review of dissertation topics to conduct a study of 149 graduates of the University of Central Florida’s Ed.D. in educational leadership program (p. 9). The study aimed to address the characteristics of graduates; their career patterns, further knowledge, and preparation needed; the core course requirements’ ability to prepare them for their jobs; and the connection between students’ dissertation topics and program emphasis. Humphrey found that of the 149 respondents, 40 worked in higher education and 109 worked in K-12 (p. 60). The respondents included 132 white, 11 African-American, five Hispanic/Latino/a, one Asian-Pacific Islander and no Native-American alumni (pp 60-61). The gender split was 98 female and 51 males (p. 61). In total, 91.5% of graduates stated high satisfaction with professors’ knowledge and competence, and 81% were highly satisfied with professors’ availability (Humphrey, 2003, p. 63). Nearly 77% of alumni were satisfied with the motivation of their peers, and 75.3% were highly satisfied with library resources and services (p. 63). The study also identified alumni’s motivation for pursuing the program: 86.9% of alumni participating indicated geographic
location as highly important; 57.2% identified ranked strength/closeness of advisor-student relationship; and 52.8% said program requirements were highly important (p. 65). Overall, alumni were very satisfied with the clarity of the program objectives, communication, difficulty of courses, program procedures, quality of courses, flexibility, required paperwork, and scheduling of courses. Alumni were least satisfied with availability of job information (24.5%) and program orientation (51.4%) (p. 69). As far as the factors influencing their decision to pursue the Ed.D., personal fulfillment/satisfaction (95.2%), gaining a deeper understanding of educational leadership (80.9%), and increased problem-solving skills as an educational leader (75.3%) were identified as the most important (p. 76). Conversely, meeting state administrative certification requirements for K-12 (91.4%), needing a doctorate to remain in present position (82.7%), and anticipation of monetary gains after degree completion (32.3%) were the least important (p. 76).

These were the only research studies identified as researching either program learning and development outcomes or career impacts of Ed.D. program participants. All studies included program participants or alumni serving in roles outside those of the principal and superintendent. In the case of Eidmann (2002), the study includes both Ed.D. and Ph.D. program participants. Eidmann provided some insight into post-graduation career outcomes although only two universities systematically collected data on their alumni. Alumni also expressed strong satisfaction with the program and the program’s ability to support them in meeting their individual goals, improving their career opportunities, improving their skills on the job, and cultivating their research skills. Thomson’s (2012) quantitative study identified the perceived benefits graduates experienced after participating in an Ed.D. program, broadening the research to include voices outside of K-12 building and district administration. Vera (2012) provided
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some data on alumni awards/honors and post-graduation career mobility in addition to the knowledge alumni gained. Humphrey (2003) provided the most extensive research on Ed.D. program alumni program learning, development and career outcomes but primarily utilized survey data. These limited studies suggest that research on Ed.D. program graduates and participants’ learning, development and career impacts and outcomes are still lacking and could benefit from a purely qualitative analysis.

The History of the Ed.D. at the University of St. Thomas

The Ed.D. in leadership was first offered at the University of St. Thomas during the 1987-88 academic year. From the program’s inception, it was offered as an open cohort model. An open cohort refers to students who take a sequence of core courses with a dedicated group of students but then have the flexibility to take their collateral courses with students outside their cohort and within their specific area of interest. These cohorts and the structure of the program focused on an “interdisciplinary ethos” aimed to educate leaders in K-12 schools, higher education, health administration, police, corporate, public agencies, and other organizations with a focus on lifelong learning and development (Doctoral Handbook, 2015). The University of St. Thomas’s Ed.D. program is classified in IPEDS as a 13.0401 CIP of educational leadership and administration, generally identifying the program as serving a broad spectrum of educational leaders. The program was designed to serve working professionals.

The program coursework requirements were divided into three areas: core courses, collateral courses, and research courses. In total, students were required to complete 66 credits. The core courses consisted of 18 credits that must be taken as a cohort. These core courses provided foundational knowledge on leaders; organizations; critical issues within political, social, and economic contexts; power, freedom, and change; ethics; and narrative in leadership
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(Doctoral Handbook, 2015) The first two core credits were taught in a four day/evening bootcamp where cohort members stayed in the residence halls on campus Sunday-Thursday. Students were required to take 24 collateral coursework credits, which provided an opportunity for students to pick courses that aligned with their individual interests and professional goals. Within these collateral courses, there were recommended tracks for students interested in student affairs/higher education, administrative licensure to become a principal or superintendent, music education, international leadership, public policy, and others (Doctoral Handbook, 2015). Finally, students took 24 research credits. Of those 24 credits, six credits provided a foundation in survey research and qualitative methods. Three credits assisted students in framing their research question for their dissertation and preparing for their dissertation proposal. The final 12 credits were for students to complete their dissertation.

According to the Doctoral Handbook (2015), doctoral students learn the foundations of leadership in the following areas:

1.) Deepening their understanding of leadership and organizational theory
2.) Analyzing critical issues in education related to equity, global interdependence, conflicting cultural values, and accelerating social and technological change
3.) Examining ethical dimensions of policy and decision making
4.) Utilizing research, critical analysis and imagination in planning, problem solving, and evaluation
5.) Increase knowledge and understanding in specialized areas of education and leadership. (p. 4)

The program’s foundation is both theoretical and practical. The expectation is that program participants use leadership and organizational theory within an interdisciplinary context and
address practical issues as leaders. While the program’s stated learning outcomes resemble the guiding principles and framework established by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), the University of St. Thomas was not an institutional member. The aim of the curriculum, as stated by the program’s learning outcomes, was to encourage or prepare participants to:

1.) challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement by themselves, faculty and fellow students and come to a more complex understanding of themselves and their students or clients;
2.) form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world;
3.) form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and their life’s calling;
4.) improve their professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout their entire career; and
5.) seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action. (Doctoral Handbook, 2015, p. 9)

This program served a total of 30 cohorts (J. Grossklaus, personal communication, April 12, 2021). In the fall of 2017, what was then the College of Education, Leadership and Counseling (CELC) announced the closure of the college, department of leadership and subsequently the existing Ed.D. in leadership. CELC split into the School of Education and the Graduate School of Professional Psychology (J. Kreitzer, personal communication, September 6, 2017). The University retained offering an Ed.D., but the new program, which was named the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Learning, is housed in the School of Education and focuses
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primarily on serving K-12, higher education, and adult education leaders (University of St. Thomas, n.d.). This new program’s focused audience contrasts the previous program’s interdisciplinary focus. While the focus of the program has changed, the CIP code remains 13.0401 educational leadership and administration, general.

The University of St. Thomas’ Ed.D. in leadership program was one of the 143 programs reclassified by the SED in 2010, and therefore, after 2010, Ed.D. degree recipients from the University of St. Thomas no longer participated in the SED (NCSES & NSF, Data Explorer, n.d.). This means the Ed.D. program at the University of St. Thomas was determined by the SED to primarily serve practitioners as the program did require a dissertation. Similarly, when reporting data to IPEDS, the University of St. Thomas includes their Ed.D. awards in the category of Doctor’s Degree – Research/Scholarship, which lumps the Ed.D. awards with Ph.D. awards (IPEDS, Look up an institution, n.d.). Consequently, the categorization of the program in the SED as a practitioner-focused degree and in IPEDS as a research/scholarship degree are conflicting and clearly exhibit a practical example of how these programs are inconsistently reported therefore rendering any national data available as unreliable. However, institutions generally make enrollment and graduation data available to their community. The University of St. Thomas’ reports on awards changed several times between 1990-2020, which made identifying the number of Ed.D.s awarded in leadership difficult. However, using the institutions degrees conferred, outcomes factbook, and historical academic outcomes reports, I was able to determine roughly 397 students earned an Ed.D. in leadership from the University of St. Thomas between 1995-2020. This demonstrates that institutions can provide this information, but there is not currently a single entity collecting and analyzing this information across the United States. Additionally, when seeking contact, post-graduation outcomes, or current position data on
participants or graduates of the Ed.D. in leadership at the University of St. Thomas, the data collection, storage, and analysis process is even more haphazard. No data is available that breaks down graduates by educational sector (i.e. K-12, postsecondary, adult education) or by industry (education, healthcare, business, or any other field), meaning even at the institutional level, we do not have a good handle on the variety of leaders the program serves.

At the end of the Ed.D. in leadership’s existence at the University of St. Thomas, there was no process for systematically keeping record of program graduates (J. Grossklaus, personal communication, August 22, 2019). This missing information suggests the program did not often use program graduates’ experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the program’s impacts and outcomes. I was able to locate three dissertations that studied the Ed.D. program in leadership at the University of St. Thomas and will provide an overview of those studies below.

**Prior Research**

Warring (1991) produced the first dissertation studying the Ed.D. in leadership at the University St. Thomas a few short years after the program’s inaugural year. Warring’s case study focused primarily on the cohort impact on group dynamics and students’ ability to learn as participants in an Ed.D. in leadership program. Over a two-year period, Warring observed and evaluated students’ perceptions of cohort members interaction and growth and how that perception changed over time. Warring concluded that the cohort model creates a dynamic and engaged way of learning and knowing. The cohort allowed for members to practice the knowledge they learned with a dedicated group of people. The primary focus of Warring’s study was on the impact of the cohort model and was less concerned with the overall impacts and outcomes of the program on participants and graduates.
A few years later, Donnelly’s (1997) study, also a case study, outlined the changes the University of St. Thomas School of Education experienced after the development and implementation of the Doctorate of Education in leadership program. Donnelly used the structural, political, human resource, and symbolism lenses to describe the organizational change experienced by the school (Bolman & Deal, 2008). For the most part, Donnelly provides a history of the program’s formative years. The dissertation provides a foundation for understanding the purpose behind the development of the program, its aim for the future, concerns that existed over the program’s creation, and stakeholder’s explanation of the program’s values. Donnelly’s dissertation provides insight into the program creators, the program initiation process, and the impact the program had on the school. Donnelly’s study did not focus on the impacts or outcomes of the program on participants or graduates.

Nearly 15-years later, Sturdevant (2012) studied the impacts of the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program on 21 graduates via a case study that used individual interviews. The study included one graduate from cohorts 1-18 who graduated between 1993 and 2010. Sturdevant located graduates through an Ed.D. Directory. The study included 13 educators and eight participants outside of the field of education (banking, consultants, medical) (p. 39). The study found that the program positively affected students’ self-confidence, self-satisfaction, and self-understanding. It was noted in the study that several participants became more critical in their thinking, more accepting of differing perspectives and diversity, and more appreciating of others. According to Sturdevant (2012), “the program reinforced or changed the leadership style of 17 participants to one emphasizing relationships and collaboration with others” (p 75). The focus of this study was to understand the broad effects the program had on graduates; it was not specific to their learning, development, and career outcomes. The study also collected data across
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several cohorts instead of one cohort and included participants outside the field of education. While this study adds to the gap in the research providing insight into the impacts of an Ed.D. program on a more diverse set of participants, its focus is too broad. While three research studies were conducted on the Ed.D. in leadership at the University of St. Thomas, my research aims to understand the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort of non-traditional educational leaders participating in and/or graduating from an Ed.D. program, and is therefore distinct from the previous research conducted.

Relevant Analytical Theory

This study explores the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort of non-traditional educational leaders who participated in an Ed.D. program in leadership. Andragogy, Transformative Learning Theory, Reflective practice, and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs inform this study by providing a framework to analyze the experiences and outcomes of participants, describe learning and development that occurred, and explain worldview shifts.

Andragogy

Andragogy, or adult learning theory, is the framework or set of assumptions identifying how adults learn (Knowles, 1977). Andragogy employs a different set of assumptions than pedagogy. According to Knowles there are five assumptions about Andragogy or self-directed learning. First, when thinking about an adult learner, Andragogy assumes adults are increasingly self-directed. Second, adult learners’ experiences are a rich resource for learning. Third, their readiness to learn is built from their life tasks and problems. Fourth, learning for adult learners is often problem or task centered (i.e., they learn to solve a problem or complete a task). Fifth, adult learners are motivated by internal incentives and curiosity. Beyond these five assumptions Knowles (1977) identified seven process elements that support adults in their learning. The
climate for an adult learner must be informal, mutually respectful, consensual, collaborative, and supportive. Planning in adult learning must include the adult learner and be agreed upon through participatory decision-making. To diagnose the needs of the adult learner, teacher and learner must come to a mutual assessment. When setting learning goals for the adult learner, the adult learner must identify their goals and be able to negotiate with the teacher to arrive at mutually agreed upon goals. The design of the learning plan takes place through learning projects and learning content, sequenced in terms of the adult learner’s individual readiness. The learning activities are often experimental, inquiry-based projects, or independent study. Finally, evaluation of learning is done by mutual assessment of self-collected evidence (Knowles, 1977). These assumptions and process elements create a framework for adult learning and help frame learning experiences, which capitalize on adult learner motivation and ultimately, result in the obtainment of goals or outcomes set by the adult learner.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Learning takes place in many ways and many theories exist that analyze how students learn. An important adult learning theory helping us to understand how adults learn is Transformative Learning Theory. For the purposes of this paper, I use the integrative theory, developed by Kroth and Cranton (2014) and derived from Mezirow’s (1997) original theory. I use those theories in conjunction with Dirkx (2001), Boyd and Myers (1988); Jung (1971), Kegan (2000), Tennant (2012), and Belenky and Stanton (2000). According to Kroth and Cranton (2014), Transformative Learning is

A process by which individuals engage in the cognitive processes of critical reflection and self-reflection, intuitive and imaginative explorations of their psyche and spirituality, and developmental changes leading to a deep shift in perspective and habits of mind that
are more open, permeable, discriminating and better justified. Individual change may lead to social change, and social change may promote individual change. (p. 9)

The purpose of Transformative Learning Theory is to better understand how we can change our individual frames of reference that have developed over years. According to Mezirow (1997), “a frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view” (p. 5). Habits of mind, Mezirow explains, are generalizations and habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, determined by a set of assumptions developed over long periods of time, which makes them hard to break. Points of view, however, are malleable, changing as we reflect and consider the need to modify our assumptions, which allows us to try to understand someone else’s perspective (Mezirow, 2007).

Transforming frames of reference occurs by critically reflecting on assumptions derived from habits of mind and points of view. Reading a book, hearing a different point of view, engaging in task-oriented problem solving, or self-reflecting one’s thoughts can lead to transformative critical reflection (Mezirow, 2007). According to Mezirow (2007), the Transformative Learning Theory includes four processes: (a) elaborating on an existing point of view, (b) establishing a new point of view, (c) transforming our point of view, and (d) transforming our habit of mind by “becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized biases” (p.7). Transforming our habits of mind is a large-scale reconstructing of the ways we think, and these do not happen very often as they are extremely difficult to accomplish. Learning requires discomfort: “We do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2007, p. 7).

Understanding how Transformative Learning works is important for understanding how we develop educational leaders. One key aspect of this theory involves the transformation of
assumptions about oneself and the world. By testing assumptions, leaders are challenged to think about problems, new ideas, and opportunities differently, allowing them to make multifaceted and dynamic decisions. The question becomes: how with all the demands of our organizations today, do we ensure leaders participate in the Transformative Learning that continues to reshape how they respond and react to the problems, the issues, and the tasks they need to accomplish? If we are able understand whether transformational learning occurs within participants in Ed.D. leadership programs, we can better address this question.

**Reflective Practice**

Another adult learning theory is Schon’s Reflective Practice and Organizational Learning Theory. Reflective practice is the practice of individuals becoming aware of their implicit knowledge base and then capitalizing on it to learn from their experiences (Schon, 1987). Schon was interested in many aspects of organizational behavior and understanding how professionals come to know something through practice. He ultimately broke down Reflective Practice into three phases: (a) knowing in action, (b) reflection in action, and (c) reflection on action. According to Schon (1987), knowing in action is also known as tacit knowledge where practitioners call upon prior experience to determine how to act. Reflection in action is reflecting while performing a task. For example, when delivering a presentation, the presenter may infer confusion based on the faces of the audience members. Based on that inference, the presenter may quickly decide to communicate with clearer language until the audience appears to understand better. Lastly, reflection on action is reflection after an event with the intention of this leading to a cyclical practice where an individual reflects and readjusts their actions and behaviors the next time around. Ultimately, educational leaders need to become experts in leadership, which requires an extensive amount of problem solving; therefore, Schon (1987)
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theorizes it would require each leader to have several experiences to draw upon to help inform their reflection in action capabilities. He believes that reflection in action is pinnacle for professional expertise; therefore, our leader development programs and organizations need to focus on allowing for a variety of experiences for each leader to develop. Professional practice leadership programs need to provide experiences for leaders to build their know-how capabilities and to be better prepared for their roles as leaders.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs establishes an understanding of the motivations inherent in individuals (Ewen, 2009). According to Ewen, (2009) Maslow classifies motives into deficiency motives and growth motives. Deficiency motives are “possessed by everyone, and involve important lacks within us that must be satisfied by appropriate objects or people” (Ewen, 2009, p 205). Conversely, growth motives are higher and healthier ways of functioning but can only be reached once deficiency motives are met.

Growth is, in itself, a rewarding and exciting process…the fulfilling of yearnings and ambitions, like that of being a good doctor; the acquisition of admired skills, like playing the violin or being a good carpenter; the steady increase of understanding about people or about the universe, or about oneself; the development of creativeness in whatever field; or most important, simply the ambition to be a good human being. (Maslow, 1968, p 29-31)

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1968) identifies physiological needs at the lowest level of the hierarchy. These are needs associated with satisfying hunger, thirst, sleep, and other basic needs. Most physiological needs are deficiency motives. Once physiological needs are established, an individual’s next motivator is the pursuit of a stable, predictable, and chaos and anxiety free
environment (Ewen, 2009). If individuals are unable to satisfy this need of a calm and secure environment, they cannot move onto the third level in the motivational hierarchy, which is the need for belongingness and love. When individuals are at this level of the hierarchy, they are motivated by the need for affectionate and caring relationships with friends and family (Maslow, 1968). Once a solid foundation in belonging is established, an individual’s motivation turns to esteem needs, which means they are motivated by their need for superiority, respect, and increased self-confidence. The final level in the hierarchy is that of self-actualization where individuals fulfill their own innate potential (Ewen, 2009). This is the highest level of the hierarchy and is generally only reached as an older adult as time and age allow for the satisfying of needs related to obtaining further education, to identifying development, and to finding love and work. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs can help to develop a deeper understanding of the individual development and learning outcomes and career impacts of participants and graduates of Ed.D. programs. Each participant’s motivational needs and subsequent outcomes and impacts relate to where they are on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Gaining a deeper understanding of participants’ motivational needs helps us understand students’ goal(s) or purpose(s) for participating in an Ed.D. program and highlights individuals’ barriers to obtaining the highest place in the hierarchy.

Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter provided a synopsis of the complexities involved in understanding the impacts and outcomes of participants and graduates of Ed.D. programs. It highlights the historical confusion between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in educational administration and the ongoing mix and mingle approach to quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. I discussed the roles of the principalship and superintendency and their influence on the calls for reform and
elimination of the Ed.D. in educational administration, highlighting a gap in the existing literature which this study addresses. I shared ideas and actions for reforming the Ed.D.. I detailed the existing research on the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. participants and graduates, further illuminating just how limited the existing research is in this area. I, then, placed the University of St. Thomas’ Ed.D. in leadership program in the context of the literature. I provided a history of the program, program requirements, intended learning outcomes, intended audience of the program, and recent reforms. Finally, I laid out the theoretical framework of Andragogy, Transformative Learning Theory, Reflective Practice and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which can be used to understand the outcomes and impacts of Ed.D. programs on participants and graduates. In the next chapter, I present the methodology utilized in this study.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of the University of St. Thomas’ Ed.D. program in leadership on a cohort of leaders working in non-traditional educational leadership roles. I believe this study will help higher education institutions offering the Ed.D. in educational administration to better understand the learning, development and career outcomes or impacts of participants and graduates of these professional practice doctoral programs. Additionally, this research will help developers of Ed.D. educational administration programs understand the goals or purposes participants have for enrolling in the program, whether those goals or purposes were realized, and how graduates are using the Ed.D. credential in their personal or professional lives. In this chapter, I explain the research methodology utilized in this study. I further explain why a qualitative research design and case study methodology were selected. I provide rationale for the selection of participants and for the methods used to conduct interviews and a focus group. I discuss ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

**Research Design**

**Qualitative Research**

This research aimed to understand how an Ed.D. program influenced the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of participants and graduates. I conducted research using a qualitative research design and qualitative methods. I used a single case study research method. I collected data through in-depth interviews and a focus group of program participants and graduates. The interviews and focus group provided insights into participants’ experiences in the Ed.D. program, what learning and development they experienced, career
impacts, cohort influence, and what effect, if any, the credential had on them post-graduation. I used a qualitative research design to provide an in-depth understanding into the learning, development, and career outcomes of non-traditional leaders in a cohort-based Ed.D. program. This study sought to build knowledge by understanding individuals’ unique viewpoints after participating or graduating from an Ed.D. program, making a qualitative research design the most appropriate choice (Creswell, 2013).

Case Study

Within qualitative research, there are a variety of methodologies to choose from. For this study, I used a multiple instrument single case study research methodology. The purpose for using a multiple instrument case study was to approach the research from multiple perspectives addressing the full complexity of the research problem (Yin, 2017). Due to the nature of this research, a case study was a natural fit. A case study aims to focus on a specific situation or phenomenon and puts boundaries in place, allowing the case to narrow a broad field of research into a more specific research topic (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the phenomenon under examination is the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of Ed.D. program participants and graduates. The case is bounded by several contexts: the participants themselves, the cohort, the core coursework, their experiences in one cohort-based Ed.D. program, and their non-traditional leadership roles in education. Qualitative case studies allow for in-depth data, leading to insightful answers to the research questions. This case study allowed for a meaningful understanding of the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort of Ed.D. program participants and graduates.
Research Process and Procedures

I discuss the research process and procedures in this section including seeking and receiving the appropriate approval to conduct the research, the setting in which the research takes place, identification of how participants were selected and recruited, and the data collection and analysis processes. Furthermore, I identify and discuss researcher biases, the limitations of this study, the validity and reliability of the research, and ethical considerations.

Institutional Review Board

Prior to conducting this research an application was sent to the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) [IRB#1357174]. The Institutional Review Board ensures that the research study adheres to safeguards for the safety, rights, and welfare of those participating in the study. The IRB application process required providing a summary of the research being conducted and methodology used, participant information, process for recruiting participants, identification of any risks or benefits to participants, the process for ensuring confidentiality of data collected during the study, and information on ensuring participants understood informed consent. The application was approved, allowing the study to move forward. Participants provided their permission to participate in the study through an informed consent discussion and by signing the IRB approved signed consent form.

Research Setting

A private not-for-profit Catholic university in Minnesota with a cohort-based leadership Ed.D. program was the primary setting for this research. The University of St. Thomas is a 150-year-old Catholic university, educating “students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good” (Doctoral Handbook, 2015, p. 6). The university has seven schools and serves just under 10,000 students. When this
research began, the Ed.D. program in leadership resided within the College of Education, Leadership and Counseling (CELC). The Ed.D. program began in 1987 with its first cohort and the program enrolled its final cohort in 2016 (Doctoral handbook, 2015). The program served a total of 30 cohorts.

The Ed.D. in leadership program at the University of St. Thomas served working professionals from a variety of fields. The program required a total of 66 credits to complete the degree. Participants were required to complete six core courses (18 credits) in the theoretical foundations of leadership. These core courses were taken as a cohort. The first core cohort course required cohort members to stay in on-campus housing with cohort members for four days. All other cohort courses were held roughly once a month on Friday evenings and all day on Saturdays. In addition to these core courses, students were required to complete 24 credits in graduate-level collateral courses and 24 credits in research methodology and dissertation coursework. All coursework had to be completed within seven years of the first cohort course.

The admission requirements for the program included academic records demonstrating completion of both a baccalaureate and master’s degree, the completion of standardized testing (MAT, GRE or GMAT), writing proficiency, leadership experience, collaboration, and an interview with program faculty and program graduates. The program had an interdisciplinary philosophy. As stated in the doctoral handbook (2015), “this doctoral program is intentional about its focus on an interdisciplinary ethos. We encompass a diversity of participants, pedagogy, and theoretical strategies, with the application of multiple methodological techniques” (p. 6).
Selection and Recruitment of Participants

The cohort was predefined by the admissions process when the group was admitted into Cohort 28, which began in the summer of 2014. Originally the cohort consisted of 13 individuals; two of the cohort members left the program within the first year, reducing the cohort to 11 members. As the researcher, I am one of the members of the cohort, and while I included my story in chapter one, I was not interviewed, nor did I act as a participant within the focus group. All 11 of the cohort members, including myself, took their core courses together and participated in a one-week immersive experience, aimed at creating community amongst the cohort. All ten remaining cohort members were asked to participate in the study. However, one cohort member completed all core coursework with Cohort 28 but ultimately enrolled with a new cohort in the newly created Leadership and Learning Ed.D. program, therefore making that student outside the parameters of the study. Invitation and recruitment occurred through personal email invites, the cohort’s Facebook group, LinkedIn messages, and text messages. All nine remaining cohort members agreed to participate in the study.

Of the nine cohort members, one participant had not completed the program at the time of this study and therefore, was only interviewed once. The professional identity of this participant is a leader at a community college in higher education. The gender breakdown of the remaining eight cohort members who completed the program is three men and five women. The professional identities include four teachers: one teaching in secondary education; two teaching in middle school; and the other one teaching elementary education. Three cohort members are faculty members in higher education who also have full-time jobs: one in corporate computing, one as a faculty advisor for a fellow’s program, and the other as a religious educational leader and non-profit owner. The final cohort member works as a community organizational leader. I
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interviewed six of these cohort members during their All but Dissertation (ABD) status, meaning they had completed all core, research, and collateral course requirements and only had their dissertation work remaining. I, then, interviewed them again after they graduated. On average, the second interview occurred between six months and two years after the initial interview. The other two program graduates were interviewed between three months and 18 months after they had graduated. The age range of all nine participants was between 35-55.

The cohort members were diverse in a variety of ways, including life experiences, educational background leading to the Ed.D. program, family dynamics, levels of leadership experience, area of experience/expertise/interest in education, religious beliefs, and diversity of thought. The cohort had a good mix of male and female participants. However, one important area that was lacking was diversity within the area of race/ethnicity. Even with the original cohort of 13, only three (23%) cohort members were people of color. The racial/ethnic diversity of those interviewed was even fewer with only one (11%) person of color among the nine participants.
Table 2

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age at start of program</th>
<th>Person of color (Y/N)</th>
<th>Years of work experience</th>
<th>Years between Masters and Ed.D.</th>
<th>Education Sector</th>
<th>Graduation Status as of 12/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Graduated September 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduating spring 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The study was designed to explore the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of these non-traditional leaders in education after participating in or graduating from their cohort-based Ed.D. program. In addition, it identified participants’ purpose(s) or goal(s) for participating in the program and whether the program satisfied those purpose. Finally, the study highlighted the ways program graduates were using the credential and the impacts they believe the credential had on their professional advancement.

I collected data from these participants via individual interviews and a focus group meeting. The list of interview questions and focus group questions can be found in Appendix A. The interview questions covered the following broad categories: background information, change/transformation, understanding of leadership, learning/development, and impact of the cohort-model. When this research first began, I had identified two different groups to interview.
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The first group was made up of members of my cohort who had reached ABD status by the spring of 2019. Originally, the other group was meant to be graduates of the program who worked in academic leadership in higher education. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate or connect with program graduates who were active in their leadership roles within higher education to learn about the impact of the program on their development and careers. I conducted my first interviews with the ABD group between February 1, 2019 and January 11, 2020 while in search of the second group of participants. In the summer of 2020, I changed the focus of this research to the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of one cohort. This led to six cohort members being interviewed twice.

For those who participated in two rounds of interviews, the first round of interviews aimed to elicit how each person experienced the program with a focus on their individual motivations and goals for enrolling in the program and the learning and development they experienced. The second round of interviews aimed to understand additional insight into their learning and development; what career outcomes, if any, they experienced; the credentials impact and how they were using it; and what influence the cohort-model had on their learning and development. Additionally, this second round of interviews worked to understand if their goal(s) or purpose(s) for enrolling were satisfied post-graduation. Overall, the primary purpose for using interviews was to understand their experience in the program and how the program influenced their overall development in their own words.

Those participants not completing the program in May 2019 were asked a combination of the first round and second round interview questions (see appendix A for exact questions). For these participants, I wanted to understand, similar to the May 2019 program graduates’ group, the learning and development experienced; what career outcomes, if any, they experienced; the
impact of the cohort model, their motivation and purpose for engaging in the program, and in what ways they were using the credential in their personal and professional lives. Again, the primary purpose was to understand how the program influenced their learning and development and what career-related outcomes they experienced in their own words.

In addition to the interviews, I asked participants to engage in one focus group. The focus group did not take place until after all interviews were complete. The focus group included only a sample of those interviewed. In total, there were five participants (excluding the researcher) at the focus group meeting, which was conducted virtually via Zoom due to the ongoing global pandemic. The primary purpose in using focus groups is to elicit recall (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). While the goal is to reduce groupthink, it is important to provide the respondents an opportunity to hear what others have to say and how the experiences of others may be similar or different (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). This experience helps spark dormant ideas in participants, bringing greater depth to individual interviews. The individual interview questions focused on the individual student’s personal experience coupled with their educational experience while the focus group attempted to identify the experiences of the collective (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Again, the purpose for using a focus group here was to understand the shared experiences of these students and shared expectations. It was to provide an opportunity for participants to build upon their answers to the individual interview questions to see if commonalities emerged.

The interview and focus group recordings were transcribed using two transcription services. The ABD interviews occurring in 2019 were transcribed using Transcription HUB. The second round of interviews occurring in 2020 were transcribed using ZOOM’s artificial intelligence (AI) transcription. Similarly, the focus group was transcribed using ZOOM’s AI transcription. In total, this resulted in roughly 900 pages of transcribed recordings to analyze.
**Data Analysis Procedures**

I compiled and organized the qualitative interview data by individual interview participant and by emerging theme. In the initial stages of analysis, I read each interview transcript and highlighted participant’s learning, development, and career outcomes responses. I read all interview transcripts several times, starting the process of thematic content analysis. I read the interview transcripts organically, working to identify common themes and patterns across the data. Eventually, I used a qualitative software called NVivo to organize highlighted findings into codes. Prior to putting all highlighted narrative into NVivo, I developed broad themes or codes and placed the appropriate narrative comments into the appropriate code. Then, I began the process of refining those codes. It was during this part of the analysis that I came across the five stated program learning outcomes and realized that several of the themes I identified during coding aligned with the program learning outcomes. At that point, I aligned the participants’ comments within program learning outcome codes. All codes and accompanying data not fitting within the five program learning outcome codes became their own themes and subthemes. Those themes and subthemes were further refined for depth and breadth across participants.

Once I completed a thematic content analysis and organized all interview data in the emerging themes, I moved on to reframing the focus group questions. To provide greater reliability to the interview data analysis, I asked participants in the focus group to directly identify whether they had developed in the areas recognized by the program learning outcomes. Using a Zoom poll participants in the focus group were asked to select whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were unsure, disagreed or strongly disagreed with whether they had experienced learning or development in a program learning outcome. Once all participants responded to the
poll, I shared the results of the poll and encouraged participants to share and discuss tangible examples. Participants built off each other’s responses, providing dynamic insight into their learning and development. These findings served to validate and to further inform the interview data thematic analysis, which they did. The Zoom poll data can be found in Appendix B. Focus group data was organized by program learning outcome and participant.

**Researcher Bias**

As mentioned previously, I was a member of the cohort being studied. As is standard in qualitative research, I had an active role in this study as the researcher. In addition, my knowledge and experiences within the program are detailed in Chapter One to provide transparency of my experiences within the cohort and program. As a member of the cohort and the researcher, I practiced intentional bracketing techniques to set aside my own experience within the program while focusing on the participants’ lived experience with an open mind. I did not abandon my experiences, assumptions, and opinions but rather separated them from the lived experiences of those interviewed. Beyond my active participation in Cohort 28, at the beginning of this research, I worked at the University of St. Thomas in an administrator role and had intimate knowledge of the institution and strong relationships with many of the faculty and staff at the university. At the time of the analysis, I no longer worked at the University and acknowledge that my experience as a staff at the University has no place in this research. I am also a 2012 graduate of the Master’s in Leadership in Student Affairs program at the University within the College of Education, Leadership and Counseling. Again, while I acknowledge these experiences, they do not have a place in the research being conducted, which is specific to the experiences of Cohort 28 participants within the Ed.D. program in leadership. Overall, I have nearly a 19-year relationship with the institution as a student, staff member, or both
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simultaneously. Besides the experience directly related to the Ed.D. leadership program, none of my other experiences will enter into the study as they are not applicable to the purpose of the study.

During the data collection and analysis, I was intentional about setting aside my own experiences and understandings to focus on the point-of-view of the participant. To support this, during interviews, I spoke only rarely to ask interview questions or to seek clarification. Study participants, while not asked directly, did not identify concerns over my involvement in the program as I made it clear that my experience would be included as part of the study but plainly identified. My aim is not to completely exclude my experience and insights but rather identify them clearly throughout the study. I conducted the interviews in a professional manner, using active listening, clarifying questions, and contemplation space.

Limitations of the Study

One potential limitation of this case study is the narrow focus on one cohort’s experience in a specific Ed.D. program in leadership at a private not-for-profit institution in the Midwest. While much of the program curriculum and structure is not unique to this cohort and program, the individuals within the cohort bring with them specific experiences not replicable. The faculty who taught in the program also bring a specific set of expertise and experiences, which no other program can replicate entirely. The uniqueness of the program participants creates some variances and alters certain experiences, which are specific to this group of students at this point in time. The somewhat homogenous nature of the group in the areas of ethnic and racial diversity limited this study’s ability to analyze differences across racial and ethnic groups, which would be a valuable lens to consider.
Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Several strategies were utilized to ensure validity and reliability of the data. The strategies utilized align with those described by Creswell (2013), including triangulation, clarifying research lens, prolonged engagement in the field, and thick description. I used triangulation as described by Creswell (2000).

A popular practice is for qualitative inquiries to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study (p. 127).

I used interviews and a focus group to triangulate the data and validate emerging themes. I utilized prolonged engagement in the field as I was a member of Cohort 28 and had built relationships with participants over the five years of the program. This intimate experience with the cohort is acknowledged as both a possible area for biases but also as a sign of validity as the participants had developed a strong rapport with me, allowing them to comfortably disclose information. Every effort was made to include rich and thick descriptions to allow for greater validity and reliability of the data. I provided as much context about the participants and the program being studied as possible. As Creswell (2000) puts it, “With this vivid detail, the researchers help readers understand that the account is credible. Rich description also enables readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar context” (p. 129).

The generalizability of the findings, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), identifies “whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects, and the
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setting involved” (p. 36). Interviewing participants of an Ed.D. program provided relevant data on the program learning impacts and the career outcomes of such a program. Findings from this research are specific to one Ed.D. program and one cohort of non-traditional educational leaders, yet the data can be used as preliminary groundwork for additional research. This study may have implications for institutions of higher education, faculty teaching Ed.D. programs, colleges or departments offering these programs, and participants of these programs in addition to application to the broad scope of programming efforts in the adult learning space.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with one cohort of nine students within the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. in leadership program. Based on the questions asked and the purpose of conducting the research, an assumption was made that neither the interviews nor focus group would put them in problematic or unethical situations nor put undue stress on them. The nature of this study made it nearly impossible for participants to remain anonymous. My acknowledgement within the researcher’s bias section that I am a member of the cohort being studied makes it easy to identify which specific cohort was studied. Beyond my own identification, participants’ backgrounds and personal stories often make them identifiable by members of the faculty or other cohorts of students. Within the consent form that participants signed, it was clearly explained that privacy and confidentiality could not be guaranteed. With the inclusion of a focus group in this study, any data collected through that process is not private as I cannot control what others share outside the focus group setting. To create a level of privacy and confidentiality for participants, I do not include names of participants in this dissertation; pseudonyms were used when quoting participants directly. When using background information, I attempted to make it as uniform as possible so as not to identify participants directly; although,
some cohort members’ professional roles, background, and program outcomes make them easier to identify than others no matter the uniformity.

Chapter 3 Summary

Using a case study methodology, this research revealed the shared experiences of non-traditional educational leaders who engaged in a professional practice Ed.D. leadership program. The data collected identified the program learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of these non-traditional leaders allowing us to understand how Ed.D. programs transform individuals, contribute to their growth, and impact their careers. A core and unique feature of this research is the inclusion of two rounds of interviews for program completers: one interview at ABD status and one interview between 6-18 months post-graduation. The inclusion of a focus group triangulated interview data and increased reliability. This multi instrument approach identified the shared transformational aspects and individual impacts of an Ed.D. in leadership program.
CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter contains both the findings from 15 interviews across the nine participating members of Cohort 28, and the findings from the focus group that included a sample size of five members from the cohort. Table 3 provides an overview of participants’ data collection touchpoints. This chapter includes a profile of each participant, containing important information on each participant’s background and experience. During the interviews, I asked each participant several questions; although, I did not hold strictly to my original interview questions as these interviews were semi-structured and focused on the learning, development, and career outcomes identified by the participant. Therefore, any follow-up questions were specific to the information being provided by each individual participant. However, each participant answered questions around the same basic categories of questions: (a) why the University of St. Thomas program? (b) what purpose(s) or goal(s) did they have for enrolling in the Ed.D.? (c) what impact did the program have on their learning and development? (f) how did the cohort influence their learning and development? and (g) what impact has the credential had and are they using it in their professional identity? (See Appendix A for interview questions). I present, describe, and support the findings with direct quotes from individual interviews and focus group transcripts.
Table 3

Interview and Focus Group Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Interviewed during ABD Status</th>
<th>Interviewed after graduating</th>
<th>Number of months after graduating interview took place</th>
<th>Total number of interviews</th>
<th>Participated in focus group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program &amp; Faculty (Stephanie)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Research Findings

Findings in this qualitative, single case study were developed through the thorough examination of interview and focus group data. Data analysis focused on the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes of a professional practice Ed.D. program on one cohort of non-traditional educational leaders. An important component of understanding participants’ journey required understanding what led them to the program and what goal(s) or purpose(s) they had for engaging in the program. The goal(s) or purpose(s) participants identified for enrolling fell into four themes: learning/knowledge, earn credential, new career opportunities, and the challenge. These findings provide unique context to understand what might lead an individual to engage in a professional practice Ed.D. program.

The background information provided a solid understanding of participants’ experiences and their motivations for enrolling. However, the primary focus of this research was to understand the learning, development and career impacts and outcomes of participants. To solicit
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this data, participants were asked questions in the following categories: transformation, 
leadership, and development/growth. During preliminary analysis, the data was organized into 
two broad themes: direct career impacts and learning and development outcomes. The theme of 
direct career impacts became a standalone theme, identifying the direct career outcomes 
participants experienced post-graduation. The broad theme of learning and development required 
further refinement. During the initial stages of refinement, it became clear that many of the 
learning and development outcomes participants described, aligned with the program’s stated 
learning outcomes located in the Doctoral Handbook. The program stated learning outcomes are:

- PLO #1: Challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual 
  engagement by you, faculty and fellow students and come to a more complex 
  understanding of yourself and your students or clients.
- PLO #2: Form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a 
  continuously changing world.
- PLO #3: Form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and 
  your life’s calling.
- PLO #4: Improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth 
  throughout your entire career.
- PLO #5: Seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action. (Doctoral 
  Handbook, 2015, p. 9)

Due to the overlap in participants’ data findings and program learning outcomes, I 
decided to identify program learning outcomes as a theme and each individual outcome as 
subthemes in the analysis. However, not all learning and development findings aligned with the 
stated program learning outcomes, requiring an additional theme be developed. Through the final
analysis of participants’ responses, the theme of transformative learning outcomes arose with three significant subthemes: (a) becoming scholars; (b) worldview, perspectives, and personal transformation; and (c) confidence/refinement. Therefore, the primary findings are broken down into three primary themes: direct career impacts, transformative learning outcomes, and program learning outcomes. A discussion of any identified subthemes follows each theme.

After reviewing the interview transcripts, I determined the emphasis for the focus group questions. The focus group questions aimed to validate and triangulate interview findings. The focus group provided an opportunity for participants to directly address how their learning and development aligned with the program’s stated learning outcomes. The five participants were first asked, using the polling function in Zoom, to identify their agreement or disagreement with whether they felt they experienced growth or development in a particular program outcome. Polling results were then shared with the focus group, and participants discussed specific examples or shared stories, illuminating their development and learning. The focus group findings triangulate and validate the program learning outcomes interview findings, providing greater reliability. I discuss the focus group findings following the detailed interview findings on program learning outcomes.

Finally, the initial research did not aim to understand how the cohort structure influenced participants’ learning and development or whether and how participants used the credential post-graduation. However, these themes emerged after the first round of ABD interviews, leading to questions in the subsequent interviews dedicated to better understanding these themes. I identify these findings as secondary research findings, not because they are not significant but because they were not the initial aim of the research. However, their applicability and connection to the primary findings could not be separated and therefore, could not be ignored.
Nearly all participants interviewed during ABD status mentioned the cohort structure and how it supported their learning and development. This led to the addition of questions in second round interviews to better understand how the cohort structure impacted their learning and development in the Ed.D. program. During my analysis of the cohort impact data, some common themes arose, including program completion support, safe learning environment, and community. However, upon further analysis, it appeared each cohort member’s responses in this area were unique enough not to be organized by theme but rather by participant.

The other secondary finding was what impact the credential had and if, how, or when participants were using the credential post-graduation. During first round interviews, I asked participants about their goal or purpose for enrolling in the program. Many participants identified earning the credential as their goal or purpose, which led to including a question in second round interviews on whether and how participants were using the credential in their professional or professional lives. This section of the findings identifies which participants are currently using the credential, or title of Doctor, or the ways the credential impacted their personal or professional lives. Those who identified not using the credential, identified environmental barriers prohibiting them from using it in their current professional roles.

In summary, the findings are broken down into background data, which includes participants’ profiles, why the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. and participants’ purpose(s) or goal(s) for enrolling. This background data is followed by the primary research finding themes of direct career impacts, transformative learning outcomes, and program learning outcomes, which included focus group findings. Finally, I discuss and describe the secondary research findings on the credential and cohort-model impact.
Background Data

The background data includes an overview of participants, including their backgrounds and experiences leading up to enrollment in the Ed.D. program. I provide a summary of the individual reason’s participants identified for selecting the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program. Finally, I organize and discuss participant’s goal(s) or purpose(s) for enrolling in the program under the themes of (a) learning/knowledge development, (b) earn credential, (c) new career opportunities, and (d) the challenge.

Participant Profiles

Maxine found herself back in the United States in 2012 after living in Syria since 1993. While living in Syria, she studied the language and engaged in religious coursework similar to seminary study in the United States. During this period, she worked as an academic director of a school and as a consultant while she worked to become an Islamic scholar and religious leader. She worked in the field of education for nearly 25 years prior to returning to the United States. In 2012, she moved back to the United States because of the war in Syria. Upon her return to the United States, she started a non-profit organization educating Muslim women. She continues as the Executive Director and Chief Spirituality Officer of that non-profit.

Jane has 20+ years of work experience in the field of education. She has taught for several years in the classroom in both private and public sectors. In addition to her teaching experience, she has held roles as a peer coach, supporting gifted and talented programs, and coordinating and facilitating district partnerships with local universities. Beyond this experience, she also started her own personal development and coaching business where she coaches adults in various professional fields. Today, she teaches in elementary education and continues her work in coaching.
Susan has roughly 10 years of work experience in education. She has taught in several capacities in education, including as a camp counselor; as a leader with young people dealing with emotional, behavioral, and substance abuse issues; as a middle school special education teacher, and as a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) in high school. Her experience crosses many educational boundaries, including the untraditional, charter schools and large urban districts. Today she continues her works as a TOSA in a large urban high school.

Stephanie has 20+ years of experience in higher education. For nearly 16 years, she taught accounting at a local private university. Just before she began the program, she took on a director role, which included both student advisor and leadership responsibilities. She worked in that capacity up until June of 2020 when she took on a new role in higher education both as a distinguished service faculty member in the accounting department and a faculty advisor for a fellow’s program.

Paulo has roughly eight years of experience in higher education. He worked in the service industry off and on for several years while he sought a position within higher education. He has held positions in several states, including New York, Florida, Illinois, and Minnesota. Paulo has spent six of his eight years in higher education within a public community college. At the college, he has worked in several capacities in marketing, student life, program and student support services, accreditation, and student success. Additionally, he has served on several committees that serve important initiatives in higher education. He currently serves as a student advisor, focused on student success, supporting the community college’s nursing department.

Stephen has served as a music teacher for roughly 14 years. He began teaching elementary band before spending six years teaching music in high school and finally spending the past several years as a middle school band director. In addition to his experience as a teacher,
he has been involved in the Minnesota Band Directors Association (MBDA) and served as the organization’s president for a term. Currently, he continues in his role as a middle school band director and as a building union representative.

**Michel** has worked as an adjunct faculty member at a private not-for-profit institution in the departments of library science, math, and physics for nearly 10 years. In addition to his work as an adjunct faculty member, he has worked full time in corporate computing for several years. His experience spans the areas of software engineering, youth ministry, and sacristan. He is an American Mensa life member. He studied in a Ph.D. program at a Big 10 University before joining the Ed.D. program. Today, he continues his work in corporate computing and working as adjunct faculty member.

**Myles** has spent the majority of his 25+ years of work experience in non-profit management. He has served several non-profits in executive director, director and associate director roles, leading important initiatives that positively impact the lives of others. In addition to his non-profit management experience, he was a teaching assistant in a public affairs leadership program and serves as a mentor for students in the program. He recently became a Bush Fellow and continues his work as an executive director for a large statewide association. The work he does as an executive director has strong roots in adult education, and he uses this as his platform for leading change in his organization.

**Sara** has worked as a general and vocal music teacher in both elementary and middle school settings since 2002. She has served in a variety of leadership capacities in these settings, including a choir director, show choir director, and curriculum lead since 2012. In 2007, she received her National Board Certification. In addition to her K-12 teaching experience, she has spent time as an adjunct in higher education, teaching undergraduate film and digital media
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courses. Currently, Sara continues to work as a middle school general and vocal music teacher and to serve in several leadership roles.

**Table 4**

**Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age at start of program</th>
<th>Person of color (Y/N)</th>
<th>Years of work experience</th>
<th>Years between Masters and Ed.D.</th>
<th>Education Sector</th>
<th>Graduation Status as of 12/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Graduated September 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program &amp; Faculty (Stephanie)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduated May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Graduating spring 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Backgrounds**

All research participants came into the program with at least six years of work experience with the highest years of work experience being 25. There was a considerable gap in enrollment between some participants’ master’s degree and enrolling in the Ed.D. program, with the largest gap being 25 years, and the smallest gap, being an overlap, as one participant was completing their master’s program during orientation for the Ed.D. Although all participants frame their work within the field of education, two participants worked in non-profit management, four worked at varying levels in K-12 schools, and three worked in higher education at community
college or universities. All nine participants fall outside the traditional leadership roles in K-12 education of principals and superintendents, which is why I refer to them as non-traditional leaders in education.

**Why University of St. Thomas Ed.D. Program**

There are roughly 500 institutions in the United States offering programs in educational administration (McCarthy, 2015), which begs the question: why this program? What was it about this program that led participants to apply and ultimately enroll in the program? Each participant had their own reasons for choosing the University of St. Thomas program with some being similar and others being unique to the individual’s life circumstances. Provided below is a summary of each participant’s life circumstances that led to their decision to enroll in the program and the specific components of the program (when identified) that aligned with participants needs.

**Maxine.** Maxine spent 20-years in Damascus before she was forced to return to the United States due to the war in Syria. She believed her return to the United States would be temporary, and one day, she would return to her life in Damascus. She began the process of looking for a job; although, she admitted that she was not looking very hard because she thought she would be heading back to Damascus shortly. By the end of her first year in the United States, her husband told her to apply for something and encouraged her to work towards her Ph.D. or some form of doctorate. So she applied to a Ph.D. program at University of Minnesota and did not get in, which she described as “devastating” because it was the first time in her life that she had applied for anything and did not get it. Her husband would not let that deter her and encouraged her to continue to apply. She had previously looked at the program at the University of St. Thomas and had begun the application but dropped it as she was not overly attached to
anything about the program. Her husband continued to pester to her until finally she finished her application. Overall, Maxine describes her decision for enrolling in the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. in education leadership as a time filler.

**Sara:** Sara had very different reasons for choosing the program. She started an online program prior to starting the Ed.D. program and found it to be unfulfilling. She took two classes and felt like “It just wasn’t meeting me where I was.” Sara was really interested in a program that had an in-person component, and she wanted something that was interdisciplinary as she did not want to be siloed with music performance professionals. She felt like programs that only included people from her field were “hampered by just our own bubble of perspectives.” She stumbled across a flyer about the program and connected with the program coordinator, a music faculty member, and ultimately traveled from outside the state to participate in the program each month. Sara describes herself as someone driven to learn as much as possible to become the best version of herself.

**Paulo:** Paulo spent a good portion of his career outside the field of education. Prior to enrolling in the program, he gained experience working in higher education at an institution in Miami, Florida. Even though he was sought out for the position, after a year-and-a-half in the role, his position was eliminated. So he and his wife headed back to the Midwest. After a handful of jobs in the service industry, he realized he was tired of the lifestyle the service industry required. He continued to apply for higher education jobs and landed one as a marketing student life specialist at a local community college: a position he landed only a few months after enrolling in the Ed.D. program. Paulo said, “Honestly, I just applied, and I got in. I was like, okay, let me see if I can get into this program because I wanted to get into higher education.”
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Most of Paulo’s graduate education included a cohort structure, and he really appreciated that component of the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program.

**Myles:** Myles was just wrapping up his master’s degree at the University of Minnesota as the cohort was meeting for its orientation. He shared that he had some financial setbacks and felt as though going to school gave him the competitive edge he needed. Prior to enrolling, his wife became unemployed; they had just committed themselves to a 30-year mortgage; and they had a child. He felt some urgency that he needed to do something to help them in the future even if the solution took a long-term approach. The University of St. Thomas program offered him an interdisciplinary cohort of non-profit and education leaders, which made him feel as though he had a good sub-cohort of individuals focused on non-profit management.

**Susan:** Susan earned her special education licensure from the University of St. Thomas and did not want to worry about transferring credits, making the University of St. Thomas an easy choice for her next degree. She was not interested in enrolling in an administrative licensure program, and there were few other programs at the university that aligned with her experience in education like the Ed.D. program. Ultimately, Susan chose the program because of convenience: the convenience of location and the convenience of applying earned credits to her new program. She also shared that she felt a sort of responsibility within her family as she is the primary breadwinner in her home. This urged her to seek development opportunities allowing her to pursue leadership positions.

**Jane:** After several years in the classroom Jane earned a position working in the district office of a K-12 school district. The position was dedicated halftime to working with a local university, doing training in the teacher education program. The other half switched every year and included working with schools in her district to support gifted education, providing support
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as a peer coach, and developing student teacher placement processes. The experience exposed her to political dynamics within organizations—an area she identified as a growth opportunity. Jane knew after earning her master’s degree that she would ultimately go on to pursue her doctorate, looking programs up right away. However, she recognized the timing was not right explaining that she needed a break. “In [the] four years that I waited, I got my life coaching certification and began working with adults…and I just felt the timing was right; I researched programs, and everything fell into place.” Jane said that leadership has always been an area of study for her throughout her career. So the program she enrolled in needed to have leadership at its core. Her other requirement was that the program needed to be interdisciplinary, including people from different professions, different “walks of life,” and different perspectives. She stated, “It wasn’t about the degree; you know. There were a lot of things that went into this decision for me.” If it was about the degree, she stated she would have enrolled somewhere else with a bigger name that was more highly recognizable or reputable. However, she admits that she would not have enjoyed the learning nor the process, which is a big reason she chose the University of St. Thomas program.

Michel: Michel was working full-time in corporate computing while also working as an adjunct professor when he decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program in computer science. While he had completed all the necessary coursework for his Ph.D., the date that was set for his orals proposals came and went, and he was told he had not made adequate progress and was removed from the program in 2013. Michel really wanted to continue his work in the classroom as a faculty member and knew having a terminal degree was a big prerequisite to gaining full-time employment as a faculty member. He went to the chair of the department he was an adjunct for and said, “I failed” explaining what happened with his Ph.D. program. She replied, “Why don’t
you just go get like an Ed.D. or something like that? All you need is a doctorate. Just go get a doctorate of some kind.” So Michel Google searched, and St. Thomas showed up as offering an Ed.D. program, so he connected with a faculty member in the program and began the process of applying. Michel summed up his decision this way, “That’s basically my path up to that point; the Ed.D. was a last gasp for what I thought was going to be a career of mine.”

**Stephanie:** Stephanie worked at the university in a different school/college and acknowledges that much of her decision around enrolling in the program was convenience., “The truth of the matter is, it was at school. I mean it was convenient for me to do this work. It was at the same place I worked.”

**Stephen:** Stephen was a University of St. Thomas alumnus. He came into the Ed.D. program with knowledge of the university and connections with the music faculty. Stephen admittedly needed to have a brick and mortar, face-to-face program and needed to find a program that allowed him to continue working full-time, which aligned with the Ed.D. program. Stephen always knew he was going to further his education, so the question was not so much if he enrolled in a program but when and which program allowed him the flexibility to continue working while also providing some structure and accountability with a face-to-face format. Stephen put it this way, “When I was an undergraduate, I kind of knew I was going to do advanced degrees…I was going to go to terminal degree, all the way through a doctoral degree. I didn’t know what it would look like.”

**Why University of St. Thomas Ed.D. Program Summary**

While all research participants had varying life circumstances leading up to their enrollment, Maxine, Myles, Paulo, and Michel all identified significant setbacks that prompted them to do something to change their circumstances. While the setbacks were different for each
one of them, they saw the program as an opportunity to keep moving them forward. Susan, Stephanie, and Stephen all discussed the importance of flexibility and convenience when selecting the program, allowing them to continue working or to leverage existing earned credits. These three participants had existing relationships with the university either as alumni or employee, making the program more a choice of familiarity. Jane, Sara, and Myles all mentioned the importance of having an interdisciplinary structure to the program. There was also consistent mention of the need for a face-to-face component in the program by Stephen, Sara, and Susan. Jane, Stephanie, and Susan all mentioned a general interest in leadership, aligning with the program focus. Susan and Michel both seemed to have experiences that suggested the Ed.D., while not a Ph.D., would still get them where they needed to get professionally. These two participates where the only two to mention anything about the program being an Ed.D. verses a Ph.D. Paulo, Sara, Jane, and Myles all mentioned the overall cohort structure as being an important component of the program. Jane and Stephen both mentioned knowing they would eventually go on to pursue their terminal degree in a matter of time. While the above identifies the life circumstances leading to their decision for enrolling in the program, participants were also asked about their purpose(s) or goal(s) for engaging in the program; those findings are discussed below.

**Purpose or Goal for Engaging in the Program**

All participants were asked if they had a goal or purpose for enrolling in the program, and while each had unique goals or purposes for enrolling, they fell within one of these four subthemes: (a) learning and knowledge development, (b) earning the credential, (c) new career opportunity, or (d) the challenge. Some participants identified more than one purpose or goal for engaging in the program. Table 5 provides a summary of all participants’ identified goal(s) or
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purpose(s) for engaging in the program. Below the table, I provide in-depth findings in each of these categories.

Table 5

Purpose for Enrolling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Learning and Knowledge Development</th>
<th>Earning the Credential</th>
<th>New Career Opportunity</th>
<th>The Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program &amp; Faculty (Stephanie)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning and Knowledge Development

Jane and Sara were the only two participants to identify that their primary purpose for engaging in the program was solely for the learning and knowledge development. Sara shared that she was motivated to know as much as she could resulting in her, “[becoming] the best person [she could] be in this profession.” She went on to say, “I wasn’t done learning.” Similarly, Jane said, “It was not the degree; it was the learning that would take place and what I anticipated to be transformational.” Again, these were the only two participants to identify the learning as their sole purpose for enrolling in the program. Myles and Stephen identified the learning and knowledge development as one of the goals for engaging in the program but not their only goal. Myles put it this way, “At a doctoral level, you’re creating information, and I was like, oh, that’s very intriguing.” Myles also wanted to find a deeper meaning to the kind of work he was doing. Stephen identified this as one of his goals and described it this way, “I
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wanted to do the masters for an experience more so than to learn and grow even though that
obviously happened. But I think now as a doctoral student, it’s been more about understanding
and analyzing.” Stephen was also motivated by the credential. However, he acknowledged the
credential was a secondary drive and that his primary drive, “would be the knowledge and the
skills and all that kind of good stuff.”

Credential

Earning the credential was by far the most popular purpose or goal participants had for
engaging in the program. However, what participants believed the credential was going to afford
them was slightly different; although, the theme of authority, credence or credibility seemed to
weave across all responses in this area. Stephen, Susan, Maxine, Stephanie, Paulo, and Myles all
mentioned the credential as the primary goal for engaging in the program. Stephen stated,
“Getting the degree and having the credentials…there’s no way to say that it doesn’t open up
opportunities and open up doors and perhaps give some weight and credence to the things I say.”
Stephen suggested that the credential would put more weight on what he said. “Maybe I’ll be
able to say something and have people take me seriously when I have a few letters in front of my
name.” Like Stephen, Myles was the only other participant to identify learning and knowledge
development in addition to earning the credential as their goal for engaging in the program.
Myles stated that while he was intrigued by the ability to create knowledge at the doctoral level,
he also felt “that I was kind of stymied professionally, that without credentials whatever
direction I wanted to go I couldn’t go in.” Stephanie was like Myles and Stephen in that she felt,
professionally, the credential would give her “more credence” in her role. Susan’s primary goal
was to “have the formality of letters behind [her] name.” Paulo’s response echoed that same
sentiment stating, “I just want the Ed.D. behind my name like anybody else.” Similarly, Maxine
was very clear that she “went into the program because [she] just wanted that Dr. in front on [her] name.” She went on to explain, “You know those are really all I care about. Because in the world of Muslim women leadership, what I learned in my dissertation, is it’s really hard for women to have authority, top authority and that Dr. grants authority.” For Stephen, Susan, Stephanie, and Maxine, their purpose(s) or goal(s) for enrolling in the program involved earning the credential so that they might have more credence, authority, or credibility in their professional roles. Myles and Susan seemed to imply they felt held back professionally without the credential. While Michel did not mention earning the credential specifically in his interview, his primary goal of becoming a university professor, which is detailed below, suggests that earning the credential was a peripheral goal as the credential itself is what would gain him entry into the full-time faculty ranks.

**New Career Opportunities**

Michel was the only cohort member whose sole purpose for enrolling in the program was to allow him to make a career change. For Michel, it was not just making a career change but fulfilling a life-long dream. Michel stated, “I kind of always wanted to be a university professor…I just love being in the classroom. I would say that my academic life has kind of kept me alive in my corporate life.” Michel wanted to make the transition from an adjunct teaching position to a full-time faculty role and believed the Ed.D. was going to help him get there. The other cohort members who mentioned the program opening new career opportunities were Susan and Paulo. Originally, Paulo had intended to earn the degree, so he could work as faculty but later transitioned to seeking an administrator role in higher education.

I wanted to get into education, higher education at the administrative level. Like administrator level or dean level or director level and the only way to do that for
me...was to have a terminal degree. No matter what experience you brought to the table, they always put another layer...prerequisite or minimum qualification...I noticed with the terminal degree you immediately jumped to preferred qualifications.

In addition to Susan’s goal of adding the formality of letters behind her name, she wanted to “obtain some sort of leadership position or to teach in higher education.” Susan, Sara, and Jane all addressed in their interviews that they were not interested in pursuing principal licensure or any other administrative license in K-12. While all three mentioned that other people encouraged them to go that route, ultimately, they did not feel as those licensures or positional leadership roles aligned with their goals. Sara said, “I thought about maybe I should become a principal...I didn’t want to become a principal. I look at the principals that I work with now, and I think...I have more autonomy, and I make more than they do.” Similarly, Jane stated, “I would say that people my whole life, in a very encouraging positive kind of way...you’d be really good at [being a] principal, superintendent...politician.” However, Jane had a different perspective, “If I felt called to do that...I would. Did I have the skills and the competency...did I have the capacity? Absolutely.” Overall, Jane was not interested in a positional leadership positions within the K-12 environment. Susan put her feelings about seeking an administrative license this way, “I did not want to get an administrative license; I wanted to do something other than that.”

The Challenge

While Paulo identified the possibility of the program opening new career opportunities and earning the credential as his primary goals and Sara identified the learning and knowledge development as her primary goal for engaging in the program, they both made mention of a secondary goal of simply seeing if they could get in or finish a doctoral program. Paulo wanted to know if he could get in. “Honestly, I just applied, and I got in, right. Well, that’s the honest
truth. I was like, okay, let me see if I can get into this program.” While Sara mentioned the challenge this way, “You know, I think the impetus to enroll in an education leadership program…part of it was to see if I could…see if it’s something I could do.”

**Purpose(s) or Goal(s) Summary**

Each cohort member had specific aims for engaging in the program, but they all fell within the broader categories of (a) learning and knowledge development, (b) earning the credential, (c) new career opportunity, or (d) the challenge. In most cases, participants identified more than one purpose or goal. Stephanie, Maxine, and Jane were the only cohort members who honed in on one purpose or goal for engaging in the program. Jane and Sara were the only cohort members not to identify earning the credential as a goal. Consequently, they were also the ones to identify learning and knowledge development as their primary goal. Of those who sought earning the credential, all except Myles and Paulo made statements that they believed the credential would signify to others a level of authority in their field or give them more credence professionally. Susan, Michel, and Paulo identified earning the credential and new career opportunities as their primary goals. Stephen and Myles identified earning the credential and learning and knowledge development as their goals. Stephanie and Maxine were the only two cohort members who identified earning the credential as their only goal. Paulo was the only member to identify three goals for enrolling in the program; the only goal he did not identify with was the learning and knowledge development. However, he shared that as he engaged in the program, his interests evolved. Many cohort members’ goals or purposes for engaging in the program revolved around creating direct career outcomes whether that be new jobs or opening new opportunities in other areas. The findings in the primary research findings section provide
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insight into whether participants experienced direct career impacts post-graduation and the
learning and knowledge they gained.

Primary Research Findings

In the section, the primary research findings are stated, highlighting the career impacts,
and learning and development outcomes of participants. The primary research findings are
organized into three themes: (a) direct career impacts, (b) transformative learning outcomes, and
(c) program learning outcomes. A summary of individuals direct career impacts by participant is
provided in the first subsection. The second subsection includes the findings within the
transformative learning outcomes theme. The transformative learning outcomes theme is
organized into three subthemes: (a) becoming scholars, (b) worldview, perspective, and personal
transformation, and (c) confidence or refinement. Finally, the third section consists of the
findings associated with the program learning outcomes and the five subthemes, which represent
the five learning outcomes.

Direct Career Outcomes

Four out of nine cohort members mentioned direct career outcomes or new opportunities
as a result of the program. Some of the new opportunities are within their existing careers while
other opportunities represent interest areas outside the participant’s primary careers. Slightly
different than career outcomes but still relevant to growth within their careers, some participants
identified ways they applied what they learned from the program in their careers. Not all
members identified direct career outcome or the realization of new opportunities. Those not
mentioning direct career outcomes or new opportunities did state that they were looking for new
opportunities, and those statements will be included here. The direct career outcomes and new
opportunities experienced by participants included (a) guest lecturer, (b) further research
opportunities, (c) new job, (d) non-profit growth, (e) faculty roles, or (f) fellowship. Maxine, Michel, Stephen, Susan, and Jane all graduated in the spring of 2019. Therefore, I present their findings first as they had the most time post-graduation to realize direct career impacts. After that, I discuss the findings for Stephanie and Myles who graduated in spring of 2020, Sara who graduated in September 2020, and finally Paulo who anticipates graduating spring 2021.

Table 6

Summary of Direct Career Impacts post-graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member</th>
<th>Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
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<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
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<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
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Stephen: Stephen was able to present his research at a couple of conferences. However, with the global pandemic in 2020, many of the opportunities he planned on engaging with were cancelled or changed to virtual events. Beyond presenting his research, Stephen shared that he feels like he has “gotten some audiences with district administration” as an outcome of earning the degree. Overall, Stephen stated, “I don’t feel like professionally a lot has changed.”

Susan: Like Stephen, Susan expressed that not much has changed for her professionally. When Susan first enrolled in the program, she felt as though it gave her the confidence to apply for a Teacher on Special Assignment position, which she ultimately landed. However, since graduating, Susan has applied for a handful of positions within higher education, a goal of hers
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for enrolling in the program, but has not been offered any opportunities yet. She stated, “So when I went into it, I thought I would get a different, I think, I thought I would get a different job out of it. You know, like I wouldn’t be on a teacher contract anymore.” Susan went on to say, “I’ve applied for five or six jobs that [are]…right up my alley…and nothing, very few interviews, even. And so, it’s frustrating because it’s not opening up a door to logistical credibility in terms of title.” As was previously mentioned, Susan did not want to pursue an administrative license, which upon reflection, she felt was potentially an opportunity missed. “In retrospect, I regret it a little bit. Not a lot, but a little bit because I think that additional license in the field that I’m in would make a significant difference in what I would like to do.”

**Jane:** Much like Stephen and Susan, Jane did not feel as though completing the program changed much for her in the way of direct career outcomes. However, Jane was very clear in her interview that she was not looking for the program to open new positional leadership opportunities within her K-12 role. “I have not pursued other opportunities. So in K-12 education or P-12 education, it’s not because I haven’t pursued them…I’m not interested in pursuing that within that system.” She did state that “Post-graduation was very different than anticipated.” She later went on to explain that post-graduation, she anticipated not returning to her position as a teacher but instead seeking new opportunities. However, due to personal reasons, she had to make the decision to continue in her teaching role, which she believed was the right choice but not the choice she wanted to make. Jane summarized her thoughts about new opportunities on the horizon: “So will opportunities come…yeah, they are right now…Opportunities to learn and take what I learned and how I’ve learned and who I am and do something more valuable to others…yeah. It has provided more opportunity for that.”
Michel: Michel described similar experiences post-graduation to Jane, Stephen, and Susan. As I shared previously, Michel’s primary goal for engaging in the program was to become a full-time faculty member. While Michel did get a contract to teach as an adjunct for the upcoming fall 2021 semester, he did not get a contract for spring 2021 nor fall 2020 due to the pandemic. He continues to look for opportunities to realize his dream of working at a university as a full-time faculty member. “I am applying for faculty positions, and yeah, I’ve gotten my share of first interviews, and I almost had a second.” Michel is also experiencing success in applying what he learned to his work as an adjunct. “The race class and gender class…was really good for getting me more aware of some of the difference between students…how to change my approach to the subject and how to, you know, approach students differently.”

Maxine: Unlike the others who graduated with her in the spring of 2019, Maxine identified several career outcomes and new opportunities as a result of the program. She stated, “I would say that exactly what I planned to happen has happened.” She became a faculty member at an Islamic education center. While she was invited to teach prior to completing the program, she believes earning the degree allowed her to continue in this capacity into the future. She is also working at an Islamic seminary where she is on the academic council and a faculty member. She will be teaching at a seminary next summer. In addition to these faculty positions, she has also written for some journals and became a senior fellow at institute for Islamic research. She stated, “I’ve done a lot of speaking since [graduating], I’ve grown my nonprofit, which in the end, that’s what I was trying to get…real growth, a lot more students in our programming. We’re more well known.” Maxine attributes much of the growth in her organization to earning the status of Doctor, which she states has given her authority in her field. “In the world of Muslim women leadership, we actually, what I learned in my dissertation…it’s
really hard for women to have authority, top authority and the Doctor grants authority; it did grant me authority.” Beyond those opportunities already realized, Maxine believes there is still more on the horizon as she submits grant proposals and continues to grow her non-profit. Maxine found the structure of the Ed.D. program so beneficial that she applied components of the program to the programming her non-profit offers. First, she applied the cohort method to her own programming. Second, she applied what she learned from the course on Freire to how she designed her teen and kids programming. Third, she uses the teaching methods learned in class in her own programs, “I have used this method of having everybody read a book and then come and talk about the book. I use that in two of my classes.”

Stephanie: Stephanie graduated in the spring of 2020 and her position at the university was set to end in June of 2020. However, right after graduation, the university called to ask if she was interested in a contract as a distinguished service faculty member where half of her job would be as a faculty advisor for a fellow’s program and the other half as a faculty member. Her new role gave her the opportunity to lead leadership seminars and to advise students while also teaching in the classroom. She took the position, saying, “I think [the new position] comes directly out of the fact that I have an Ed.D. in leadership. They could present it to school leadership in a way that it looked like I was the perfect fit for the role.” Beyond the direct impact the program had on Stephanie’s career, she also shared that the program opened a new leadership opportunity in sailing. Stephanie invited her female cohort members to join her sailing, and she said, “That was the start of a whole new venture for me personally… I’ve been taking out groups of women up to go sailing…I take these leadership things out on the water with me.” Stephanie experienced both direct career outcomes and new opportunities outside her professional practice, which she attributes directly to the program.
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Myles: Myles has experienced several new opportunities because of the program. As Myles was writing his dissertation, he was simultaneously applying for a fellowship. Ultimately, Myles was one of the recipients of the Bush Fellowship. Myles is using the fellowship to “do something self-directed and for me it’s ended up becoming a direct continuation of where the dissertation left off.” According Bush Fellowship (n.d.) website, his focus for the 24-month fellowship will be to “advance his ideas and influence on a larger scale; he will pursue training to lead a multicultural movement for change and study innovative ways to reshape the narrative of park communities.” Beyond the fellowship, Myles stated that he has received more invitations to guest lecture, to present at conferences, and to sit on boards and review committees. Finally, Myles is applying what he learned directly to his job. “I am forever applying different theoretical frameworks.” He shared that he uses Paulo Freire when orienting and training new organizers as they come onboard. Myles mentioned that he had success in sharing the information with other people and being able to apply it directly to the work that he is doing within and outside his organization: “Being able to apply it to kind of the programmatic work outside of the organization in terms of dealing with community problems or policy changes…yeah!”

Sara: Sara is the cohort member who most recently completed her degree. She completed the program in September 2020, so at the time of the interview, she was only three months post-graduation. With that said, Sara has many new opportunities on the horizon, including contributing to a book chapter on community music. She also has plans to join a team with National Geographic to film a documentary researching indigenous filmmakers. She too received invitations to be a guest lecturer. Sara plans to pursue new opportunities, including the goal of writing more articles and shifting her work into a book. Sara is looking to new career
opportunities in the future, “I have, I think, about 10 applications that I want to finish in the next couple of weeks; they are all [in higher education].”

**Paulo:** Paulo is just wrapping up the dissertation process and therefore, has not realized any direct career outcomes as a result of completing the program. However, Paulo aims to use his degree completion to his advantage to pursue leadership opportunities at the dean or director level within higher education. Paulo’s original goal was to become a faculty member, stating, “I wanted to transition into teaching faculty…to be the role model in front of the classroom for these students of color. We don’t see them in front of the class which is a huge issue within higher education.” However, as Paulo nears graduation, his aim changed slightly, “after working with faculty…I don’t want to do that. So then, I went back and forth. I could do [an] administrator role.” Paulo is ready to move on to something new, but his next opportunity must be in a dean or director role or in a role where he is part of the leadership team.

**Direct Career Outcomes Summary**

The cohort members experiencing direct career outcomes identified new jobs, contributing to journal articles and book chapters, conference presentation participation, opportunities to guest lecture, and faculty positions or fellowships as the primary opportunities they experienced. For those not identifying direct career outcomes, many are starting or continuing to pursue new opportunities. Susan, Sara, Michel, and Jane are all pursuing new opportunities outside their current jobs in K-12 and corporate computing with all except Jane specifically identifying opportunities in higher education as their primary focus. Experiencing direct career outcomes was a direct aim of some cohort members and a tangible outcome for several cohort members even those who did not identify that as a goal from the onset of the program. Susan, Michel, and Paulo all identified new career opportunities as a purpose for
enrolling in the program, all three to-date have not yet experienced those as a result of the program. While these more tangible outcomes suggest the program had a positive and life-changing impact on participants, it appears, through the interviews the learning, growth and development that took place had a life-altering impact, as well.

**Transformative Learning Outcomes**

The theme of transformative learning outcomes identifies the ways participants described being transformed by the program. These findings are organized in the following subthemes: (a) becoming scholars, (b) worldview, perspective, and personal transformation, (c) and confidence or refinement. A summary of the subthemes by participant is provided in Table 7. The table identifies which participants identified learning or development in each subtheme.

**Table 7**

*Summary of Transformative Learning Outcomes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Becoming a Scholar</th>
<th>Worldview, Perspective, Personal Transformation</th>
<th>Confidence or Refinement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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**Becoming Scholars**

In total, six out of the nine participants identified becoming a scholar as an outcome of the program. This subtheme encompasses the variety of skills, abilities, and knowledge it takes to identify as a scholar. The skills, abilities and knowledge participants mentioned included
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reading, writing, thinking, analyzing, applying, synthesizing, and conducting research. Much of
the learning and development identified in this subtheme focused on tangible skills such as
writing and reading. This subtheme recognizes participants’ abilities to think more deeply,
analyze information more quickly, apply theory to practice, and synthesize information
coherently.

Stephen: Stephen identified his development in this area as skills development more so
than knowledge development, saying, “I would say, it wouldn’t be knowledge, it’d be skills.
Being able to read more analytically—more deeply. To be able to write well, to be able to be
critical of literature, critical of writing, to analyze.”

Sara: Sara summarized her development as a scholar: “The way I process…think
through things…organize information… I feel like I’m much more equipped to do that kind of
research. I can think in categories faster and take a mess of information and make sense of it in
some fashion.” Overall, she stated that she felt the program “helped set us up for research.” Sara
called the ability to do research a transformative experience. “The whole process of how to think,
how to write in that way but also to be able to transform that and mold that into something that I
felt like was a contribution to research that I’m proud of.”

Myles: Myles described his growth in this area: “The doctoral program just kind of
whether it’s the research skills or just kind of the theories…it’s changed how I think about and
analyze things that I’m working with.” He goes on to say, “It’s easy to identify so many levels in
terms of how it impacted me in terms of how I communicate and analyze situations on a day-to-
day basis.” Myles looks for ways to incorporate more formal research methods in his work and
tries to apply different theoretical frameworks, “I’ve looked for ways to incorporate more formal
research methods… and I am forever applying different theoretical frameworks.”
Susan: Susan identified efficiency as an outcome of the skills she developed, saying, “I think I became better at doing stuff with less time. Like I can scan something, I can review something much quicker and be like, yep, I got this. I understand this. Boom. Here you go.” She also talked about strengthening her skills in writing and reading a handful of times, “I have become a much better writer and reader. I’m certainly a better reader, as well. I think I’ve increased my reading since beginning the program.” She built on that further, “I think specifically…my ability to write and communicate…that has gotten incredibly so much better, and I think that’s in everything…communicating with students, families. All that kind of writing like even how I put things together, how I layout information.”

Jane: Jane really felt as though the dissertation process created higher-level thinking; “To apply theory at that level to something that you study and that you research and that you go through the data… [the dissertation process] was a game changer. That’s a whole different level of thinking it changes your thinking.”

Maxine: Maxine also felt as though there was clear growth in her thinking process and how that thinking benefited her work saying, “I definitely applied those things to the thinking I was doing around my work as a leader in this nonprofit.” Participating in the program helped Maxine hone-in on the theoretical by providing a “theoretical background and new [way of] thinking, a mind habit of thinking theoretically of drawing on theories and experiences.” Maxine added the title of researcher to the list of her accomplishments saying, “I feel now…capable of calling myself a researcher, which is a huge accomplishment…. Having a doctorate, you know where to go get the information. [The doctoral program] is as they said in the beginning, to create scholars out of us.”
Worldview, Perspective and Personal Transformation

There were eight cohort members who acknowledged the program changed or transformed their worldview or perspectives. They shared ways in which they used different lenses from the coursework to view, see, and understand the world more deeply. Some of their comments spoke to intangible outcomes that others perhaps would not notice. In many ways, this subtheme is hard to define as the participants themselves struggled to define the change in more tangible ways. One named it as more “conscious,” which seems to fit well with the other interviewees’ comments.

Myles: Myles was struck by the internal changes he was experiencing: “The doctoral program…pushes your thinking into enough new areas that by the end of it, it’s almost this oriented disorienting trying to track back where your sense of identity and your worldview…came from…it felt really immersive and really transformational.” The internal changes altered the way he looked at situations and the way he approached opportunities, “It’s kind of exposed [me] to new ideas…it gave me some knowledge and skill…different way[s] of looking at situations…I am seeing different opportunities that I didn’t before and am approaching things in a way that makes it more successful.” Essentially, the program made Myles feel more alive, “I feel like I’m so much more conscious, you know, just kind of at a foundational level that I think the process was very good for sharpening.”

Jane: Jane, like Myles, used the word internal to describe her development in this area, “It’s how I have internalized the information. I would say there were defining things and readings…that resonated with me and I brought those into my repertoire, I don’t necessarily draw back to them.” Jane really felt changed due to the program; she asserts that the program changed her life.
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If I had to say what’s changed: I’ve changed. How I think. How I approach decision-making. Not just what I learned but how I apply what I’ve learned. There’s just a difference in me to the point that I cannot interact the same way, with the same people. I have become more of an observer, a listener, a thinker, a processor, and a responder versus a reactor.

Jane’s internal transformation does have an impact on how one might experience her today verses prior to the program, “In every way my life has changed. Part of its personal, part of it is professional… how I see the world…interact with the world, every day. I have become quieter internally allowing me to study, think and interact differently.”

Maxine: Maxine also felt changed; she felt the change was incremental, building week-by-week over the program, stating, “I would go home every single week of class, when we had weekend classes, I would go home changed and ready to take this new thinking back to work with me.” Maxine made important friends during the program, which allowed her to see different perspectives and to apply different lenses in her daily life.

I have made friends with these different people…. They’re my friends now, and I can speak to their ideas, and they help me. If I want to pick up those lenses, if I want to pick up the Freire lens, if I want to pick up the Nodding’s lens, the Bell Hooks lens, the Bordeaux lens…all these different lenses, I can pick them up and look at things like that and sort of think how does it…what does it look like if I look at it through that lens and what does that mean?

She went on to clarify the impact that making friends with these theorists had on her development and growth, “I was surprised to have so many worlds open up to me… it really
affected me, making ‘friends’ with those thinkers because they were new people that I didn’t
know and I thought I knew so many.”

**Paulo:** “A lot of my worldview has [changed] and I don’t know how. And I’m pretty sure
other [cohort members did] as well in the program…in a good way.” Paulo was able to identify a
feminist course that changed his perspective: “That was a really interesting, good class. I think
that changed some of my perspective on feminism.”

**Stephen:** Stephen mentioned that he experienced some growth in this area saying, “It
was just having that different lens and being able to step back and try to look at the larger picture
and just think more thoughtfully about the situation.”

**Stephanie:** Stephanie was able to see her work in a different way. She identified two
lenses that she uses more often now: a feminist lens and the lens of diversity and inclusion.

I took a feminist perspectives course, and I think that has opened up…I think I look
through that lens more now than I did before. I took a diversity class…there’s an awful
lot of diversity and inclusion [work in business], and I rely on that lens a lot when DEI
(diversity, equity and inclusion) things come up at school or in the workplace.

Overall, Stephanie summed up her development in this way, “A far broader worldview,
definitely…a new lens to explore through. It’s a new lens from which to explore things, that’s
what I got overall from the program.”

**Michel:** Thanks to the program, Michel was able to see the experiences of women in
corporate computing more clearly. He started to recognize the structural barriers that exist in IT
for females to find success in leadership roles. His understanding of past situations was
transformed because of the program. He recognized his own privilege, and his worldview
shifted. He came to acknowledge his role as ally for women in IT and his responsibility to inform and transform other men’s attitudes and actions towards women in IT.

**Sara:** Sara experienced a foundational shift in how she viewed music education after participating in the program. She recognized the colonizing nature of music education and saw a different way for teaching music. She describes how her thinking was transformed and how she saw herself, her role within the field, and the capacity for her field in a new way. Sara felt really transformed after her dissertation process, stating it helped her to “change my thinking or transform the way I think about what I do and what, you know, the capacity for my field is and the contribution that I might be able to make in my field.”

**Confidence and Refinement**

Seven cohort members used the words confidence, authority, credibility, and credence when talking about outcomes of the program. Those cohort members felt as though the program helped them gain confidence, allowing them to speak up more often. Other cohort members stated that they came in with a foundation in those areas. In those instances, cohort members described their development as refinement. As one cohort member put it, “coal to diamond” or as Rigoni (2002) wrote about how education was a “grain of sand to students’ oysters…[producing] spectacular pearls” (p. 158).

**Sara:** Sara described the confidence she gained from the program this way: “So, I think it has helped develop a little bit more chutzpah than I would have had, you know what I mean, to like stand up for what I believe in.”

**Stephanie:** While Stephanie knew degrees and credentials carried weight in higher education, it was not until after she completed the program that she herself realized the confidence the program provided her. “It didn’t hit me until after I had completed my
dissertation that I could stick my neck out more and take more chances and raise my hand more.”

The program developed her confidence, and it also helped refine existing knowledge. As mentioned previously, the feminist perspectives class that Stephanie took had an impact on her worldview. However, an important component of that growth was that she felt like some of her understanding of feminism and the feminist lens was “inherently inside there some place just waiting to grow.”

Maxine: Just like the internal change that Maxine described being incremental over the length of the program, she has felt her confidence growing. “It could be an amount of confidence that grew over the years of studying.”

Susan: From the very early stages in the program, Susan was beginning to feel more confident about her abilities and potential as very early on in the program she applied for the Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) position, a position she would not have applied for if it were not for the doctoral program. “I don’t think I would have felt…worthy of that position or application. But I felt like, I’m in this doctorate program, I can say that in the interview, that adds some sort of legitimacy to who I am.” Besides the confidence to apply for positions, she also expressed confidence in using her voice and being more fully herself because of the program, “I would definitely say that I feel more confident…being able to express who I am and what I think.” She also said, “So I think just having more confidence and being very content with where I am makes my day-to-day much easier.” Susan mentioned a situation at work where she felt like she was getting the run-around, but she asserted herself with the confidence the program helped develop in her, saying afterwards, “I don’t think I would have advocated in the same way had I not gone through the program.”
Michel: Being an adjunct professor, Michel felt like he was always on the outside, never really fitting in with the other full-time faculty. He often referred to his colleagues as Doctor. However, after he graduated with his Ed.D., he described a “psychological shift” that occurred where he suddenly felt like “one of them.” He was invited to join them during commencement and now considers the full-time faculty his colleagues. This new confidence and validity helped him feel like “one of them.” Michel also admitted that through the process of the program, he started to “trust [his] own judgment,” having greater confidence in his abilities.

Paulo: The coursework had a similar impact on Paulo: it gave him the confidence to stand up even when it could potentially have a negative impact on his future career prospects. Those classes kind of gave me more of a backbone, right, to say you know we’re onto something. You have to have strong people to stand up and say something and you know I’m very mindful that a lot of times I say stuff and it is career suicide. Don’t get me wrong. It’s like, oh, that promotion, I just shot it in the foot. Similarly, to Stephanie, Paulo had the foundations of a strategic point of view it just needed to be more fully developed.

So I think for me, it has opened up and has enhanced my view and looking at things from a strategic point of view, right, and how all the pieces come together and how it’s important to have key stakeholders in the room to make change happen. So those things were, I don’t want to say obvious before, but the program kind of really enhanced the importance of that.

Jane: Jane was one of the cohort members who felt like they came into the program with a foundation of confidence, allowing the program to use what she had and build upon it in the areas she needed, “So I have always had a level of confidence and competence and that has
allowed me to navigate different situations and opportunities and people. Taking those things and refining it.” She went on to explain that refinement vividly.

You refine your skills and the more refined you become, the more palatable. Interesting to others, right? Either you draw them in or they seek you out because of the refinements. When you think of even the way that I maybe speak or the way that I think or how I make decisions, whatever it may be, the more refined I become at that, and hopefully that’s a continual process. Coal to diamond. That was probably, you know, pretty high heat during the dissertation and during school, right, some pretty intense stuff. But then coming to the other side of that and landing in a place of deep refinement, but that process still continues.

The refinement that Jane identified, she summarized as a kind of eloquence of self, “Eloquence in how I think, how I speak, how I see others, how I view things. So when you said confident, I was a pretty confident person…it’s become a very eloquent confidence. Right, the refinements.”

**Transformative Learning Outcomes Summary**

This theme illustrated the deep shifts in perspectives and habits of mind that occurred because of the program. The participants detailed the ways the program increased confidence or continued to refine existing confidence to make it more palatable. Finally, it described participants’ identity shift to becoming scholars. These transformative learning outcomes were the learning and development experienced by participants that fell outside the program’s stated learning outcomes. Next, I will detail participants’ identified learning and development within the program’s stated learning outcomes.
Program Learning Outcomes

As stated previously, analysis of participants interview data resulted in the realization that participants identified learning and development aligned with the program’s stated learning outcomes. Therefore, this next section details individual’s interview findings and their alignment with each program learning outcome, where applicable. Table 8 summarizes the learning and development participants identified and their alignment with the program learning outcomes. After a discussion of the interview findings, I explain the focus group findings, which triangulate and validate these primary research findings.

Table 8

Summary of Program Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>PLO #1</th>
<th>PLO #2</th>
<th>PLO #3</th>
<th>PLO #4</th>
<th>PLO #5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program &amp; Faculty (Stephanie)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PLO #1**

Coming to a greater, more complex understanding of self, while not directly described in those words, was an outcome for all the participants as was challenging unexamined assumptions. While there was not always an unexamined assumption identified in the interview, it was clear through the interviewee’s own words that in many cases the program allowed them,
Stephen: Stephen gained a deeper understanding of himself through the doctoral program in a couple different ways. First, he identified how the coursework helped him to recognize his political alignment more clearly. “George Lakeoff’s book was interesting…I didn’t think of liberal and conservative as such polar differences. After that book, I went, ‘Oh, I guess I am a liberal.’” The program also helped him challenge his assumptions about education, “Before the doctoral program, I thought of education as some sort of means to an end. Whereas now…I look at education as a means of thinking and understanding how we interact with others…how we view the world.”

Sara: Sara has also come to a more complex understanding of herself. Through the coursework, she was able to recognize that she became a postmodern constructivist. This recognition helped her to realize that she works to avoid the binary, especially when considering civil turmoil and conflict. The dissertation process and her research helped challenge assumptions about her field, leading her to realize that the United States educational system needs to “decolonize music education.” She recognized her own assumptions about her field, which was based on colonized notions of music education instead of “the way people actually learn inside their communities.” She came to a deeper understanding of students. “We’re doing [music education] wrong, you know, it’s subjugating kids of color. There isn’t a requisite representation in the teacher education programs. We’re not validating informal learning.” Sara’s development in this area helped her to challenge assumptions about comfort and discomfort describing the development this way: “Part of the deal that I think adults don’t learn readily, we get into the stuff that we are good at and then we’re comfortable. We don’t want to feel stupid or
look stupid or you know, learn something where we’re not automatically good at it at first. So pushing us out of our comfort zones. I think that’s probably one of the most valuable things that maybe I learned also because everything about my research pushed me out of my comfort zone.”

**Myles:** Myles was able to understand situations and people at a complex level after the program. While he did not necessarily state that assumptions were challenged to get him to this complex understanding of others, the knowledge that led to the complexity was knowledge he gained from program.

The doctoral program was me trying to better understand the situation that I’m in and the people I’m working with, and it’s amazing how quickly I just started clicking over to—I think I know what theory explains why the situation is the way it is or why people are acting the way they are and I know the kind of training that I should do.

The concept of subjugated knowledge helped Myles come to a complex understanding of his job and the staff, which also challenged assumptions he had about the barriers to his work.

The concept of subjugated knowledge which really resonates with and has become a major feature of any kind of training or orientation I do for our staff or within different networks I am part of around organizing our leadership. Just the idea that if you’re, a person without professional credentials or professional position, advocating for what you think is important, the idea that you get dismissed because your knowledge is just the knowledge of everyday people and what’s that worth. And so just that you recognize [that] and not being deterred by the fact that that’s a barrier you’re going to run into because it has to be submerged. It has to be discredited in part just out of the insecurities of professionals where they’ve invested all this time and money in education that needs to be respected.
Myles’s understanding of exercising leadership through training and education was a crystalizing moment for him, “… reading that Myles Horton book thinking of—[education] as an important maybe even central way of exercising leadership through training and educating others as opposed to the master's program like that whole thing of applying knowledge.” Myles went on to explain how the idea of using education as a leadership tool helped him come to a deeper understanding of how he should approach advocacy work, “To focus…on them and what the educational need might be in order to get from where the problem is to where they want the solution to be as opposed to me just coming in with the prefabricated plan.”

Michel: The program helped Michel come to a deeper understanding of his role as a teacher.

The thing that I think really changed for me was the idea that a professor isn’t just an expert. The professor is a leader and so professor as leaders in the classroom that…was kind of a revelation, was kind of a complete change of perspective…And it was like, you know, we’re not just imparting experience. We’re not just giving people the knowledge that we have. We’re also helping them to try to figure out their lives…it helped me try to figure out mine.

Michel started to see the role of professor not as the role of being an expert but as the role of leading and that at the core of leadership was people. “If professorship is primarily leadership…[Then] you’re centered on the people that you’re teaching, the people you are working with.”

Michel’s assumptions about education, beyond the role of the professorship, were also challenged throughout the program. He started to realize the negative impacts of our school systems. “School itself is responsible for reproducing the class [system] that students are in when
they start. This flies in the face of ideas like education being a way of getting up, you know, or stepping up in life.” Michel mentioned recognizing the similarities that Foucault described with the internalization of the prison with the internalization of school.

Michel also came to complex understanding of his students and their diversity through a course on race, class, and gender saying the course, “changed how I approach [race] and how to be, not just sensitive because sensitive doesn’t mean that you’ve changed the way you think. But basically, changed my approach to the subject and how to approach students differently about it.” This complex understanding extended to his colleagues in corporate computing, as well. He started to challenge assumptions about gender and promotions, “I was promoted over two different women…And the first time I thought, oh well, you know its time and circumstance. The second time I thought, no, there’s something here.” Michel went on to study successful women in IT and sexism, which led to an even deeper understanding of his female colleagues and sexism in IT.

The challenges of these assumptions led Michel to come to a more complex understanding of what being an ally means: “Understanding what my role is as a man when I’m fighting sexism because it shouldn’t be what women do to fight sexism.” Through the dissertation process Michel started to realize that this fight against sexism meant that he needed other men, not women, to understand sexism. Women already understood it. “If I’m asked who [I’m] going to go talk to about [sexism], and it’s the last line of my dissertation; it’s going to be other men. It is going to be the audience that doesn’t want to hear [about it].” Michel goes on to explain that as a man, the work he needs to do to fight sexism is different than his female colleagues, “So I don’t need to do the work that my female colleagues are doing. I need to do the work that’s unique to myself and I need to understand the difference.”
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**Jane:** During Jane’s interview, she identified a variety of ways the program changed her, ultimately leading to a more complex understanding of herself.

If I had to say what’s changed, I’ve changed. How I think. How I approach decision-making. Not just what I learned but how I apply what I’ve learned. How that has integrated into who I naturally am and what my strengths naturally are. How it has exposed certain weakness and how I manage those. How I view the world, how I view others, and how I interact with it. It changed everything in relation to that.

The program challenged certain assumptions Jane had about charisma and leadership. She came to realize that leaders with charisma and those without have value saying both approaches are, “Equally as valuable, just like qualitative and quantitative, with them being exclusive they both have value but in combination they have extreme value.” Like Michel, Jane also came to realize that leadership was about people, and that while she leads, leadership is not about her but instead about the people being led.

I guess [something] I had not thought about prior to this, so leadership is about people, and I’ve always believed in people first, process second, and product last. That has always been my thinking and how you interact with people matters and what you understand about yourself, and what you understand about the world, and what you understand about the dynamics of people within leadership allows you to lead differently, it’s not about me, and it never was about me.

**Stephanie:** Stephanie’s work as an accountant has forced her to think very linear about her work but the program helped challenge that approach. “I take a bigger step back in the work that I do, I look at it far more holistically than I used to before…I have a much broader worldview of my work and my place in the university structure.” Stephanie goes on to describe it
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this way, “I am open to exploring the world of accounting in a different way today than I did six years ago and it’s far more exploratory rather than rote, perfunctory, obligatory.”

Similar to Jane, Stephanie came to a more complex understand of herself and her students. She came to realize that as a leader, it wasn’t about her; it was about her students. She talked about how she was restructuring a program she taught in and how she removed herself from the process and instead focused on what students needed from the program “I recall numerous times saying to my colleagues that I was selling this new program, this isn’t about me. It’s not about me and my job, it’s about what’s best for the students.”

Maxine: Paulo Freire had a powerful impact on Maxine, deepening her understanding of herself as a leader. The program’s structure also helped to challenge Maxine’s assumption about what a leader needed to learn in a program on leadership, transitioning her thoughts from needing to learn leadership theories to valuing individual leader’s stories.

Freire…just learning about him as one person, it affected me in a couple of ways. One is the learning, thinking about the pedagogy of the oppressed…how teaching can change the state of a group of people as you’re working on individual people. It was really powerful for me. The other thing that was really powerful was learning about the life of one person because this is a department of leadership where I didn’t learn any leadership theory…at first, I was like where’s the leadership classes…And at first, I found that strange, but looking back on it, I see how necessary that was not to cheapen the work that we were doing. So in that class, just sort of watching this one person’s life as a leader, it was really powerful for me as a person who was really trying to exercise her muscles of leadership and looking at someone who had really risked so much and he was exiled from
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his country…I am not saying I fully identified with him, but there was enough parallels where I could begin to think deeply about myself as an individual leader.

Susan: For Susan, the program challenged assumptions she had about leadership, which lead to a complex understanding of herself and bringing her true self to her leadership. “I have pulled out this idea of authenticity and being your true self when you are leading…. You have to be who you are, and I think that has changed for me. So being an authentic collective individual.” Susan took this idea of being one’s authentic self in leadership and tied it to her deepened understanding of the importance of including narrative and leader’s’ stories in leadership practice.

So the narrative, like using our stories to be leaders and to change minds and to lead. I think that whole narrative class really helped me to think about who I am as a person, the transformational learning piece…That really resounded with me, this idea of using our stories, and talking about who we are as humans to then affect change and to lead people from point A to point B.

Even though Susan had been a teacher for several years before enrolling in the program, the program really helped her come to a more complex understating of her teaching philosophy. A theorist she studied during the dissertation process was a crystalizing moment for her.

So what it is, essentially, is that you see the people that you’re connecting with as one with. It’s like a symbiotic relationship. We both need one another to move forward and to do anything with our relationship and as I was reading that, when I was doing my dissertation stuff, I was like that’s teaching to me. Like teachers who see that relationship…that’s my teaching philosophy, I see students in this, I Thou (one with relationship).
Paulo: The program, for Paulo, did not necessarily challenge any assumption he had, but his enrollment in the program challenged other’s assumptions, and this led him to a more complex understanding of the students of color he serves at his institution.

We had to write a paper…we had an opportunity to talk about our journey and how we see ourselves. And I talked about how I am very mindful that I wasn’t supposed to make it this far as a person of color. And I felt in a couple of classes, I know I’ve felt in a couple of groups, even from the faculty, the professor…I get it, I’m going to prove you wrong, right. But that’s a person of color, they always got to prove themselves. I wrote this paper and [our professor] is like, “wow, this is the best paper I’ve ever seen you write.” It was very telling that I had to write that [paper about my journey] maybe for him to get it, right. So, I’m very mindful of that. And that’s why my work and my dissertation is very close to me. Right, because I know what our students are going through.

The program also helped Paulo challenge assumptions about leadership, helping him identify his own leadership style. “Now I can claim that I’m a servant leader. I know I’ve done that. I mentor people; I coach them, help them see their potential. When somebody asks me what kind of leader [I am], now I say servant leader.” The program helped challenge Paulo’s previous approaches to management causing him to focus on leadership instead of management.

Before the program, I think I was one of those leaders where I just managed tasks, and now, it’s transitioned into the servant leader, right. Where you see people for who they are, and your job as a leader is to help them be their best self. Help them get to their self-actualization level where they realize, oh, you should be doing this work.
Upon reviewing cohort members interview transcripts, I only identified one cohort member who did not make comments that suggested growth or development in the area of forming knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world. Many of the comments in this area identify a commitment to advocacy or allyship. The advocacy was identified as self-advocacy, advocacy for students, or advocacy for equity and diversity in their organizations. Some respondents who identified growth and development in this area acknowledged that they had the ethical foundation, but their commitments became stronger because of the program.

**Sara:** During the global pandemic Sara had to make a tough knowledge-based commitment to her health, “So on Tuesday when I called in sick instead of compromising my values…and folding like just about everybody I know. I didn’t do that. And ultimately, even though it was hard, I felt good about not doing that.” The program created a stronger commitment to advocacy in Sara, advocating for herself and others, “It has helped develop more chutzpah than I would have had… to stand up for what I believe in…I have to continue sticking up for what I believe in and to back it up with evidence and facts.”

**Michel:** The program helped Michel make knowledge-based commitments to teaching using a social justice lens in his computer programming courses. “And so I’ve learned to try to connect I guess computer literacy and coding with things like social justice and with projects that advance socially relevant or aware causes.” Michel’s comments reflecting the previous theme about reframing allyship also suggests that he has formed knowledge-based ethical commitments to being an ally for women in the IT.
**Jane:** Jane has made a commitment to focus on others in her leadership, taking the focus off her.

So it was kind of all about me contributing and doing things and doing meaningful things, but it was all based on me. I have shifted and refined to the point that it is not about me. It is about others. And what I can bring to others. How I can refine someone’s thinking based on who I am. How I can refine someone’s decision-making, based on the questions I ask them. How I can refine systems because of the way that I think. So, the refinement is something that I would say I’ve gone through and hopefully I will continue to go through. But what I want to do is be able to be a catalyst, not just for change but for refinement. Let’s keep the core of who you are and what you do and why you do it. Let’s refine it.

**Stephen:** Due to the program, Stephen mentioned a knowledge-based ethical commitment to understanding leaders to help advocacy efforts.

A strength right now is to look at leaders and to be able to figure out what’s motivating them and what kind of powers them, what they value. And then figuring out how I can best interact with them, either from a point of advocacy or from a point of just being able to be collegial with each other. For example, I figured out really quickly that I have a leader that has very low empathy for other folks; that the leader is just really interested in moving forward. So I had the uncomfortable conversation with that person saying, you know, I think your intentions are wonderful. I think you’re trying to motivate and inspire. I think there’s also some times where that doesn’t work out the way that you want it to work out. I think sometimes people get very turned off by that…and so we were able to have that conversation. I don’t think they agreed with me but I don’t think I would have
had that diagnosis, nor conversation without the training and with the critical thinking that happened within the coursework.

**Myles:** Myles has made the knowledge-based commitment to share the information he has learned with others and use it to inform his practice and actions.

Now, if I don't think [a] person really understands. Maybe I should recommend and I'm endlessly recommending things to people. It's like I think this person really needs to read George Lakoff, so they can see that they're not going to reason this person out of their position because it's a worldview thing. And they really need to try to figure out where the person is coming from, or I don't think this person is going to be successful because they're not using strategic communications. They're just trying to go in there and maybe out of their own insecurity just trying to prove how much they know by telling people how to do something, but they haven't told the negative story to establish urgency or the positive story to inspire hope. So how is the audience ever going to be ready for the boring technical story about how you get it done. And so yeah, I'm drawing things from where I am like endlessly. Just like sitting there and it's like okay. I would have had a problem with this in the past but now I know why I have a problem with that.

**Stephanie:** Stephanie identified some of her knowledge-based ethical commitments when she defined leadership this way: “I think that leaders are there to help us become the best version of ourselves that we can be.” She sees leadership as an ethical commitment to developing others; she clarifies further by saying, “I mean, I still see a leader as one who’s willing to walk alongside someone and encourage and help them become better, to change, to move sometimes into leadership themselves.” She admits that leaders who do not have ethical commitments to developing others disappoint her. “I’m incredibly disappointed when leaders don’t rise to that
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task and when they aren’t looking out for the common good. When they’re not looking out for
the betterment of their people or their organization.”

Paulo: The program has strengthened Paulo’s commitment to equity, diversity, and
inclusion as well as challenging other leaders to do as they say.

I am on a lot of committees at work, and we are talking about inequity and hiring people
of color at the institution. And it seems to be a very difficult conversation, and the
conversation is difficult with the people in leadership that say one thing but do something
else. And when you see that, it’s like, wait a minute, what you do and what you say
you’re doing are two different things. And so I’m going to challenge you, right, to do the
right thing.

The dissertation process itself demonstrated Paulo’s strengthened commitment to equity as his
dissertation looked at the racial disparities within nursing education. Paulo identified a strong
commitment to ensuring leaders do not simply work to maintain the status quo. Finally, as was
noted in the theme on confidence and refinement, Paulo knows that a lot of his advocacy work in
the area of equity, diversity, and inclusion creates friction with his goals of obtaining a
leadership position, but he holds to his ethical commitments regardless. “You have to have
strong people to stand up and say something, right? … I’m very mindful that a lot of times I say
stuff and its career suicide. It’s like, oh, ok. That’s the promotion I just shut down.”

Susan: As was noted in the theme on confidence and refinement, the program helped
Susan gain confidence. That confidence lead to Susan advocating for herself in ways she would
not have done previously. It is clear through her interview comments that she too has developed
a commitment to advocating for herself and others. When feeling like she was getting the run
around on her job, she stood up for herself, demonstrating her ethical commitment of equitable
and fair treatment. “[I said] you’re giving me the runaround; I need something concrete, and I
don’t think I would have advocated in the same way had I not gone through the program.”

**PLO #3**

A total of eight respondents made comments that clearly identified development or
growth within this program outcome. The comments in this theme identify growth and
development in forming questions or answers about the relationship of the field of education and
leadership and the participants’ life calling. Participants described gaining clarity on what they
wanted to do in the future.

**Sara:** At the onset of the program, Sara was already starting to feel restless in her role
working in music education. The program helped distract her from a cycle she had felt pushing
her to do something else professionally.

I worked in elementary music for about 10 years at the current school district I’m in. And
I was getting itchy at about [year] eight. Yep, I know how to do this, but it’s not quite as
fun and a lot of change and a lot of stuff that doesn’t really jive with me as I am learning
more about myself and who I am. So, switching to middle school helped a little bit, but
that cycle is getting shorter and shorter. So, I think that I really would like to do
something else.

So besides knowing deep down that her time in middle school music education had an
expiration date at the beginning of the program, she did not know what that next position would
be. The program, specifically her dissertation, helped Sara hone in on her passions and her hopes
for the future.

I love working with college students, and I would love to…have a professorship, and
that’s kind of basically what I do over my summers is work with college students and
indigenous filmmakers, indigenous filmmaking women and chiefs of villages, and I’m like, this is my jam. Anything that lets me continue that and continue doing things like that. I mean, that’s where I want to be.

She started to sketch out what her life calling includes.

Well, I think finding the kind of position where I get to travel and I get to keep learning these kinds of directions and work in interdisciplinary teams and these kinds of directions with local culture bearers to help preserve culture to help sustain culture. It started out with learning about culturally responsive pedagogy, but it really shifts more towards how do we actively sustain culture. And not just respond to it, but how do we carry it into the future? How do we reclaim the stuff that we lost, the knowledge that has been lost? And I definitely want to be a part of those initiatives so I can do some more things with National Geographic. That would be cool…So, I can definitely tell that it’s time to move on to other things. I also would like to have the space to write some articles; I want to shift my work into a book.

Finally, she describes how the program and the methodical dissertation process transformed the way she thinks about what she does and “…the capacity for [her] field and the contribution that [she] might be able to make in [her] field.”

**Myles:** At the beginning of the program, Myles questioned whether the Ed.D. was the right program for him. He struggled with some of the very education-focused coursework at the beginning of the program and its applicability to his work in the non-profit world, but eventually, he started to reframe his work. “How can I say generally speaking, the kind of work that I’ve been doing and emphasize the educational part of it. That was always there that I didn’t recognize. Sort of redefining myself more as an adult educator.” By the end of the program, he
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started to see himself as an educator and indirectly identified adult education as his life’s calling.

there was a certain vicarious thrill in being the person who got to educate other adults in a way
where suddenly they would just start [to] almost glow.”

Myles continues to look towards the future in the hopes of dedicating more of his
professional practice to adult education.

I think it’s been, how do I sort of carve out a new kind of role for myself, and it could be
a different role with the same organization. It could be an entirely different role with a
new organization, but I feel especially that the process of coming to the end of the
program, research process, the dissertation defense. I think each of those was kind of our
refining and focusing even though it didn’t spit out a little slip of paper that said, this is
what you’re going to do instead it really clarified for me where my interests lie and that
my interests lie in different areas now than they had before.

While the program gave him the knowledge to gain a greater understanding of his life’s calling, he
acknowledges he still has work to do: “I have clarity on what I would feel more satisfied with
and the next chapter of my life [and] career path… now [its] incumbent on me to take advantage
of what I gained [from the] program [and] go make it happen.”

**Michel:** Michel went into the program having the goal of becoming a professor,
believing teaching was his life’s calling. “Academic life has kind of kept me alive in my
corporate life.” However, he gained a deeper understanding of the field of education, the field of
leadership, and the role of the professor in the classroom. As stated previously, he sees the role
of professor in the classroom as a leadership role centered around people. Through the program,
he came to a deeper understanding of the type of professor or leader he would like to be in the
classroom. He wants to help others figure out their lives. This idea was counter to how Michel previously thought about the role as professor as primarily being an expert in the field who imparts knowledge. The program helped Michel not just form but answer questions about the fields of education and leadership as it relates to his life’s calling as a professor.

**Jane:** Jane found validation to questions she had about education in a course about Paulo Freire. “The major game changer or major shift came for me with Paulo Freire. When I took that course, that was defining for me because it validated my approach to education.” While Jane does not speak specifically about what her life calling is, she does suggest the program helped create clarity about her future. “[The program] helped me define more and become more passionate about what I want to do and what I want to bring to the future.” Jane further explains how she learned that leadership was not about her. “[It’s] not about what I think, what I know, what I want, what I envision; it’s not about me. It is about the person, the situation, the organization, the structure, all of those things and my true contribution to that.” Jane formed several questions about positional leadership verses influential leadership, “The influence I had in my position on more people than those in decision-making positions, they have power of decision-making, but influence, it depends…my non-positional leadership will serve me well in what I choose to do in my future.”

**Stephanie:** Stephanie too formed questions which lead to a greater understanding of the field of leadership and her life’s calling. “I want to be the impetus for change. I think leaders have quite a bit of responsibility for change in an organization.” The program also helped Stephanie take her knowledge of the field of leadership into the world of sailing.

When I look backwards I see how I grew into a leadership role in [sailing]. I’m continuing to explore that and grow that and so that’s completely separate from my world
of work and my world of education. I can see that it has an impacted that whole world and it’s flourished in a way that I don’t’ know that it would have had I not had this educational background.

**Maxine:** Maxine made it pretty clear that the program helped her understand her life’s work: “Part of this process has helped me really know what my life’s work is.” If that was not stated clearly enough, she went on to say, “Over these four years, [I was able to] figure out what I will do with the rest of my life and that is important because when I entered into [the program] it’s true that I was filling time.” She went on to clarify, “But the beauty of this whole thing is that where I am now is that I know what I want to do…I want to keep doing the non-profit work and I don't want to work in a university.” While Maxine recognizes she no longer feels called to the professorship, she does feel called to continue to create knowledge. “I’m concerned with knowledge production, but I feel like I can be part of knowledge production without having to commit fully as a professor somewhere. And that’s what I want to do knowledge production and continue writing.” The program continued to reroute her back to her non-profit work.

I used to call it brain candy, and it was so great for me. This ability to… have that brain candy and think about things in that really sort of big picture way. And each class sort of rerouted me back into the work I was doing and helped me to clarify for myself what I am doing, even to strategize and think about all the different levels of what I am doing…we were kind of growing together, the doctorate and my nonprofit. She had a real connection to what she learned in the coursework and how she wants to approach her work in the future.

One of the things that I learned in the sociology class was this concept of a community of practice and a real recognition that I don't have one...And so, I think studying them and
seeing the work that they're doing…I began to imagine this community of practice and how it could exist. And I began to really see concretely, how the work I'm doing in the nonprofit I'm working on could create a future large community of practice.

She finalized her thoughts on the impact the program had on leading to her life’s work, “So I can tell you that is because the learning that I received was so focused on the practical that it really honed me. So I'm really ready to dig my hands even deeper than they already are.”

Susan: As mentioned previously, through Susan’s dissertation research, she was able to articulate her teaching philosophy brought about by theorist, Martin Buber. She came to the realization that relationships are at the core of teaching and leading. “We both need one another to move forward and to do anything with our relationship, and as I was reading that when I was doing my dissertation stuff, I was like, oh, that’s teaching to me.” Susan also mentioned seeking new opportunities in higher education outside the K-12 environment. While she did not necessarily point to the program helping her to realize that her life’s calling was in higher education, she did make comments that suggest the program formed questions for her about her current environment that resulted in a lot of frustration, “Yeah, so when things like that happen that gets a little frustrating. There was like a period where I think I applied for like three jobs.” She went on to mention loving the idea of teaching teachers in higher education, “I would love it. I would love it.”

Paulo: Originally, Paulo thought he wanted to become a faculty member, teaching in higher education, but during the program, he realized there were many other opportunities to make an impact in higher education outside the faculty role, “So my goal was [to become faculty]. And then I’ve learned…I don’t want to do that…I think I’m ready to move on to something [else]…to be in a director role, where I’m leading, a part of the leadership team.” The
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program also helped him answer questions about the field of leadership and the type of leadership he practices. “Now, I can claim that I’m a servant leader.” As Paulo nears the end of the program, he feels open to new opportunities and ideas about his future. “Now it is becoming more exciting, interesting after I’m finished. Because I’ll have more options that I haven’t even entertained.”

PLO #4

Participants were asked directly about ways they are continuing to develop their leadership skills, and five out of the nine provided comments about how they were continuing their development. Very few participants had concrete ways they were furthering their professional practice with a focus on learning and growth throughout their career. Those responding in this area provided informal ways they were continuing to search out information or continuing their development. One participant admittedly said they were not doing anything directly in this area.

Myles: Myles has had a practice of consuming Minnesota Public Radio, TED Talks, and other resources to continue to learn new things. “So in general, I do like learning new things…I suppose that's kind of a trait for any of us who decided to go as [into] a doctoral program. I certainly have plenty of reasons to be tracking down new information.” He also mentioned taking the opportunity to compile lists of things he wants to add to his knowledge: “And so I just created like a list of all of these things that I think would really add to my knowledge, as someone practicing.”

Michel: Michel shared that he has found the independent work of learning and growth development post-graduation to be more challenging than he thought: “I’ve had to do more self-directed stuff as far as keeping current and reading some of the things that we did in class and
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that’s harder to do now that you don’t have the structure that I used to.” Michel also continues to reengage with the readings from the coursework, “I’m still going back over a lot of the books that we bought or that we sort of circulated…and reading those because I’m still getting my sea legs with education.”

**Jane:** Jane sees learning and development opportunities everywhere as she continues to refine who she is and how she interacts with the world.

Two things come to mind right away. The first would be, it's a continuation of being a learner. I've always been an observer and a studier, but I observe and study in a different kind of way…everything that comes to mind is knowing my strengths, and really focusing on-- that word ‘refinement’ keeps coming up… strengths can be an asset and a deficit, and so really honing in on that and recognizing other things. Like for instance the visionary part of me versus the day-to-day detail, really paying close attention to what energizes me, what takes away energy from me, what am I really good at, and how can I surround myself with people who are different from me who I can learn from, and so it’s a constant development, its reflection; reflection is huge, huge.

**Stephanie:** When asked how she continues to learn and grow, Stephanie said, “by grabbing every opportunity I have!” She went on to say, “I continue to just keep growing, keep moving forward, keep reaching out. I recognize that I keep putting myself in positions that I’m uncomfortable in.”

**Maxine:** Maxine tended to read all the works by the individuals being studied in the coursework. She referred to the readings as brain candy. While she didn’t state ways in which she would continue to learn and grow directly, the program opened her to the realization of all the resources that are likely still out there for her to use eventually, “[The program] taught me
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there are hundreds more [resources] out there that I don't know [that] would be valuable to
me…whether or not I will take the time to study… We'll see…I mean it is brain candy.”

PLO #5

There were six participants who identified learning and developing in seeking a common
ground for dialogue and constructive action. Participants’ comments identified ways in which
they approached conversations and discussion with a listen first and act second approach. They
discussed the importance of getting colleagues, leaders, and students on the same page. They
learned how important it was to understand where people were at and meeting them there instead
of forging ahead alone. This subtheme identified the ways participants became more intentional
about their interactions with others.

Stephen: For Stephen, this idea of seeking a common ground for dialogue has made him
look at things more clearly to understand what’s going on beneath the surface.

I look at things a little bit more critically I would say and then there's also… there's
multiple reasons why this has happened, but I've become much more aware of and critical
of all the events and national events politically in particular. I am looking at the
leadership styles that are out there in those situations and finding and being able to self-
reflect and how I would handle such a situation or self-reflect on how I would handle
similar leadership situation in a different way. So, yeah, and it's actually, I feel like at
times too, it's even helped in my personal relationships because I've been able to step
back and think about what I am bringing to the relationship versus what the other person
is bringing and how we can better meet each other halfway.

Stephen takes this idea of seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action
into his work environment, “But yeah, I think there has been a lot more listening and a lot more
trying to kind of get everyone on a similar page or at least to agree that this is the proper course of action.”

Part of Stephen’s advocacy for others also hinges on bringing others to a common ground for dialogue, “I feel like I've done a better job of reaching out to our leaders…in a respectful way, but also nudging way at times saying, I don't know if we all understand where we're coming from or where we're going.”

Stephen tries to seek a common ground with leaders who might not be headed in the right direction and trying to bring them to a place where they can move forward productively, “There are some times where I feel like we have leaders who perhaps don't have the proper skills...So it's challenging and tricky to help them and alleviate … the pain they might be causing without alienating them and upsetting.”

**Myles:** Myles talked about being able to see ineffective routes others took to organize people and acknowledges that seeking a common ground for dialogue is critical to moving forward. Overall, understanding where people are coming from helps Myles to take constructive action, “[Understanding] why people are coming from where they're coming from…trying to figure out how to go around what I think might be creating their objection or their resistance to kind of get to where I want with them.”

**Stephanie:** Stephanie is more readily seeking out colleagues in different areas of the university to come to a common ground for constructive action to benefit students. “I venture outside of [my box within the university] far more readily and I reach across jurisdictions. And [I] try to involve other constituents at the university.”

**Maxine:** Maxine took her learning and growth in this area directly from a reading from the coursework, “You know the book *Respect*. I [now] have a class called *Know your
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Audience.” The program helped Maxine focus on the importance of word use, “Looking at words, what words we choose and how we use words, making choices and decisions around that…I think about language, I think about a lot of the things we learn, what language are we using when we’re talking about whatever.”

Susan: Susan’s biggest takeaway about leadership from the program has to do with understanding the audience so a common ground can be found. “So I think that has been my biggest, like takeaway about what leadership is, it is a collective ‘we.’” Another part of seeking common ground for dialogue for Susan is taking a step back and trying to understand the narrative leaders are trying to tell, “That idea of leadership and narrative really stuck with me so…I use that terminology a lot, what is it the story that we're trying to tell here, what is the message that we're trying to get out as leaders.”

Paulo: The program helped Paulo realize the importance of having key stakeholders at the table.

How it’s important to have key stakeholders in the room, right, to make change happen. So, those things were, I don’t want to say obvious before, but the program kind of really enhanced the importance of that for me. So, now when I have conversations with people, I’ve noticed, more and more [asking] what’s the impact with X, Y and Z before we jump over here…lets sit back and look at the whole picture and see who we need to bring on board and what we need to do.

Program Learning Outcomes Summary

The program learning outcomes were divided into the five subthemes, representing each individual learning outcome. Two participants identified growth or development in all five PLOs. A handful of participants provided significant evidence of growth within one PLO. Based
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on amount of data provided, they are: (a) Maxine’s growth in PLO #3, (b) Jane’s growth in PLO #1, (c) Michel’s growth in PLO #1, (d) Stephen’s growth in PLO #5, (e) Sara’s growth in PLO #3, and (f) Myles’s growth in PLO #3. Stephanie, Paulo, and Susan did not have a PLO with significantly more evidence than any other. The PLO #1 of challenging unexamined assumptions, leading to a more complex understanding of yourself, your students, clients, or your colleagues was the only PLO identified by all participants. PLO #2 and PLO #3 were the second most represented across participants with only one participant not having data identifying growth or development in these areas. PLO #4 asserting that the program would encourage or prepare students to improve their professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout their career was the least identified PLO with only five participants providing data in this subtheme. I also utilized a focus group to triangulate and validate interview findings in the program learning outcome theme. These findings support the interview findings.

Focus Group Findings

The purpose of the focus group was to validate whether the participants felt the stated program learning outcomes were an area of growth or development for them. During the interview process, participants were not asked directly about whether they experienced learning or development within the program learning outcomes. They were instead asked more general questions about their growth and development. I then realized that many of their comments within the interviews highlighted their learning and development within the program learning outcomes. The focus group was a subset of the overall participants; there were five participants in the focus group. I presented the focus group participants with the program learning outcome using Zoom’s polling function; I prompted them to select whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were unsure, disagreed or strongly disagreed with whether the program prepared or encouraged their growth or
development in each of the five program learning outcomes. I presented each program learning outcome individually; I then collected the polling results and shared them publicly with the focus group with time spent discussing why each participant made their selection.

I broke down the focus group findings by individual PLO. Each PLO has a table identifying each participant’s level of agreement with whether they grew or developed within the area identified by the program learning outcome statement. I then broke down the findings by level of agreement. Overall, no participants identified a response of disagree or strongly disagree to any of the program learning outcomes, suggesting that interview findings aligning interview comments within these program learning outcomes are valid. In three separate instances, participants selected unsure as their answer. As noted in the interview findings, not all participants identified growth or development with the same level of intensity or in the same areas. The focus group findings mirrored those findings. I discuss the focus group findings in greater detail below.

**PLO #1**

For this PLO all focus group participants selected either agree or strongly agree. Therefore, all participants agreed that the program encouraged or prepared them to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement, leading them to a more complex understanding of themselves and their students or clients. Correspondingly, within all five focus group participant’s interview analysis, they had data that suggested this was an area of growth and development.
Table 9

PLO #1

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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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Agree: Maxine was the only participant to respond at the “agree” level. Consistent with her responses within the interview, Maxine identified the assumption about what she would be learning in a program on leadership.

I think my assumption was that I was going to learn straight up leadership theory…I was really surprised and I have to say disappointed at first that we weren’t going to learn straight up leadership theory. But, looking back on it, it was definitely, I would say the better choice, those [leadership theories] are just sort of shallow pop culture things that people are throwing around. I had the assumption that I was going to learn something shallow and I learned something much deeper about leadership as a lifestyle.

Strongly Agree: Jane confirmed that she gained a deeper understanding of herself and others through examining assumptions and intellectual engagement, “So, that's really what hit me the most was the unexamined assumptions, intellectual engagement, and understanding of self in relation to those.”

Building on Jane’s comments, Sara summarized her growth and development in this area: “To kind of further that idea, I think the development of a critically reflective practice, myself applying those to decolonizing my practice and meeting my students where they are.”
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Susan pulled from an early example of an assumption the program solidified for her as a foundational component of leadership, “At the beginning, we made a very clear statement that leadership is for good…and it stuck with me for the entire time. That we’re in the program, leadership is good, you do it for good.”

Michel built on that in his response stating, “Leadership is not management, management is a skill that you need to acquire to carry out the plan.” Michel also felt like the idea of reflection in leadership challenged assumptions he had based on his primary field of corporate computing, “the idea of a reflective leader wasn’t something that I had seen very much before now.”

PLO #2

For this program learning outcome, there was a bit more variability in participants responses. One participant identified an answer of unsure, two agreed, and two strongly disagreed. In their interview analysis all but one participant had identified this as an area of growth and development.

Table 10

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Unsure: Maxine was the only participant to respond as unsure to whether the program encouraged or prepared her to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world. Likewise, within her interview, there was no data suggesting she
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had identified this as an area of growth or development. Maxine explained why she selected unsure: “I had new thoughts and new thinking around the ethical commitments I already had that I didn’t really change them for new ones. Yeah, I didn’t really form new ones, that’s why I’m unsure.”

Agree: For Susan, the words ethical commitments stuck out to her. While she agreed with the statement, she had a hard time really connecting to how the program encouraged growth in this area, “I was stuck on that ethical commitments phrase, as well. I couldn’t actually remember the content… I put agree, as opposed to strongly agree… I can’t cite it, you know, like I can’t put a parenthetical citation to it.”

While Jane felt she had well-grounded ethical commitments prior to the program she still felt this was an area of development, “Through this program it’s the knowledge base, I learned so much. The idea of infusing ethics into what we do and it’s bringing perspective and then being able to articulate and communicate that.” Part of this, from Jane’s perspective, was about not staying quiet when ethical boundaries were crossed, “I have a different level of responsibility in how I approach that around me based on what I know, based I what I learned, based on who I am post program.”

Strongly Agree: Michel felt like the program really opened his eyes to ethics especially considering his work within corporate America, “The Kramer text for me was like rolling up a garage door as far as ethics goes. My experience of corporate life is bereft of ethics; ethics is considered an opinion.” Michel goes on to explain how his growth and development in this area has allowed him to make traction, “It’s easier now for me to speak up with my thoughts, having sort of gone through the process… those opinions tend to get more traction because they are more practical, they’re more integrated into the situation.”
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For Sara, the ethical commitments she had strengthened through the programs coursework.

I think some of the text that we read and some of the other activities that I did…examined my own ethics and either strengthened them [to] really understand the foundation. In a way, that prepared me to better speak to City Hall and advocate for what I really believe is right with evidence with facts and kind of see the other side of it, to see how I need to communicate to leaders to be heard.

**PLO #3**

There were three focus group participants who selected strongly agree, one agree, and one participant identified that they were unsure whether the program encouraged or prepared them to form questions about the relationship of a particular field and their life’s calling. Each focus group participant’s interview data identified this as an area of growth and development.

**Table 11**

**PLO #3**

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**Unsure:** Susan was the only participant to select unsure for this program learning outcome.

While data within her interview findings suggested that she had formed questions about a particular field of study, particularly her identification of a teaching philosophy through the
dissertation process, she seemed to question whether the program has had an impact on her life’s calling.

I don’t know if I’m going to put it on the program. I wonder sometime if education was the right choice, that it was something that I really wanted to do or did I fall into it because of where I was when I went to get my masters, like was that just sort of what kind of happened. But I don’t think the program, if it did anything it solidified me into that field, into education. Yeah, I don’t know. So I’m just saying sure I’m in like a weird place with like what I want to do with my life. I don’t think it has necessarily to do with like the things that we learned or how I grew intellectually. I think it has more to do with just like letters that I can put after my name now. I thought, maybe that like more opportunities would open up professionally because I can call myself Dr. because I can sign Ed.D. after something and that hasn’t necessarily happened but that’s also partially because of like my own, like kind of lackadaisical laziness about trying to find new things.”

Agree: Sara feels similar to Susan, she’s not sure what she’s going to do next. Sara selected agree as she feels the program and her own internal awareness continues to nudge her to move on to something new.

I guess I’m in a similar place where I’m not sure what my next steps are, but I definitely know…I’ve known for a little while. I knew as soon as I started teaching middle school like, it has a shelf life because I can’t affect the kind of change that’s really important to me, that I feel strongly that needs to happen. I’m just limited, and I’m not willing to put in the years of the principal middleman, especially now, you know. That was never my life’s calling so figuring out those next steps and I’m starting to take on those next steps…so I can and I can’t put that on the program because I think it kind of initiated that process but I
think for me the isolating painful process of going through the dissertation the way I ended up doing it also kind of transformed what I want to do in a different way.

Strongly Agree: Maxine’s focus group and interview responses really highlighted this outcome as having a big impact on Maxine. Originally, Maxine thought she wanted to become a principal but the program changed her perspective.

I had no intention [any longer] of becoming a principal. I was going to be a nonprofit leader and be it my nonprofit is educational. But it’s still not; it’s very different than school leadership and so that change happened within the program. It happened not only because of the program but the program certainly had a heavy influence on my reading and my thinking around all the new cool ways that I could work in this field of education; that, I think, is super cool and amazing but in a new way, in this nonprofit way. It was a very confusing time in the middle, and I just felt like I was floundering around but now I feel very happy about it, really happy, where I’m excited about doing the creative educational stuff and making new programs and all the stuff that we do every day. So, yeah, I would say that life - calling piece.

Michel’s dissertation on sexism in IT really brought things together for him when thinking about his life moving forward, “This program brought that sky and the earth together. My dissertation ended up being something…that if I managed to do this within my lifetime, or even get it started within my lifetime, it will have been quite an accomplishment.” The program helped him understand and see sexism for the first time, “Talk about having your eyes just sort of you know pulled open by a course of study.” While Michel is not sure what his life’s calling might be for his career, he does feel called to do some meaningful work. “What is my life calling, I’m not too sure
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… anymore, but I have a much better practical idea and yet the practicalities still has some pull towards larger ideas and larger goals and issues far bigger than me.”

Jane selected strongly agree but to Jane her life’s calling is not a career necessarily she sees it more as a journey.

When I think of my life’s calling, it’s a process; it’s not a destination. It’s about the journey, not the destination, and it changes with our experience; it changes with our knowledge; it changes with who we know and what we’re doing. But the program for me, I know, was part of my life’s calling; this was part of what I needed to do for the next thing I was going to do. So I finally decided it was time, and then, I’m so glad I decided when it was because I think I was meant to be and know all of you, and I said that, over and over again. So the idea of life’s calling...we just don’t know what that next thing is going to be, but it’s not a job, for me it’s not a job. We get to create what it is that we want to create now that we are where we are and for me it’s been developing all along the way, and how it’s going to come together has yet to be seen.

PLO #4

For this program outcome, two focus group participants selected strongly agree, two selected agree, and one selected unsure. Within the interview data for these participants, three participants addressed this program learning outcome as an area of learning and development. However, one of those participants, who also was the participant who answered unsure in the focus group, had identified how difficult it was to continue to develop themselves independently. The other two participants who did not have data within their interview to identify this as an area of growth selected agree within the focus group.
### Table 12

**PLO #4**

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**Unsure:** Michel really struggled with the language of “professional practice” as he sees his current professional practice more in the corporate computing arena than within education.

The program didn’t offer me any skills that I could use, except in the classroom as an adjunct, and so whatever academic career I have, it has yet to begin, but it’s opened up a lot of avenues for me as far as, you know, the prospect of writing a book or two or whatever of getting more involved with diversity in the workplace. None of those really would have been an option without this program.

**Agree:** Susan was hung up on the words entire career, which caused her to select agree, “I was wary of clicking strongly when the word entire career was on there. But…this idea of like this life practice of thinking more deeply about the choices that I am making.”

Jane had a hard time with the language around entire career as well, “Along with Susan kind of that idea of entire career, you know professional practice…that word career that just kind of felt like it boxed me in a little bit.” However, Jane did feel as though getting this far in the educational process suggests participants are life-long learners, “I mean, I don’t think any of us would have been in the program if that wasn’t an innate part of who we are and what we do anyway.”
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**Strongly Agree:** Sara really felt like the program helped to inform her professional practice, and she hopes that it will last her a lifetime. “I think the program did prepare me to question and continually adjust and grow my practice in a way…and I’m hoping that lasts throughout my career.”

Maxine also selected strongly agree, recognizing that her thirst for brain candy continues. My first reaction was well, I haven’t signed up for any new learning things, but then I realized, first of all that’s false. Because I just finished a certificate on fundraising management from University of Indiana, and second of all, if I could sign up for another one, I would. But I’m holding myself back all the time. I love candy for the brain. I think my favorite thing that I’ve taken away from this is real confidence as a researcher so that I feel like I can learn by myself…I’ve really learned from this program how much I learn through writing and so I’ve really made that part of the process of research…Whether I’m going to try to publish it or not, is irrelevant. I just want to write it out, so that I can learn it better and see how I’m actually thinking about it.

**PLO #5**

All focus group participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the program encouraged or prepared them to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action. However, only three of the five identified this as a program outcome within their interview data. Oddly enough, the focus group participant selecting strongly agree was one of the participants who did not have any data within their interview to align with this outcome.
Table 13

PLO #5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Agree:** Maxine drew on an example with her board to demonstrate her growth in this area and she summarized it this way, “If I want this to happen, this constructive action to happen, I had to figure out a way to really fix that dialogue that I probably started out in the wrong way.”

Susan felt as though the cohort really modeled this behavior well, which has challenged her to figure out ways to bring that into other areas of her life. “Because I think that we came every Friday and Saturday ready to have this common ground for dialogue...I think we role modeled and exemplified [it].”

Sara interpreted her growth in this way.

Listening empathetically, listening first, before I jump in with my own thoughts. Thinking about what I’m saying, how it’s going to be received. But I think a lot of it is based on empathy, meeting people where they are. And I mean, I think I already had a little bit of grounding for that, but I noticed that my style of leadership, especially in like working with other music teachers and leading meetings and things like that I, I tried to listen more and listen first and tried to meet my team members, where they were and find that common ground. That’s not easy, sometimes...Setting ego aside and coming in, listening, coming to share and continue to learn.
Michel built on Susan’s comments about how the cohort provided a good example for how this might work, “And, especially if I want to address an issue like sexism, and I’m gonna have to grow a common ground from scratch and my experience with the cohort was along those lines.”

**Strongly Agree:** Jane felt very strongly about this being an area where she needed growth and development and received it through the program, “I think this for me was actually an area of growth in which I needed to learn and didn’t realize to the extent I needed to learn it.” Jane goes on to explain how being invited to the table as a leader is about figuring out, “how it all fits together, and then, how do you put that into practice with people and people of all different levels at all different stakeholders in organizations.” She recognized that she did not always think this way about her own leadership.

I was more of an independent action person…But the idea of finding common ground speaking to it, articulating it and have constructive action is more of a collaborative way of taking what you know and what you’ve observed…How to listen, how to understand that growth in myself, but also in my own leadership which many things came naturally to me but I was kind of a lone warrior, even though I was fighting a battle for others.

**Focus Group Summary**

The focus group findings support the data analysis of the participants’ interviews. In the two instances where focus group participants selected unsure, those participant’s interview data did not identify that particular program learning outcome as an area of growth or development. All participants in the focus group either agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced learning or development within PLO #4. However, within the interview data, only three of the five had identified it as an area of growth or development. Many of the examples participants provided within the focus group aligned with the findings in the interview data analysis. In conclusion, the
focus group helped to validate my research findings where interview data was aligned with the stated program learning outcomes.

**Primary Findings Summary**

**Figure 1**

*Primary findings summarized by participant*

Interview data analysis identified three themes that address career impacts and learning and development outcomes experienced by Ed.D. program participants: (a) direct career impacts, (b) transformative learning outcomes, and (c) program learning outcomes. Within the theme of transformative learning outcomes, data illuminated three subthemes: (a) becoming scholars, (b) worldview, perspective, and personal transformation and (c) confidence and refinement. Finally, the program learning outcomes theme had five subthemes; each subtheme represented one of the program’s learning outcomes. Focus group data were used to triangulate and provide greater validity to the interview findings associated with the program learning outcome theme. Overall, there was strong evidence that participants experienced learning and development that both aligned with and extended beyond the program’s stated learning outcomes. It is clear through
these findings that the program had initial and in several cases, significant impacts on participants’ careers. Finally, significant data exists which illuminates the transformational nature of the program on participants’ worldview, confidence, and scholarly identity. While these findings address the primary focus of this research, in the next section I will discuss the secondary findings of this research including how participants are using the credential, the credential’s impact and what influence the cohort-model had on individual participants.

**Secondary Research Findings**

In reviewing the secondary research findings, I discuss the credential’s impact on graduates and whether/how they are using the credential or title of doctor in their professional identity. The cohort structure’s impact on participants learning and development is also detailed. I identify these findings as secondary findings not because they lack significance but rather because they were not the original aim of this research. Participants overwhelmingly discussed the credential in their interviews, which led to follow-up questions on the credentials use and impact. Additionally, participants consistently included the cohort in descriptions of their learning and development, highlighting how impactful the cohort-model was to these aspects of the program.

**Credential Impact**

Each cohort member discussed the impact the credential had on their professional and personal development and whether they are currently using the title of Doctor. For the one cohort member who was still completing their dissertation at the time of this study, their response focuses on how they see the credential impacting their career development and whether they anticipate using the title of Doctor. There were three participants who identified environmental barriers to their use of the credential and their overall professional growth. Table 14 provides a
summary of participants’ use of the credential as part of their professional identity and which participants identified barriers.

Table 14

Using Credential as part of professional identify

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Member Position at Start of Program</th>
<th>Yes Sometimes in current professional role and outside</th>
<th>Yes Very limitedly inside current professional role but some use in other professional arenas</th>
<th>Yes Does not anticipate using it once graduated</th>
<th>Yes Identified barriers to using credential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coach (Jane)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music Teacher (Stephen)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher (Susan)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit owner and Religious Educator (Maxine)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Teacher, Choir Director (Sara)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Graduate Program &amp; Faculty (Stephanie)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizer Director (Myles)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Programmer and Adjunct Faculty (Michel)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support (Paulo)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stephen: Stephen uses the credential sparingly in his current working environment as a music teacher, “I try not to send emails to other adults…I try to send it as Stephen. I don’t correct adults when they don’t say it correctly.” He does use the credential when submitting conference proposals, “So the couple of times I did presentations. Yeah, I would introduce myself as, as Doctor and have received positive responses.” Stephen chooses to use the credential in his leadership roles as part of the teacher’s union.

So I’m a union rep in our building, and at the beginning of the year we had, we felt like we needed to reach out to the school board and have the scope or do some visits to all the buildings, so they could kind of see what our preparation looked like before the beginning of the year, and in that situation I did, you know, Stephen Wise, Ed.D.. And
Stephen notes one additional way he feels the credential impacted his career, “I do feel like for better or for worse, I feel like I’ve gotten some audiences with district administration more easily than I feel like I perhaps did before.”

**Michel:** Michel’s full-time job is in corporate computing, so he is not using the title of Doctor in his primary career, but as an adjunct faculty member, he does, “Now I am Dr. Michel.” For Michel, being an adjunct faculty member instead of a full-time faculty member and not having the degree made him feel like an outsider in the department where he teaches, but after earning the degree, he started to realize he was one of them. However, he still struggles to fully feel as though he belongs, “When I talked to my colleagues, it’s so weird to say that the regular faculty…are my colleagues. So before I graduated, I call[ed] them professor and Doctor. And then I was told, ‘listen, drop that. You’re one of us now.’”

**Myles:** Myles is finding that post-graduation people are taking notice because of the credential,

But I do think I’ve also noticed. Yeah, different type of reaction to me professionally, as well, that you know whether it’s how I’m communicating or whether people are looking to that sort of third-party validation of oh, you know, I should assume that you’re a good person to add to this board or to this review committee or whatever it is.

**Jane:** Like Stephen, Jane is experiencing some changes for her professionally outside her K-12 role because of the credential, “I contacted somebody…to ask if she’d be interested in this speaking engagement for this board I serve on, and she responded to me with, thank you Dr…It
struck me how common that is in the language of other people.” However, Jane is not using the credential in all situations. She is being selective when and where she uses it. “So I will use [the credential] when it is a benefit to others or I need it to say, no, this is part of who I am.” In another portion of the interview, she stated it this way, “Now will I use [the credential]? Yes, when it’s appropriate.” She explains one example of when she believes it is appropriate.

I serve on a board for a women’s foundation in Atlanta. There are several women on that board who have their doctorates. Do I use it for that context? Absolutely. Does it give me more definition of who I am and a different way of people approaching me? Yes, absolutely. So yes, I do use it there. I feel it’s appropriate, and it adds value to the board and adds value to that organization.

Jane acknowledge that her existing K-12 work environment is not receptive to her new credential, “It’s just interesting how different people in education, wouldn’t we want to value education in education? And I don’t need the acknowledgement, but I would love to be able to contribute.” She elaborates on how the K-12 environment does not value her degree because she is a teacher.

So because I work in K-12 education, unless you are in a certain position, typically people don’t use those credentials because it is not well received by others. In other words, your peers might see that as a one-upping kind of situation versus an acknowledgement, celebration, and respect for that.

She goes even further to say using the credential in her current role as a teacher in K-12 serves no purpose, “There’s no purpose in it, it would not serve a purpose, it wouldn’t benefit anybody. So I don’t use it.” Jane identifies the inequity of the value the same degree has on different positions in her K-12 environment.
I graduated with this assistant superintendent of the district I work in. He went with Dr. going forward, and they had a big write up in the district’s newsletter…there was no mention of me. There was no mention at my particular location that I work. There was no district acknowledgement. There was nothing, absolutely nothing because of the position I’m in…my voice is only as valuable as my position.

In her interview, Jane stated that post-graduation was different than she anticipated. She thought she would leave the classroom post-graduation, but COVID-19 had other plans.

A lot of people hit the ground running after school. Literally, I didn’t. I allowed myself like that summer just to be… So what is valuable after a doctorate? It depends on who you ask. Is it a position? Is it clout?…What’s important to you?…I value different things…The learning. The ability to transform in such a way to bring a deeper, broader, more meaningful contribution to others.

Jane recalls one memorable moment when a leader in her organization questioned why she was earning the degree, “Literally passing in the hallway, [they said] ‘what do you do with that degree anyway?’”

**Maxine**: During Maxine’s ABD interview, she identified that her primary goal was to earn the credential, so she could use it to further promote her non-profit.

I feel like with the Dr. in front of my name, which you can bet I’m going to milk for everything…it is going to make a big difference in this world because it gives you the legitimacy and clout, especially in my world. It’s really easy just to say Dr., and then you’re a person of knowledge. So it’s going to help me in that power dimension of gaining clout and legitimacy in a big way. We all, my whole team…they cannot wait to put on the flyer Doctor. They can’t wait!
Post-graduation she shared, “My staff has changed every, like they went in and changed all the things under the sun [to Doctor].” So Maxine does use the credential and title in her primary work and within other areas of her professional life.

Maxine finds saying, “I earned my doctorate” creates certain assumptions, but the outcome of gaining respect and authority in her field is what she aims to accomplish, “I usually say I finished my doctorate. I use that much more often and a lot of people assume it’s a Ph.D., and I don’t correct them. It’s not…important. The point [is] that you respect me and give [me] authority.”

**Sara:** Sara is using the credential within her primary work environment as a K-12 music teacher. She stated that she uses the title of Doctor in both professional and personal arenas, with students and in “every call that [she] makes to the board meetings, as well.” She went on to explain how she made the transition to using the credential and why.

So I think, you know, once I really earned it, I was like, you know what, this is mine, and I want to use it. I actually had one of my choir students write me this handwritten note, and I’ve had a couple friends that inspired me, and they said, “You know, this is awesome for your students to see and your female students to see and to know that you accomplished that…they have a direct line and a direct connection to somebody that decided to go for this and met their goal.” And some of these students have been there along the way.

She explained that she was not the first in her district to make the transition, which made it easier for her, “So, I’m also not the first person to use doctor in my district. There’s another person, a math teacher, who goes by Dr. so it also is like, somebody else broke that ice first.” Sara feels like it is a title well earned, “And I worked my [butt] off for this. I worked harder on this than I
have on anything else in my life and I feel like, you know, I feel like I earned it and I like using it.” Sara was interviewed three months post-graduation. As she looks towards the future, she is a little apprehensive even with the credential, “Now I get to apply for those things. But now, there’s like this layer of fear…Where am I going to end up? I haven’t really applied for a job in 20 years.”

**Stephanie:** When asked if Stephanie was using the title of doctor she had a mixed response depending upon the situation.

Yes and no. I added the Ed.D. to my signature line. Our culture at school is not to have Dr. at the beginning of your name on your signature line. On the other hand, when I write an email or I post an announcement to my students, I sign it, I typically sign it with Dr. or Professor…I’ll use them interchangeably. I have asked to be introduced as Dr. to my students. So when they ask, what do you want us to call you? I say, you may call me either Dr. or Professor. I don’t respond to Sara from students anymore because I feel that this is my opportunity to help them learn about titles.

Additionally, outside her primary role at the university, she is using the title, “I wrote an article this semester for the Minnesota Society of CPA, and in that, they refer to me as Dr.” Stephanie feels as though the environment and her role within the university makes the title natural, “I certainly do [use the credential] because now I am able to introduce myself as Dr. and the professor goes along with the Doctor.”

**Susan:** Susan knew prior to graduating the credential was not going to make a real impact for her in the K-12 environment. Similarly to Jane, she recognized her role as teacher as a barrier. During her ABD interview, she said, “Yes, so even with getting letters after your name in the field that I am in, if you don't have a license associated with it, it's hard to make real change
and to really be kind of looked at by outside people.” In her post-graduation interview, she was asked whether she was using the credential in her current role, and she responded, “no.” She had a couple reasons why she has not used the credential, “My principal goes by it, and it [irritates] me…. Part of me is like, I should go by Dr. Susan because that’s kinda fun.” She went on to explain the limited times when she has used the credential, “But no, I do not go by Dr. Susan. There are specific times when I put the Ed.D. on…instructional material, [professional development material] that I have created…and so I’ve written these handbooks…I put my name on it with the credential.” Susan shared a story about a student recognizing her being a doctor but it did not create the change she needed to start using the credential in her professional role as a TOSA.

Last year, a student actually she was like, “I heard you have a doctorate”. And I was like, “Yes, I do”. She’s like “why don’t you go by Dr.” and I was like, “I don’t know, I guess I don’t need to.” And she was like, “I’d go by it, that’s a lot of work, I’d go by it in a minute.” But then she didn’t start calling me, Doctor. She was the change. She needed to do it, but I remember that conversation…I don’t know, but even on my website, like I’ll write on there I finished my doctorate, but I don’t put Dr., or even Ed.D. after my name. It’s interesting, I think it would maybe be different if like I got my Ph.D. in history or something and I was teaching history, maybe I would do it then.

Susan realizes that her current environment plays a role in not using the credential or title of Doctor, “I think if I moved to a higher education position. Absolutely, I would go by Dr…. I think if I were to transition to secondary ed., to a different secondary ed. position, in a different building. I think I would say, yeah, call me Dr. Susan.”
WE ARE THE GAP

Susan acknowledged the lack of an administrative licensure had an impact on her goal of moving into a new position.

So when I went into [the program] I thought I would get a different job out of it. You know, I wouldn’t be on the teacher contract anymore. But I also willingly went into it knowing that I wasn’t going to get my admin license. So I need that. I didn’t want to get my admin license, and in retrospect, I regret that a little bit. Not a lot, but a little bit because I think that additional license in the field that I’m in would make a significant difference in what I would like to do.

**Paulo**: Paulo was working to complete his dissertation at the time of this research, so his responses in this area are how he anticipates using the credential once earned. When asked once he earns the letters whether he will use them, he responded, “No, no. Well, I wouldn’t want somebody to call me Doctor…not at a community college where that’s not the norm here…when you’re an academic I get Ph.D. or Ed.D. that’s a whole different thing.” He goes on further to say, “But I won’t use it, but I will, I might put it on a business card, maybe. But I won’t give that to everybody.”

Paulo also identified barriers for the credential to make a difference for him recalling a conversation he had with a leader at his institution.

The [leader] said, what do you want to be doing with your degree? What are going to do? The world is open to you. And I’m like, well…[it] might be to you because you’re a white male. He didn’t say a word, but it becomes one of those things, you have no idea the struggle, right. Even though it is a degree in higher education there is still barriers, still struggling, there really is.
Paulo went on to share the barriers he’s experienced in this area, “I know that because I’ve applied for jobs where the master’s degree is needed and an MBA is needed and X, Y, Z experience is needed, and I’ve applied. I didn’t get it. And then now with this Ed.D. and even ABD, you would think that would do something…no.” In the end Paulo feels like some of what is holding him back are his current environment and the limited view of his leadership. “It doesn’t matter what you have here at the end of the day. You are who they see you to be…I want a leadership role, it can’t be [at my current institution]. I know they don’t see me that way.”

While Paulo doesn’t see his degree making an impact in his current environment, he does have hopes for the future, “I’m waiting for the day that I’m on a panel at this conference where I am a person of color with an Ed.D. and they ask me about my experiences.”

**Credential Impact Summary**

While not every participant is currently using the credential as part of their professional identity, each anticipates there being opportunities for putting the credential to use. Myles, Maxine, Sara, and Stephanie are the four participants who identified using the credential liberally. Three of the four had previously identified earning the credential as one of or their only goal for enrolling in the program. Of the four K-12 educators only Sara is using the credential regularly in her role as a K-12 educator. Stephen is using the credential sparingly in is work as a K-12 music educator but did not identify any barriers to using it. Jane and Susan both K-12 educators identified barriers to using the credential within their current working environment. Likewise, Paulo also identified barriers to using the credential in his current community college environment. While Michel uses the credential in his role as an adjunct professor, he did not mention using it within his full-time career in corporate computing. Michel, Sara, Susan, Paulo, and Jane believe that the credential will become of use in the future in roles in higher education
or other opportunities outside their current working environments. Beyond simply using the credential, Stephen, Maxine, Myles, Jane, Stephen, Michel, and Stephanie all mentioned a level of authority, recognition, validation, or legitimacy that they had gained due to earning the credential. Susan and Paulo were the only two participants who did not feel as though the credential had an effect in that way within their current environment.

**Cohort Impact**

Participants in the first round of interviews were not prompted to discuss the impact the cohort model had on their learning and development, but all provided comments about the cohort’s impact on their success in the program. Therefore, in the second round of interviews, a specific question was asked to address what impact the cohort-model had on each participant. The impacts participants identified included: a tight knit community of learners, a safe space for growth and development, and the support they needed to finish the program. These findings are included because of participants’ inability to separate the cohort’s impact from their identified learning and development, which was the primary focus of this study. Therefore, I felt it necessary to include these findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how learning and development occurred within the program. I organized the responses by participant.

**Stephen:** Stephen was admittedly surprised by the impact the cohort had on him.

I felt and still feel pleasantly surprised by not only the coursework and the thinking that happened but also the people that I met throughout the process…There were times where I felt like, Oh boy, I have got to go see these people again. But yet they were wonderful people and there were so many times where it was… something I started looking forward to.
Stephen recognizes while the cohort does not stay in touch regularly, they are a lasting community of learners who will be there when you need them.

We all had this very unique experience, and so there was something that Myles had about six months ago, and so he and I were writing back and forth to each other all of sudden, and then we stopped. And we won’t again until someone else goes hey …and we’ll be back in contact again because we had that shared experience.

Stephen recognized the role the cohort had in getting him to the finish line.

I did my first defense in the spring of 2017, and I got a little bit of something going on that summer, but then it just kind of stalled out, and I feel like if not for the cohort kind of jumping in, in the spring I wouldn’t have started writing again. I went like, Oh, I gotta start writing pages here and that was really the boost I needed to get through that summer to then go on to actually finishing the following year. So I think that’s where it became most critical. It was nice to have a group of people before that, but it was really just kind of getting across the finish line and being able to stay in contact.

Post coursework members of the cohort helped create the structure to help Stephen finish, “I would say Susan was really into scheduling the meetings going into that last summer. So I think that was [helpful].” Besides the cohort being there to help him get across the finish line, he also acknowledged it gave him the competitive push he needed, “I knew Maxine was going to get done super-fast, and I was motivated to try and get done maybe not as fast as her but right after her if I could.”

Sara: Sara identified how the cohort created a respectful community for dialogue and discussion.
I do think that we had a lot of professional respect for each other. And there wasn’t a lot of ego, you know. And I think we kind of left that at the door, and we just learned. That really increased the amount of professional respect and empathy we were able to afford each other, you know, in the really authentic discussions that we’ve had.

Sara also had dissertation editing support from one of the cohort members, “Susan helped me edit my first couple chapters.” Sara recognized the community aspect of the cohort and what it brought to her experience.

I mean, I think we had, at least at the time, a pretty tight knit group, and it felt good to be connected into, you know, so many different perspectives and individual stories…. Everybody has their own journey through this and that’s why I wanted an Ed.D. and that’s why I wanted an interdisciplinary program… I think that was a really valuable component of the program to learn in an intuitive interdisciplinary fashion. But I really liked the different personalities that we had in the room, just people talk and the way that people think and present their ideas. I think it was really valuable.

Each member contributed to Sara’s growth and development, “So I feel like I’ve learned something, some things that are valuable from each and every person in our cohort, and I will always carry those forward.” Sara connects the cohort to what made the program so powerful.

I think it’s really a powerful experience in a powerful way to do that because we had time to go away and think on our own. We had a time where you had to come together and process through things in person, too. And I think that’s a hallmark of a really great program.

Myles: Myles shared how the cohort could engage in dynamic conversations but remain respectful.
I really enjoyed where the theory and the application really got kind of real in the classroom setting, you know, we never had. And I think we all heard the stories about how other cohorts would have virtual blood baths over disagreements and we never had that, but I do remember one of the core research courses we were reading the book *Quiet* and about the whole introvert, extrovert thing and how that pushed the extroverts’ buttons clearly a lot…I kind of enjoyed how sort of real it was in terms of the theory that was laid out in the book and how people were personally reacting to it and how the evidence for and against the arguments the author made was kind of playing out in how the class itself was having a discussion about the book and it’s like our disagreements were so polite, but they were still there.

Myles really appreciated and benefited from the diversity of perspectives in the cohort, “Yeah, it is fascinating that the group of us could have come from so many different kinds of backgrounds and all felt comfortable being part of the same cohort.” While he appreciated the diversity he also appreciated having a sub-cohort focused on non-profit leadership, “I had a good cohort. I mean sub cohort of people from the nonprofit [world].”

Myles realized that the cohort pulled together when things were unclear, “Faculty members seem to have no clue what we were supposed to be doing to graduate…it was the cohort pulling together to figure it out…I feel like sometimes the cohort saved me from the imperfections of the faculty.”

**Jane:** Jane felt like the cohort was a natural and dynamic way to learn about leadership. The cohort base was really huge. Because when you learn about leadership and you’re learning about yourself within that, in addition to that, the best way to do that is to be with people, to learn with people, to hear other perspectives, not to read it in a book and
not to figure it out when you go through your day-to-day life, well what does this mean?

And to be able to grapple that with yourself and be able to dialogue with other people and
listen to other people, and see other people.

Jane recognized how important discussion, dialogue and conversation with the cohort was
because of the different and interdisciplinary perspectives they brought.

It’s the conversation. It’s the collaboration. Those moments for me were really important
to the process. It wasn’t just sitting and reading and writing papers, right. Those were real
moments about real things happening all the time with real people from different
professions, from different walks of life, you know, all the different personalities and
perspectives. It allowed you to apply some of the things you were learning and thinking
about…in a very safe way. We don’t always have the opportunity to do it safely.

Overall, she described the specific cohort make-up and impact this way, “It was instrumental. It
would be very different learning with different people…everyone brings something to the room,
everyone brings something to the conversation.”

Stephanie: In one-word Stephanie described the cohort as “familial.” She goes on to
describe, “It was a family [that was] able to explore, research, learn and develop [together] and
lean on [each other] to get through this process. I don’t know that I would have gotten as far as I
did without the cohort.” She accredited the cohort with helping get her to degree completion,
“Most definitely, it was certainly, the cohort model was certainly a help to me personally to get
the degree completed.”

Maxine: Maxine strongly believes in the positive impact of the cohort that she is
applying it to her own programs.
The cohort system was great. It's so great, I'm probably going to apply it where I'm planning to open a graduate program through our online academic institute, and I will do a cohort program for the, I'll do a cohort system because it's so helpful to know that there are other people working with you and I mean, in the end we're not all at the same pace. But nonetheless, just having that was really great.

Maxine also felt that the cohort kept her accountable, “I always felt like I got to get this work done because everybody else is going to have it done.” Maxine felt the cohort structure helped her to finish. She and a few cohort members during their dissertation process went up north to write together, she had this to say about that experience.

There’s intentionality behind it as well as recognizing the importance of having a support group…like when we went up north [to write] that’s where I knew I was going to get it done…So having other people there to talk about nothing…like literally nothing. You know what I mean or just to talk through something, whether someone is half listening or not. We really wrote 18 hours. So, that kind of support was incredible, incredible support really.

Maxine, like Stephen, also used the cohort as competition, which positively motivated her to finish, “Part of it was just competition. You know, I mean, there’s all these other people trying to get this out…I wanted to be first, but yeah, Stephen beat me, and I was so upset about that.” Maxine really valued the cohort members’ perspectives which helped her to see more than she would have on her own.

We would do all that reading and come back and talk about it. I really liked coming back and hearing other people talking about these readings in different ways than I had seen
them or just reflecting on different parts that I had missed maybe. Was really impactful in
that, I mean, for me, especially that early time. It sort of woke up my brain.

Susan: Susan’s experience with the cohort helped to build her confidence, gave her a
sense of belonging and helped her feel validated.

I think in 910, that summer class, I felt very like I don't know if this is right, like I don't
know if I belong. And then there was something about that respect assignment where I
felt like okay, like, [the professor] had graded mine, and I had done very well on it. And I
felt very, like comfortable with that. So there was something it wasn't necessarily the
curriculum…because I dislike that word respect it's so vague, but then for [the author] to
narrow it down. So I think that was one thing. And then I think the Foucault class
continued that process for me it wasn't as much about the curriculum, but it was about
how I felt in this idea of getting…earning…feeling like I earned something amongst my
cohort members like, oh, Susan's like, legit, for some reason I felt like, like I think that
was like when Maxine started to sit next to me in class, which helped because Maxine is
Maxine, and so when she sat next to me, when we started sitting next to each other, that
added to it as well because it was like we were collectively working together then. So,
then if Maxine respected what I was saying and what I was talking about and the way I
took notes or whatever, then that would then pan out to other people.

She explains how approval from the cohort helped her realize she could apply it in other settings,
“If I can get approval from people in this cohort, people who I trust and like and respect as
scholars and as academics and as professionals then why can't I do it in this setting?” Susan felt
like the consistency of the cohort added to the program’s impact.
I think it would not have been the same, had we tried to do those courses to do that coursework with a different group of people right every semester. It just wouldn't have worked, and I think that, that model has really impressed upon me how important it is to create those bonds and those connections when you are learning even if it kind of falls apart a little bit after you're done. I think still that idea of those bonds being so important in a learning community. And then as an educator knowing that that's something that's so important to then build within classroom structures within even the professional setting. But yeah, without that in person, you lose that connectivity. And I think also accountability. I think that was huge with the cohort with the readings that we were doing with the work that we were doing. Yeah right, but learning and really being engaged in the topic is 3D.

Susan felt a true sense of connection with her cohort members and would rely on many of them for help.

I think that is one of the amazing benefits of this program, as we've kind of left the classes, this group, this connection with Jane and Maxine has really strengthened and you and the Sara pop in and out, but it's like, I feel like I've gone to Jane for a lot of like professional like how do I navigate this, and I think part of that is just life experience differential, but also just like she gets me in terms of like our shared profession, but then also this viewpoint of that we've gone through together. So I think that's helpful. Susan really feels like the cohort helped her earn her degree, “So, the structure was very helpful in terms of creating that community with the women who are still connected and how that has been really yeah, that's been very effective in making sure that you finish.”

Michel: Michel describes the cohort as having a core of collegiality.
So leadership is supposed to be a free exchange of ideas not a begrudging one. It’s supposed to have a core of collegiality and, if possible, where possible, friendship, not competition, competition only gets in the way. I heard once that your siblings are the people in your family that you know the longest and to be able to talk on a level or in a way that you can’t with anyone else. And I think that might well be true for our cohort, too.

Much like many of the cohort members according to Michel the cohort helped him complete, “I’m of the opinion that the cohort got me through school.”

**Paulo:** Paulo had done cohort programs before but felt like this one was different. However, the cohort allowed him to realize there were more possibilities after earning the degree than he had originally thought.

My interest was different than others. And I thought with a cohort, because I've been in cohort situation before from my undergrad and my associate’s degree level where we all have the same goal and finishing and we knew exactly what we wanted to do and everybody had pretty much the same goal to be in a certain area after we were done with the degree. This was different, you know, people had their own goals and their own life, and they all seemed like everybody had a different mission right everybody had a different purpose for doing the program. When I came into it, it was like this is higher education this is to fulfill the purpose of getting into higher education and do that. And when I noticed it was like you can do whatever you want, right, it doesn’t have to be in higher education. That was kind of an aha moment. That's when I started thinking, okay, then I don't really have to go into faculty where I really don't have to do that.
However, Paulo recognized differences from his cohort members early on, which made him feel like he didn’t belong.

So at first, I was brand new to the cohort. I was the last one added. So I was like excited to be there, and I want to say about two semesters maybe three semesters, and I realize, oh, a lot of these people are already in higher education or public education…nothing in common, right. And I noticed too a lot of these people within the program were alumni. So then I felt like okay I’m a quota.

**Cohort Impact Summary**

There was a total of eight participants who identified or likened the cohort to a community or family. Stephen, Maxine, Stephanie, Michel, and Susan all mentioned that the cohort really helped them get to completion of the degree. Stephen and Maxine mentioned how competition with the cohort member spurred them on during the dissertation. Oddly, both Stephen and Maxine identified each other as the people they were competing against to get the degree completed first. Conversely, Michel recognized the absence of competition within the cohort, which made it feel collegial to him. Paulo was the only cohort member who did not identify strong relationships or sense of community as an impact of the cohort. He was the only cohort member to mention the feeling of not belonging within the cohort. Nearly all participants identified the different perspectives, diversity of life experiences, and personalities as a positive impact on their learning and development.

**Chapter 4 Summary**

This chapter summarized each participant’s background and life circumstances, leading up to their enrollment in the Ed.D. program. The background information included their reasons for choosing the University of St. Thomas program and an analysis of their goal(s) or purpose(s)
for engaging in the program. I organized the participants’ goal(s) or purpose(s) for enrolling into four themes: (a) learning/knowledge development, (b) credential, (c) new career opportunities, and (d) the challenge. The primary findings of this qualitative research included (a) direct career impacts, (b) transformational learning outcomes, (c) and program learning outcomes of participants. Participants experienced direct career impacts such as: (a) guest lecturer opportunities, (b) opportunities for further research, (c) new job(s), (d) non-profit growth, (e) offered faculty roles, (f) fellowship opportunities or (g) new opportunities anticipated. The theme of transformative learning outcomes contained the life-altering impact of the program and included three subthemes: (a) becoming scholars, (b) worldview, perspective, personal transformation, and (c) confidence or refinement. The theme of program learning outcomes included the five program learning outcomes as subthemes. I used the focus group to triangulate and validate the interview findings associated with the program learning outcomes theme. Beyond the primary findings, I discussed the secondary findings including what impact the credential had, if and how the credential was used post-graduation and the influence the cohort-model had on participants’ learning and development. The next chapter will provide a discussion and analysis of the findings, provide implications for practice and recommendations for future research.
Summary of research findings

**Background Data**
Participants Backgrounds

Why, the University of St. Thomas’ Ed.D.?

Purpose(s) or goal(s) for enrolling:
- Learning/Knowledge Development
- Credential
- New Career Opportunities
- The Challenge

**Primary Findings**
Direct Career Impacts
- Guest Lecturer
- Faculty Role
- Research
- New Job
- Fellowship
- Grew non-profit

Transformative Learning Outcomes
- Becoming Scholars
- Worldview, Perspectives, and Personal Transformation
- Confidence/Refinement

Program Learning Outcomes
- PLO #1
- PLO #2
- PLO #3
- PLO #4
- PLO #5

**Secondary Findings**
Using credential as part of professional identity and credential impact

Cohort-model Impact
- Completion Support
- Family/Community
- Diverse Perspectives
- Competition or Motivation
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the learning, development, and career impacts and outcomes experienced by one cohort of non-traditional leaders in education after participating in or graduating from the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program in leadership. This chapter provides a summary and analysis of the research findings as well as a discussion of the results, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The implications of this study suggest a refocus and reframing of how we evaluate the impact of professional practice Ed.D. programs and their success in preparing adults for leading in educational settings.

Summary of the Research

The cloudy past of the Ed.D. in education has lasted more than a century. The Ed.D. was initially defined clearly as the doctoral degree in education for preparing practitioners; however, the overlap identified between some Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs created questions and negative perceptions of the degree itself (Anderson, 1983; Dill & Morrison, 1985; Levine, 2005; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006; Shulman et al., 2006; Wergin, 2011). Is the Ed.D. truly preparing practitioners for their roles in education? Is the Ed.D. developing researchers instead of practitioners? Are Ed.D.s just a “Ph.D. -lite” program neither preparing researchers nor practitioners effectively? The ultimate effect of these questions is a diminished view of the Ed.D. as the terminal degree for practitioners in education and persistent confusion as to why two degrees exist. This prolonged confusion and lack of formalized data collection and reporting processes to separate the Ed.D. from the Ph.D. in education has led to several calls for the elimination or reform of the Ed.D. A clear majority of these reform and elimination calls emphasized the Ed.D.’s inability to prepare principals and superintendents. While the studies emphasizing principal and superintendent’s preparation included quantitative data on
participants’ or graduates’ experiences, very little qualitative studies exist. Additionally, very little is known about the learning, development, and career impacts of these programs on those not serving in principal or superintendent roles.

This qualitative single case study examined non-traditional educational leaders’ experiences and outcomes as participants of a cohort-based professional practice Ed.D. program in leadership while addressing the question: What are the career impacts and learning and development outcomes of a cohort of non-traditional educational leaders who participated in or graduated from a professional practice Ed.D. leadership program? Interviews provided comprehensive data, which I analyzed and organized into a concise understanding of the collective experiences of participants. I organized research findings into background data, primary findings, and secondary findings. The background data provided a comprehensive understanding of what experience participants brought to their Ed.D. experience, why they chose the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program, and what their goal(s) or purpose(s) were for enrolling. The primary research findings addressed the career impacts, learning and development outcomes and were organized into three main themes: (a) career impacts, (b) transformative learning outcomes and (c) program learning outcomes. Focus group data triangulated and validated the interview findings in the program learning outcomes theme.

Finally, secondary findings illuminated what impact the credential had on participants, how graduates were using the credential post-graduation and the impact the cohort-model had on program participants’ learning and development. While the Ed.D.’s rise in popularity was in response to the growing interest to ensure K-12 leaders were prepared for leading (Levine, 2005), this research demonstrated the Ed.D.’s ability to serve and impact a variety of educational
leaders. The collective evidence of these non-traditional leaders in education provided insight into the comprehensive and transformational impacts of a professional practice Ed.D. program.

Figure 3

*Summary of research findings*
Discussion of Results

Prior Beliefs

As a member of Cohort 28 in the University of St. Thomas’s Ed.D. in leadership program, I knew the program had the potential for transformational impacts and outcomes. The program transformed my understanding of race, privilege, gender, capitalism, leadership, people, power, dialogue, organizations, and so much more. I am coming out of this program a changed person: I see and understand the world differently. I am awed by how the program changed some of my rigid ideals and made them more flexible, more open. This learning and transformation caused me to wonder if my experience was unique or consistent with other program participants. This curiosity led me to study the career impacts, learning and development outcomes of my cohort. I chose a single case study design for this research because I wanted to understand the experiences and outcomes of my cohort. Studying one cohort put controls in place as we all experienced the same cohort classes at the same time during our studies, had the same faculty, read the same books, completed the same assignments, and participated in the same discussions. Studying one cohort also meant that local, regional, and national events surrounding their enrollment would be consistent, even if the impact on individuals was not.

Personal Implications

Due to the overlap in curriculum, faculty, and time, I assumed there would be some similarities across cohort members learning and development. However, I was truly surprised by the overlap in learning and development identified by cohort members. The transformative learning outcome subthemes of worldview, perspective, and personal transformation that the participants identified spoke to the worldview shifts I had experienced and confirmed that the
program impacted seven out of nine of my cohort members in the same way. The program broadened participant’s perspectives, shifted their worldviews, and transformed their lives.

The transformative learning outcome subtheme of becoming a scholar identified by six of nine cohort members, emphasized how the program (and more specifically the dissertation process) had cohort members collecting, processing, synthesizing, and analyzing information differently. Additionally, participants identified becoming better readers and writers. These new or refined skills transformed participants, leading them to incorporate scholar as part of their identity. The debate on whether the Ed.D. effectively prepares practitioners or researchers still exists; however, this study revealed that participants gained skills and abilities as researchers while their learning and development extended beyond research into the realm of practice. This result became evident as I analyzed the data further and uncovered another significant theme across participants’ learning and development.

**Correlation to PLOs**

As stated previously, while conducting my initial thematic analysis, I decided to read the Doctoral Handbook (2015) and came across the program’s learning outcomes. I was amazed to find the program learning outcomes as a primary and significant theme while analyzing participants’ learning and development. While I know faculty are intentional about those statements, I was surprised to find overwhelming evidence the program had truly prepared the cohort members in the precise way it intended. The fact that all nine cohort members identified learning and development aligning with PLO #1, eight with PLO #2, eight with PLO #3, five with PLO #4, and six with PLO #5 made this a significant finding. The focus group supported these findings when participants directly identified their learning and development with each PLO. The focus group provided even further evidence and validity to my findings. These
WE ARE THE GAP

findings identify how important intentional and carefully crafted program learning outcomes are to evaluating and assessing student learning and development. The PLOs established by the program were broad and transformational in nature. However, the program’s ability to truly deliver a transformational experience across such a wide variety of leaders and learners is exceptional. Overall, the learning and development described and experienced by participants attests to the transformational nature of the Ed.D. program. My primary reason, like four of my cohort members, for enrolling in the Ed.D. was to gain the type of knowledge described above. However, through interviews, it was clear that several of my cohort members expected the program to positively impact their careers as well.

Credential

I was surprised that seven of my cohort members identified earning the credential as one of their primary goals for enrolling in the program. It was clear many hoped the credential would open doors to them by advancing their career or serving as evidence to their knowledge and abilities, leading to legitimacy or authority in their field. Four cohort members found the program led to direct career impacts: new faculty roles, fellowships, new positions, further research opportunities, guest lecture opportunities, and non-profit organization development. While some cohort members have not yet experienced direct career outcomes, there is a belief among many of them that the Ed.D. will open future opportunities.

For Susan, Jane, and Stephen who all work in K-12 schools, there was an acknowledgement that the Ed.D. did not and would not impact their roles as teachers. Susan and Jane were particularly discouraged by the lack of acknowledgement their accomplishment and new knowledge afforded them in their current roles. There appeared to be a belief that unless they were willing to seek a formal leadership position as a principal or superintendent, their
credential would not lead to much—not even opportunities to contribute their broadened perspectives. This realization led both to seek roles outside K-12, which is discouraging. Similarly, Sara, who only graduated a few short months before being interviewed, was also preparing to leave K-12 as she felt she had outgrown her role. Paulo, who works in higher education, was both excited and apprehensive about earning the credential. Foundationally, he did not believe the Ed.D. would have a direct impact on his career but rather allow him to check the minimum and preferred qualification boxes on employment applications.

It is odd that those working in K-12, the primary audience of the Ed.D., appear to have more difficulty using the credential to benefit their K-12 careers. They also appear to be more apprehensive in using the credential as part of their professional identity within their current positions with Jane even stating that it served no purpose. Sara was the only K-12 individual using the title of doctor in her role as a music teacher and choir director. All others were using the credential sparingly. There appears to be a strong culture that supports the use of the credentials for formal leaders in K-12 environments but discourages it among others. This is especially discouraging for those like Susan who believed the credential would open new opportunities but found very little changed with her K-12 position postgraduation.

**Summary**

This study identified the multidimensional learning, development and career impacts the Ed.D. in leadership had on one cohort of non-traditional leaders. This research demonstrates how, when done well, the Ed.D. in leadership can lead to both preparing practitioners and developing scholars. This cohort’s learning and development highlights the transformational nature of the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. and how its well-aligned curriculum, learning activities, learning outcomes, and cohort structure leveraged the Andragogy framework.
Discussion of the Results in Relation to Theory

Andragogy

Table 15 summaries the assumptions associated with Andragogy as identified in this research study. Andragogy is the “art and science of helping adults (or even better, maturing human beings) learn” (Knowles, 1977, p. 211). Taylor and Cranton (2012) present Andragogy as a framework for teaching adults instead of a theory. I will analyze the research findings through three of the seven assumptions Andragogy assumes about adult learners: (a) motivation, (b) the role of the learners’ experiences and (c) readiness to learn. I will start with the assumption of motivation.

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) asserted that adult learners are motivated by internal incentives and curiosity. “Adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 68). This research study identified participants’ motives for enrolling in the Ed.D. program. At the core of participants’ responses about their goal(s) or purpose(s) for enrolling in the program was the desire for a better quality of life and increased job satisfaction. For example, Michel, recognized the Ed.D. as a necessary step to fulfill his dream of becoming a full-time faculty member. He was motivated by the desire to increase his job satisfaction and acknowledged the Ed.D. would get him to his dream. While Stephen had initially identified earning the credential as his purpose for enrolling in the program, in the end that was not the real drive, “That drive would be the knowledge and the skills…. I hope, if I did a really good analysis [of myself], that’s where it would all come out.” Even in cases where participants identified earning the credential as their purpose, the underlying motivation was what they saw the
credential doing for them in their existing roles, including giving them more credence and authority, leading to greater satisfaction. Stephen, Jane, Myles, and Sara all identified the knowledge and learning as a reason for enrolling, which aligns with the internal motivational assumptions of Andragogy. Sara and Paulo identified the challenge of being able to complete the degree, which is an internal motivation for pursuing the degree.

Another assumption of Andragogy is the importance and the role the learners’ experiences play in their learning and development. Two components of this assumption are central to the findings in this research. First, all research participants had at least eight years of experience to draw from during the Ed.D. program. The diversity of the program participants’ backgrounds allowed for varied perspectives and experiences to be used in the classroom. Additionally, the program was structured to utilize experiential techniques that leveraged the experiences of learners. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) explained it this way:

> The richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques—techniques that tap into the experiences of learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques. Also, greater emphasis is placed on peer-helping activities. (p. 66)

The richness of the cohort in experiences and perspectives allowed for deeper learning and development. Therefore, when the secondary research finding of the cohort-model’s impact arose, it was clear that the cohort-model had a foundational role in participants’ learning and development. Understanding the cohort-model’s impact was not the purpose of this research, but participants could not seem to describe their learning and development without including the cohort.
The second component is that adult learners’ experiences can also have a negative impact on their learning. Knowles et al. (2005) explains it this way:

As we accumulate experiences, we tend to develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions that tend to cause us to close our minds to new ideas, fresh perceptions, and alternative ways of thinking. Accordingly, adult educators try to discover ways to help adults examine their habits and biases and open their minds to new approaches. (p. 66)

The University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program had a stated learning outcome of “challenging unexamined assumptions” (Doctoral Handbook, 2015, p. 9) to address this potentially negative impact of adult learners’ experiences. The stated program learning outcome aimed to encourage and to prepare adult learners to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement by learners, faculty, and fellow students and by leading learners to a more complex understanding of themselves, their students, or their clients. The interview and focus group findings in this research confirmed this stated learning outcome as an area of learning and development for all participants. Jane summarized this development this way:

If I had to say what’s changed, I’ve changed. How I think. How I approach decision-making. Not just what I learned but how I apply what I’ve learned. How that has integrated into who I naturally am and what my strengths are. How it has exposed certain weaknesses and how I manage those. How I view the world, how I view others, and how I interact with it. It changed everything in relation to that.

The third assumption I will discuss is the readiness to learn which Knowles et al. (2005) describes this way, “Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (p. 67). As I analyzed the findings
around program and learning development outcomes, it became clear that several were directly related to things that participants needed to navigate real-life situations. A great example was when Jane stated in the focus group that she recognized, “seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action” (Doctoral handbook, 2015, p. 9) as an opportunity for her learning and development, which was satisfied by the program. Similarly, Michel shared how he was able to understand sexism in IT because he had previous experiences to draw from, and the program gave him the knowledge to challenge assumptions he had about sexism in IT and come to a greater understanding of allyship and the work he can do as a male in IT to support his female colleagues. Maxine captured her readiness to learn by describing how the coursework continued to redirect her back to the work she was doing with her nonprofit, “We were kind of growing together; the doctorate and my nonprofit.”

Andragogy’s adult learning assumptions are a useful framework for understanding Ed.D. participants’ learning and development. This analysis identified how the University of St. Thomas incorporated the Andragogy framework in the Ed.D. program and subsequently how participants’ learning and development were supported. The program design of University of St. Thomas’s Ed.D. had a strong foundation in adult learning, which positively impacts students learning and development.
Table 15

**Andragogy adult learning assumptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSUMPTIONS</th>
<th>Andragogical Self-Directed Learning</th>
<th>University of St. Thomas Program structure/research findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept of learner</td>
<td>Increasingly Self-Directed Organism</td>
<td>The program had an interdisciplinary ethos and program participants selected 24 credits within collateral coursework which aligned with their individual interests and backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of learner’s experience</td>
<td>A rich resource for learning</td>
<td>Cohort leveraged for impact on learning and development: community, diversity of experiences and perspectives, challenge unexamined assumptions, strong emphasis on group discussion activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to learn</td>
<td>A rich Resource for Learning</td>
<td>Participants identified areas they needed development and how the program filled the gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to learning</td>
<td>Task or Problem Centered</td>
<td>The program used case studies and group discussion to solve problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Internal Incentives, Curiosity</td>
<td>Learning and Knowledge development, new career opportunities, and the challenge identified in interviews as goal(s) purpose(s) for enrolling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Another theory useful to the examination of the research findings is that of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, which is the evolution of altering a frame of reference. To understand this definition of Transformative Learning Theory, we need to better define a frame of reference. Mezirow (1997) defines frame of reference this way, “Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (p. 5). These frames of reference are how adults interpret the world. These frames of reference shape adults’ expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings, ultimately leading them to a set of automated actions for moving forward. The purpose of Transformative Learning is to transform these rigid
preconceptions. The aim of Transformative Learning is simple: “When circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

To allow for Transformative Learning, certain conditions must be in place. First, learners must become more critically aware of their assumptions and those of others. Second, learners must have awareness and recognition of their frames of reference and see alternatives. Third, learners must be effective and responsible at working collectively with others to assess reason, pose and solve problems, and attain a tentative judgment regarding previous assumptions.

The Ed.D. in leadership program at the University of St. Thomas clearly aims to create these conditions and transform learners. This goal is evident by the two program learning outcomes that directly address the goals of Transformative Learning: PLO #1 challenging unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement leading to a complex understanding of yourself and others; and PLO #2 seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action (Doctoral Handbook, 2015, p. 9). Additionally, the cohort learning model utilized by the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program supports the ideal in Transformative Learning that discourse take place with others. The inclusion of transformational program learning outcomes and the utilization of a cohort model does not necessarily ensure transformational learning. However, the findings from this single case study confirmed that transformational learning did indeed take place for a cohort of nontraditional educational leaders as participants in an Ed.D. program. Consequently, one of the primary research themes identified was titled transformative learning outcomes and identified a subtheme of worldview, perspective, and personal transformation.
The subtheme of worldview, perspective, and personal transformation was an identified area of learning and development by seven participants. Participants identified being more critically aware of their assumptions and having an awareness of their own frames of reference and the ability to see alternatives more clearly. Myles summarized his new awareness best when he said, “What I’m most focused on is kind of the internal changes…its almost this oriented disorienting trying to track back where your sense of identity and your worldview and all of that came from.” Maxine described her ability to see alternatives by describing the different perspectives and lenses she can look through. She highlights Freire, Nodding, Bell Hooks, and Bordeaux, all introduced during the program, as the different lenses through which she can now view the world.

Similarly, the program learning outcome subtheme of challenging unexamined assumptions, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself, an area of development identified by all participants, highlighted how participants became more critical of their assumptions and acknowledged their frames of reference. As an example, Sara’s assumptions and colonized notions of music education were challenged: “We’re doing [music education] wrong, you know, it’s subjugating kids of color. There isn’t a requisite representation in the teacher education programs. We’re not validating informal learning.” Michel’s assumptions associated with the role of the professor changed; he once believed the role of professor was simply to be an expert in the field. However, the program helped him to see the professor as having a leadership role in the classroom, which transformed his perspective on his role as an adjunct in the classroom.

Focus group findings confirmed these interview findings. For example, Jane describes how her unexamined assumptions, combined with the intellectual engagement of the program challenged her thinking, leading to a better understanding of herself and the people she worked with. She
ultimately applied that to working with people. Sara furthers Jane’s thoughts by saying, “I think the development of a critically reflective practice, myself applying those to decolonizing my practice and meeting my students where they are.”

The third condition for transformational learning is the need for discourse with peers, allowing learners to come to a deeper understanding of previously held assumptions and construction of new points of view or frames of reference for moving forward collectively. Learners must be effective and responsible at working collectively with others to assess reason, to pose and solve problems, and to attain a tentative judgment regarding previous assumptions (Mezirwo, 1997). The University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program aimed to create this condition in three ways: (a) the inclusion of PLO #1, which required that assumptions be challenged through constructive intellectual engagement with the learner and others; (b) the inclusion of PLO #5, which encouraged and prepared learners to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action; and (c) the use of the cohort model. I will discuss the research findings, supporting clear connections between the learning and development participants identified and the third condition of transformational learning.

Interview participants findings in subtheme PLO #5, seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action, provided significant evidence that learners became “more responsible and effective at working with others to collectively assess reasons, pose and solve problems, and arrive at a tentative best judgment regarding contested beliefs” (Meizrow, 1997, p. 9). Stephen takes this idea of seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action into his work environment, “But yeah, I think there has been a lot more listening and a lot more trying to kind of get everyone on a similar page or at least to agree that this is the proper course of action.” Susan’s biggest takeaway about leadership is the importance of establishing a sense
of unity or “we,” crystallizing for Susan how important it was to ensure constituents felt part of a community, working towards a common goal.

In addition to the interview findings, focus group participants confirmed seeking a common ground for dialogue and constructive action as a direct outcome of the program. Sara interpreted her growth by explaining how she came to realize that establishing a common ground required listening first and meeting people where they are before jumping in with her own thoughts. She also recognized that in order to get to a common ground, people needed to put ego aside and be open to learning and sharing. Jane explained that being a leader requires figuring out and understanding all the different perspectives and how they fit together in order to get to that common ground. Jane recognizes that previously she did not always seek a common ground and was more focused on individual action “I was kind of a lone warrior, even though I was fighting a battle for others.” After the program, she recognized that was not the most effective way of moving people or priorities forward.

These findings directly address condition three necessary for transformational learning. However, the research findings also illuminated the impact the cohort structure had on learners contributing to the alignment between the third condition of transformational learning and the experiences of adult learners in the Ed.D. program. There are certain requirements of discourse as Taylor and Cranton (2012) explained:

Discourse requires only that participants have the will and readiness to seek understanding and to reach some reasonable agreement. Feelings of trust, solidarity, security, and empathy are essential preconditions for the free full participation in discourse. Discourse is not based on winning arguments; it centrally involves finding agreement, welcoming differences,
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“trying on” other points of view, identifying the common in the contradictory, tolerating
the anxiety implicit in paradox, searching for synthesis, and reframing. (p. 80)

Findings from participants’ interviews identified how the cohort structure created the type of
environment that Taylor and Cranton (2012) described as leading to discourse. Sara identified how
the cohort created a respectful community for dialogue and discussion, “We had a lot of
professional respect for each other…there wasn’t a lot of ego…we kind of left that at the door,
and we just learned. That really increased the amount of professional respect and empathy we
were able to afford each other, you know, in the really authentic discussions that we’ve had.”
Jane recognized how important discussion, dialogue, and conversation with the cohort was
because of the different and interdisciplinary perspectives they brought. She explained how rare
that is: “It allowed you to apply some of the things you were learning and thinking about…in a
very safe way. We don’t always have the opportunity to do it safely. And so, that’s what I think
the value was.” The interviews were a rich source of data demonstrating how the cohort model
created an environment for transformational learning. The focus group discussion provided an
opportunity for participants to make direct connection between the growth they experienced in
seeking common ground for dialogue and constructive action and how the cohort modeled that
environment. Susan summarized it this way, “I would want an organization or board or group of
people that I’m working with…to act like our cohort did. Because I think that we came…ready to
[seek] common ground for dialogue…I think we role modeled and exemplified [it].”

It is clear the University of St. Thomas integrated all three conditions of transformational
learning in the development of the Ed.D. program, allowing for transformational learning to
occur across all participants in this study. Adult learners participating in this research,
“transformed [their] frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating
contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically assessing it” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). As Myles put it, “I feel like I’m so much more conscious, you know, just kind of at a foundational level.” The subthemes of: (a) worldview, perspectives, and personal transformation, (b) PLO #1, and (c) PLO #5 provided significant evidence of transformational learning experienced by participants. Finally, the secondary findings on the cohort-model’s impact highlighted how the Ed.D. program’s cohort structure set the conditions for Transformative Learning to take shape.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The literature examined the overlap between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. certification programs, and questioned whether the Ed.D. program prepared practitioners, researchers, or neither. The literature review identified several concerns over the Ed.D., including its ability to prepare academic leaders. Much of the literature focused on the Ed.D.’s ability to prepare K-12 administrators. One study created agency in the field to address the ongoing concerns over the Ed.D., leading to calls for eliminating the degree, modernizing the degree, or rebooting the degree. In the next subsection, I detail Levine’s final recommendation and how this study’s findings shed a different light on the Ed.D. and its impact on participants and graduates.

**Levine’s Study**

Levine’s (2005) final recommendation for the doctor of education degree (Ed.D.) in school leadership was to call for its elimination.

[The Ed.D.] is a watered-down doctorate that diminishes the field of educational administration and provides a back door for weak education schools to gain doctoral granting authority. An Ed.D. is unnecessary for any job in school administration and creates a meaningless and burdensome obstacle to people who want to enter senior levels
of school leadership. It encourages school districts to expect superintendent candidates to
have doctorates and affluent public schools to hire principals with “Dr.” in front of their
names. Neither position requires the skills and knowledge associated with doctoral study,
what is desired is the status of the degree. Credentials have come to overshadow
competence. (Levine, 2005, p. 67)

The findings in this research contradict some of the reasons Levine provides for making this
recommendation. First, Levine claims that the Ed.D. diminishes the field of education. In
contrast, participants in this research study described the program’s impact as “life-changing,”
“transformational,” and creating a heightened level of consciousness. The research findings
identified significant learning and development in the subthemes of becoming scholars,
broadening worldviews and perspectives, increasing confidence, or refining existing knowledge
or skills, challenging unexamined assumptions, forming knowledge-based ethical commitments,
and seeking common ground for dialogue and action. These findings call into question how such
a program could be diminishing the field of education.

The second reason Levine (2005) identifies is that the Ed.D. is “unnecessary for any job
in school administration and creates a meaningless and burdensome obstacle to people who want
to enter senior levels of school leadership” (p. 67). Levine narrowly defines school
administration as K-12 school administrators when the reality is much different. School
administrators are educational administrators involving many forms of education, including
higher education, adult education, and non-profit education. Levine’s study focused on the roles
of the principal and superintendent while this study focused on a cohort of non-traditional leaders
in education. Several participants’ interviews identified that the program created opportunities to
gain faculty positions in higher education, to secure fellowships, and to contribute to the field via
journal articles. In some cases, participants holding K-12 teaching positions acknowledged that the credential was not meaningful in their environment unless they were willing to pursue an administrator licensure. For those K-12 participants seeking new roles after earning the Ed.D., nearly all are seeking roles outside the K-12 environment because they recognize without the administrator licensure there is no route to senior leadership. Levine’s findings may point towards an issue within the K-12 environment rather than an issue with learning and development of participants in an Ed.D. program.

The third and most extensive reason Levine gives for suggesting eliminating the Ed.D. in education leadership is that the Ed.D. unnecessarily promotes the hiring of superintendents and principals with “Dr.” in front of their names when, “Neither position requires the skills and knowledge associated with doctoral study, what is desired is the status of the degree” (p. 67). Again, the findings in this study call the reasons identified above into question as the statement suggests that neither principals or superintendents need knowledge or development in the areas of broadening their worldview or perspectives, challenging unexamined assumptions leading to a more complex understanding of themselves or their students, forming knowledge-based ethical commitments in the context of an ever-changing world, seeking common ground for dialogue and action, or improving their life-long learning skills.

Unlike the contrast identified above, the statement made by Levine that the credential or status of the degree is desired above competence aligns with the findings in my research where seven out of nine participants identified the credential as one of their main reasons for enrolling in the program. While conversely, only four out of nine identified the learning and knowledge development as one of their primary reasons for enrolling in the program. This finding suggests that perhaps the educational leadership environment across K-12, higher education, and non-
profit leadership puts undue pressure on gaining credentials instead of gaining knowledge to
to better perform their roles as leaders. So instead of insisting that Ed.D. programs fail to produce
useful knowledge, skills, or outcomes, we should be recognizing that the pressure to earn
credentials causes educational administrators to seek out credentials as opposed to learning
opportunities.

Levine’s (2005) study calling for the elimination of the Ed.D. narrowly defined
educational administration by focusing solely on principals, superintendents, and K-12
education. The Ed.D. in leadership, as demonstrated by Cohort 28 at the University of St.
Thomas, had the ability to impact educational leaders outside the roles of principal and
superintendent and beyond the sector of K-12 education. The learning, development, and career
outcomes identified by participants in this research secures the Ed.D. as a degree applicable to a
variety of leaders in education which resulted in transformational learning and development
preparing them for impactful careers in education.

Limitations

The cohort’s make-up, while diverse in thought, gender, years of experience, role in the
field of education, educational sector, and age, was not diverse in race and ethnicity. The cohort
started with three people of color, representing nearly a quarter of the cohort. However, of the
three, one individual dropped out after the first fall semester; another individual switched to a
different program/cohort after the cohort-specific courses, leaving one non-White participant in
the cohort who participated in this study. This participant’s findings were in stark contrast to
their cohort members when discussing the impact of the cohort. This individual had a distinct
experience and generally framed their program learning, development, and outcomes within a
racial context. Within nearly all this participant’s responses was an awareness of their own
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race/ethnicity and the impact or influence it had on their program learning, development, and
career outcomes. For example, when discussing the cohort, he did not identify the same support
or familial dynamic that other cohort members identified. He shared that he felt the faculty did
not expect him to succeed. He discussed how his friends of color questioned his choice to go to
the University of St. Thomas as a place that was not “for them.” When discussing his goals for
completing the program, he mentioned how he asked a dean he was working with if they would
be willing to give him a chance at teaching a lower-level business course as he had earned his
MBA and wanted to get into a faculty role. He was told they were unwilling to be the first person
to take a chance on him. He shared struggles he faced as a person of color on committees at his
current institution, helping them to understand non-dominant perspectives or worldviews.
Overall, a good portion of his findings fell outside of the major themes identified and, therefore,
are not the primary findings of this research.

Another limitation identified during the discussion on motivation for enrolling in the
program and Andragogy was whether the timing of when I interviewed participants had an
impact on their responses. I wonder if at the time of initial enrollment, participants would have
identified a different goal or purpose. I interviewed participants during ABD status and post-
graduation, so I wonder if their motivations changed during different parts of the program
between initial enrollment, full engagement in the core coursework, ABD during dissertation,
and post-graduation. As a student in the program, prior to engaging in my dissertation work, I
can say without a doubt that my motivation was most closely connected to the learning and
development. I told people how much I enjoyed and engaged in the coursework because of its
direct impact on my professional work. However, as I have made my way to ABD status and my
focus is solely on completing my dissertation, my motivation is no longer connected to the
learning and development so much as it is connected to earning the credential. I wonder if participants in this study would have responded differently had they been interviewed during all four points in the program: (a) initial enrollment, (b) full engagement, (c) ABD, and (d) post-graduation.

Besides the timing of the interviews’ impact on their purpose or goal for enrolling, I believe interviewing participants at least three years post-graduation would allow for an even deeper and more complete understanding of the career impacts the program had on participants. With one cohort member just wrapping up the program this spring, another completing just this past fall, and two others completing in the spring of 2020, more time may need to be allowed for career impacts to be measured.

**Implications of the Study**

This study identified considerable implications for practice in the process of developing and evaluating Ed.D. educational leadership programs. This study identified program learning and development outcomes and career impacts of one cohort of non-traditional leaders in education. Departments and colleges offering these Ed.Ds. in educational administration would benefit from more broadly defining the types of practitioners these programs educate and develop. The cohort participating in my study represented roles in K-12, higher education, and non-profit leadership. None of the roles my participants held prior to and during program enrollment were discussed as part of the literature. Much of the research surrounding the impact and outcomes of these programs focused on principals and superintendents. Colleges and departments offering these Ed.D. programs should consider broadening their pool of applicants to include more non-traditional leaders in educational organizations outside the traditional K-12 school districts. Ed.D. programs should do as Wergin (2011) suggests and recognize the
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applicability of the Ed.D. and its ability to prepare practitioners for a variety of leadership roles. The colleges and departments offering these programs should more broadly define the success of these programs by including the learning, development, and career outcomes of non-traditional leaders in educational organizations. Currently, these programs are evaluated on their success in preparing principals and superintendents to lead K-12 schools and districts. However, as identified by my study, the Ed.D. has great success in preparing non-traditional leaders for their roles in educational organizations and beyond.

While the cohort studied represented a wide array of background experience, roles in education and types of educational organizations served, there was not a wide array of racial or ethnic diversity in the cohort. The fact that two out of three students of color did not persist in the program nor did the remaining cohort member identify the same sense of belonging or support that their white counterparts expressed calls into question the program’s ability to support a diverse student population. Greater diversity within the cohorts is necessary to ensure all students feel a sense of belonging and support, paramount to student persistence and graduation. The fact that a good portion of the student of color’s experiences and outcomes were unique to that one student suggests that greater attention needs to be paid to the experiences and outcomes of people of color in these programs. One negative component of the cohort was its homogenous racial and ethnic representation. However, several of the cohort members identified the diversity of the cohort’s’ experiences and perspectives as a benefit to both their learning and ultimate success in completing the program. This study’s findings confirm the importance and positive impact for including cohorts in future iterations of these Ed.D. programs. Again, while Ed.D. programs should continue to leverage the cohort model, special focus should be paid to the inclusion of diverse experiences and perspectives in race and ethnicity.
The overlap between the University of St. Thomas Ed.D.’s program structure and Andragogy’s process elements is clear, but there are areas of opportunity for the University of St. Thomas Ed.D. and similar programs (see Table 16 for summary). Andragogy suggests the identification of program learning outcomes should include individual student goals. Colleges and departments offering these Ed.D. programs should ensure each student understands the intended program learning outcomes and should have an opportunity to identify additional areas of growth for their development. The reason for this suggestion is twofold. First, as Knowles (1977) theory or framework of Andragogy suggests, goal setting should be done by mutual agreement. Second, Knowles identified internal motivation as a primary factor in adult learning. Therefore, if students have internal motivation to become more satisfied in their life or career, allowing adult learners to identify additional program goals will help them connect their learning to their individually-stated goals, leading to greater motivation and hopefully persistence to eventually complete the program. These personal goals or areas of growth could be identified through their own self-reflection, questionnaires, 360-degree surveys, interviews from colleagues or supervisors, or even direct reports. This additional insight into adult learners’ goals and opportunities for growth will allow for a tailored experience. I also believe including these individualized goals when evaluating the program will lead to a greater understanding of students’ growth and development, ultimately helping the field of educational leadership better measure program outcomes and impacts, providing greater clarity to external audiences on what students gain from the program while simultaneously recognizing the dynamic and individualized nature of both participants and outcomes realized.
Table 16

Process elements of Andragogy and University of St. Thomas Ed.D. program structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Andragogical Self-Directed Learning</th>
<th>University of St. Thomas Ed.D. Program structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Informal, Mutually Respectful, Consensual, Collaborative, Supportive</td>
<td>Cohort model created community and network of support throughout program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>By Participative Decision-Making</td>
<td>Not evident in findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis of Needs</td>
<td>By Mutual Agreement</td>
<td>Participants identified several areas of development which were met by the program. Although, could be more intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Goals</td>
<td>My Mutual Negotiation</td>
<td>Area of opportunity for University of St. Thomas program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing a Learning Plan</td>
<td>Learning Projects, Learning Content, Sequenced in Terms of Readiness</td>
<td>Not evident in findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Activities</td>
<td>Inquiry Projects, Independent Study, Experimental Techniques</td>
<td>The program used case studies, group discussion, and a variety of other experimental techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>By Mutual Assessment of Self-Collected Evidence</td>
<td>Area of opportunity for University of St. Thomas program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the setting of program learning outcomes and individual learning goals, how these programs are assessed and evaluated requires additional considerations. While there are accrediting and licensing agencies that set quality standards for some of these programs, there seems to be little understanding of how assessment of student learning and the program review process could be utilized and leveraged to evaluate the success of these programs. Levine’s study reviewed the program’s curriculum, admissions and graduation standards, faculty profile, and clinical instruction. These program components are generally reviewed as part of a traditional program review process, in addition to the analysis of assessment data, which identifies whether students are meeting program learning outcomes and if not, includes an action plan for remediation. These program review and assessment processes could be better leveraged to ensure Ed.D. programs meet the needs of the adult learners they intended to serve. Program review processes often include alumni surveys or focus groups that would benefit these programs in understanding the programs outcomes and impacts on alumni. Within many program review
processes, there is the inclusion of employer surveys or an opportunity to include an advisory board to ensure the program outcomes align with the industry or field.

The inclusion of an equity and diversity lens in reviewing these programs would help to identify areas the program could improve: its recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color. Overall, programs should ensure they are regularly reviewing these programs via a standard process, which includes the review and analysis of assessment data, the inclusion of alumni voices, the inclusion of industry, and the review of equity data and diversity initiatives. It often seems these programs are redone in response to external forces instead of based on the processes put in place to help these programs continuously improve. Using the program’s stated learning outcomes assessment findings as the basis for making informed improvements, reviewers’ suggestions or changes to programs should be the standard. Robust assessment plans should be in place to support these programs in utilizing program data, including indirect assessment data of students’ perceived growth and development, to innovate and continuously improve.

I believe administrators or faculty of these Ed.D. programs could better utilize the districts, institutions, and other non-profits the programs serve to better understand the current challenges practitioners are facing and include learning opportunities that directly address these challenges. Additionally, creating better connections with alumni and industry to support post-graduation success would benefit these programs’ participants specifically those who identify seeking new career opportunities as motivation for enrolling in the program. Creating opportunities to connect with potential employers would provide the support some graduates need with breaking through the barriers they may experience post-graduation.
Finally, considerations should be made as to how we better collect and report data on the Ed.D. Currently only institutional level data is available on Ed.D., and it likely varies dramatically. A standard should be created for reporting Ed.Ds. data separately to IPEDS. All Ed.Ds. certifications should be defined as professional practice degrees as they were originally defined. Any Ed.D. programs serving to prepare researchers should be recategorized as Ph.Ds.
There should be a separate survey of earned doctorates, which focuses on professional practice doctorates and separates all findings by degree types (Ed.D., M.D., D.D.D.). This data would help create a baseline understanding and inform future research on Ed.Ds.. Additionally, Ed.D. programs should be collecting and maintaining alumni data more systematically; alumni voices and perspectives should be used in reform and improvement efforts.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

More research needs to be done to better and more broadly understand the program learning outcomes and career impacts of Ed.D. programs on non-traditional leaders in educational settings. The hyper focus of past research on the principalship and role of superintendent has left an entire group of educational leaders’ experiences, learning, and impacts out of the conversation. While the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED), formed in 2007 after Levine’s study, developed a framework for Ed.D. program design, more research needs to be done to understand the landscape of Ed.D. programs in the United States. A future focus of this research should include understanding the current landscape of program learning outcomes and how assessment findings are driving programmatic changes. Studies should be done to understand how effective program review processes are in creating opportunities for meaningful improvement and innovation. More longitudinal studies should be done to understand the impacts of these programs over the life of educational leaders’ careers.
While not a direct finding of this study, several participants acknowledged they would not have enrolled in the program had it been in a fully online format, therefore, research should be conducted to understand whether online modalities play a role in program learning outcomes and impacts especially when considering what is known about adult learning. Finally, a study of the program learning outcomes and career impacts of adult learners of color should be conducted to better understand their experiences and how programs can better meet these learners’ needs and ultimate goals.

**Conclusion**

My master’s program exposed me to the transformational nature of adult education, and this Ed.D. program continued that transformation. I went into this research wondering if my experience was the exception, not the rule. What I found was my learning and development mirrored so much of what my cohort identified through their interviews. They gave words to the learning and development I often had a hard time describing. The experience the program provides beyond the credential may not be well understood by those not committing to this type of learning endeavor, yet I am confident, after this research, in this program’s ability to transform minds, hearts, and actions. The Ed.D. has the potential to serve, to prepare and to transform a broader group of leaders than the literature suggests. Programs like this offer a variety of adult learners the opportunity to experience a once-in-a-lifetime transformational educational experience, “that brings together the need for wide-awakeness with the hunger for community, the desire to know with the wish to understand, the desire to feel with the passion to see” (Greene, 1988 p. 23). While some simply stumbled upon the program to earn the credential, it is clear more was gained than the three letters of Ed.D.
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Appendix A

Round I Interview Questions – 2019 Completers

Background Questions:

1. In what cohort are you a member?
2. What is your research question for your dissertation?
3. How soon after your master’s degree did you begin your doctorate?
4. How many years of work experience did you have prior to beginning your doctoral work?
5. What was your age you when you began the program?
6. What was your job/position when you entered the program and what is your job/position now (Title(s))?
7. Do you have a goal/purpose for completing the program (i.e. promotion, sought additional licensure)?
8. Any other details that were important regarding your personal or professional life during your enrollment in the program?

Transformation Questions:

9. What would you say has changed the most in your life or your career since beginning the program?
10. Would you say the program changed your approach to leadership? If yes, how? If not, why not?
11. Did your experience of your own leadership change during the program? Have you change how you lead? If so, how?
12. Has your experience of other people’s leadership changed? If so, how?
Leadership Questions:

13. Do you define leadership differently now than you did prior to the start of the program?

14. What do you still struggle with as a leader?

Growth and Development Questions:

15. Are there components of the program you use in your daily life? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

16. Do you continue to develop your leadership skills? If so, where/how?

17. Were there any moments during your career where a part of the program helped you? Can you describe the situation?

18. What information do you wished was part of the program that was not, which you believe would have better helped you navigate leadership?

Round II Interview Questions – 2019 Completers

Transformation Questions:

1. What would you say has changed the most in your life or your career since completing the program?

2. Would you say the program changed your approach to leadership? If yes, how? If not, why not?

3. Did your experience of your own leadership change during the program? Have you change how you lead? If so, how?

4. Has your experience of other people’s leadership changed? If so, how?

Cohort Questions:

5. In what ways did the cohort impact your leadership development and experiences within the program?
6. Is there a particularly memorable cohort moment that you can draw upon as a transformation or influential moment in the program?

Current Issues/Challenges in 2020

7. Has the program’s curriculum or experiences helped you to navigate leading during a global pandemic, within a heightened social justice context, or as a citizen of a highly polarized country?

Round I Interview Questions – 2020/21 Completers

Background Questions:

1. What is your research question for your dissertation?

2. How soon after your master’s degree did you begin your doctorate?

3. How many years of work experience did you have prior to beginning your doctoral work?

4. What was your age you when you began the program?

5. What was your job/position when you entered the program and what is your job/position now (Title(s))?

6. Do you have a goal/purpose for completing the program (i.e. promotion, sought additional licensure)?

7. Any other details that were important regarding your personal or professional life during your enrollment in the program?

Transformation Questions:

8. What would you say has changed the most in your life or your career since beginning the program?

9. Would you say the program changed your approach to leadership? If yes, how? If not, why not?
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10. Did your experience of your own leadership change during the program? Have you change how you lead? If so, how?

11. Has your experience of other people’s leadership changed? If so, how?

Leadership Questions:

12. Do you define leadership differently now than you did prior to the start of the program?

13. What do you still struggle with as a leader?

Growth and Development Questions:

14. Are there components of the program you use in your daily life? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

15. Do you continue to develop your leadership skills? If so, where/how?

16. Were there any moments during your career where a part of the program helped you?

    Can you describe the situation?

17. What information do you wished was part of the program that was not, which you believe would have better helped you navigate leadership?

Cohort Questions:

18. In what ways did the cohort impact your leadership development and experiences within the program?

19. Is there a particularly memorable cohort moment that you can draw upon as a transformation or influential moment in the program?

Current Issues/Challenges in 2020

20. Has the program’s curriculum or experiences helped you to navigate leading during a global pandemic, within a heightened social justice context, or as a citizen of a highly polarized country?
Focus Group Questions

1. In what ways did the program challenge unexamined assumptions allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself, your students, your colleagues, your customers and/or your staff?

2. In what ways did you form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of our continuously changing world?

3. In what ways did you seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action?

4. In what ways did you improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your career?

5. In what ways did the program help you to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling?
## Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP MEMBER</th>
<th>PLO #1</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MICHEL</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students and/or clients?</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students and/or clients?</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSAN</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students and/or clients?</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXINE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students and/or clients?</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to challenge unexamined assumptions through constructive intellectual engagement allowing you to come to a more complex understanding of yourself and your students and/or clients?</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS GROUP MEMBER</td>
<td>PLO #2</td>
<td>RATING</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHEL</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSAN</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXINE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form knowledge-based ethical commitments within the context of a continuously changing world.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP MEMBER</th>
<th>PLO #3</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MICHEL</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSAN</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXINE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to form questions about the relationship of a particular field of study and your life’s calling.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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</table>
## PLO #4: Improvement in Professional Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP MEMBER</th>
<th>PLO #4</th>
<th>RATING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MICHEL</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared you to improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared you to improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSAN</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared you to improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXINE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared you to improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared you to improve your professional practice, with a focus on learning and growth throughout your entire career.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PLO #5: Seeking a Common Ground for Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP MEMBER</th>
<th>PLO #5</th>
<th>RATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MICHEL</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUSAN</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXINE</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>The program encouraged or prepared me to seek a common ground for dialogue and constructive action.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>