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## A Study of the Impact of a K-12 School District–University Doctoral Cohort on District Leadership Capacity

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A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF A K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT-UNIVERSITY  
DOCTORAL COHORT ON DISTRICT LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

by

Sharon Davis

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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requirements for the  
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Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology  
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Western Michigan University  
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# A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF A K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT–UNIVERSITY DOCTORAL COHORT ON DISTRICT LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Sharon Davis, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University, 2010

The phenomenological study examined how a K-12 school district–university partnership impacted a school district’s leadership from the perspectives of cohort members and non-cohort members. The doctoral cohort consisted of 22 candidates. The intent of the program was to merge theory with best practice and to focus on increasing the district’s leadership capacity. The study involved a purposeful sample of 10 participants that included 5 teachers who participated in the doctoral educational cohort and 5 teachers who were not members of the cohort. Data were collected through interviews.

This doctoral cohort was modeled on learning theory that addressed the needs of adult learners. Course content was not changed; however, class activities and assignments were modified to address the professional development needs of cohort members while concurrently meeting university accreditation standards. Several courses extended across multiple semesters as a systematic approach was used to connect theory with district challenges.

Respondents identified a number of changes that occurred in the areas of collaboration, knowledge, and leadership. This included increased participant leadership resulting from participation in the doctoral cohort partnership, and establishment of a

learning community. Attitudinal changes were evident as participants demonstrated passion and enthusiasm in leaning activities. Non-cohort members witnessed professional growth in cohort members and noted that cohort members became a resource for non-cohort members in reference to teaching and assessment practices. Cohort members created a sense of shared responsibility and emerged as leaders who encouraged others to improve performance and create a collaborative community. Trust also increased between cohort and non-cohort members.

Recommendations for further research included (1) a study regarding the long-term ramifications of doctoral cohort programs on school improvement, (2) the impact of cohorts on student achievement, and (3) the impact of cohorts on increasing measurable leadership capacity.

The investigation adds to the literature on doctoral cohorts and provides insights into methods of alternate program delivery. The study examines the impact of doctoral cohorts and problem-based learning on a district's leadership capacity.

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Sharon Davis

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The educational jurisdictions throughout the country are entrenched in reform initiatives that involve change in curriculum, testing, and funding along with changes in the roles and relationships of educational leaders (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002). These changes require collective accountability for reform initiatives and collective leadership toward educational reform (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

Designing educational leadership programs that address the needs of reform initiatives requires a unique structure and delivery. Creating educational programs around learning communities is one way of addressing a change in structure and delivery.

One example of a learning community is a collaborative learning cohort. Cohorts are groups of learners who do much or all of their academic work together (Siefert & Mandzuk, 2006). Maher (2005) defined a cohort-based educational leadership program as a group of students who begin a program together and end the program at approximately the same time. Teitel (1997) described a cohort learning model found in a doctoral educational leadership program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston as a simple organizational change that has reshaped their educational leadership program.

Collaborative learning has become a popular innovation (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). Collaborative cohorts have been created at the undergraduate level as

well as at the graduate level. Lambert (cited in Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 2002) describes a collaborative model in which “leadership development (is) portrayed as a reciprocal process where a community of learners inspires both individual and group development” (p. vii). Cohort members display and model elements of leadership as well as develop skills and knowledge that could be different than a non-cohort program. Opportunities to create learning teams, mutual support, and collaboration are major advantages of cohort learning (Barnett et al., 2000). Structural frameworks inherent in cohort models create both formal and informal ways that students connect and interact (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001). Learning cohorts access the social nature of learning as well as the learners’ previous experiences (Maslow, 1954; Mezirow, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

Collaborative learning communities create a collaboration of comrades who establish their identity within the collaborative community (Bentley, Zhao, Reames, & Reed, 2004; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Fullan’s (2001) framework for leadership stresses the importance of relationships in successful change initiatives. Collaborative learning is the epitome of relationship building in a learning organization.

The concept of collaborative learning communities in the development of teacher leadership abounds in the literature. Lieberman and Miller (2004) outlined the influence of a community of practice on teachers’ practices: “Developing professional communities in place of traditional teacher individualism and isolationism fosters teacher leadership” (p. 11). The collaborative community shares purpose and vision and creates innovative and coordinated action. Sergiovanni (1992) described collaborative learning communities: “There should be a connectedness among members of a learning

community that resembles a family, neighborhood, or closely-knit group with shared purposes, values, and commitments” (p. 47).

Cohort learning through teacher education programs has unexpectedly resulted in the development of a new group of teacher leaders (Tucker, Henig, & Salmonowicz, 2005).

Reform efforts have spawned use of the term *teacher-leader* (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006; Feiler, Heritage, & Gallimore, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Wasley, 1991). New importance is being attached to the impact of teachers as leaders (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2002). Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) recommended a dramatic rethinking and expansion of the traditional definition of *educational leadership* to include the classroom teacher as a leader.

The literature on teacher leadership spans 20 years, yet the concept and definitions of *teacher leadership* remain diverse, antithetical, and ambiguous (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The seminal work on teacher leadership began with the 1986 publication of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in which the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession recommended the creation of teacher leadership positions. The foundation designated researchers to develop descriptions of what teacher leadership might look like. Schlechty (1990) wrote about visionary leadership that would help reform schools and used the term *teacher as leader* (p. x). Little (1988) used the concept of teacher leaders in her writings about teacher professionalism. Teachers have increasingly been identified as agents of change and vehicles for educational reform. Wasley (1991) linked the roots of teacher leadership to the need for change and reform

efforts in the working conditions of teachers. Smylie, Ray, and Tozer (1999) identified teachers as agents of change, or teacher leaders. Sugar and Warren (2003) described teachers as informal leaders, sharing teaching strategies with other teachers, as well as formal leaders, which included department chairs, grade-level chairs, and/or team leaders.

Creating opportunities that support teacher leadership is necessary to make significant change in the current educational system (Katzenmayer & Moller, 2001; Lambert et al., 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Increasing leadership opportunities for teachers can occur through principal mentoring and by teachers assuming more responsibility in school governance (Birky et al., 2006; Childs, 2005; Marks & Louis, 1999). Lieberman and Miller (1999) discussed the need for organizational support through values and practices embedded within the school setting that promote teacher leadership.

## **Background**

The school district in this study is a small urban district in the Midwest. It is the only school district in the county that accepts schools-of-choice students across county lines. The district consists of seven schools. There is one high school, an academy housing eighth and ninth graders, a middle school with sixth and seventh graders, three kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools, and an early education program with preschool through second grade. The current district enrollment is 3,427, with 64.6% at-risk students. African Americans represent 92.4% of the student population. Asian students represent .9%, Hispanic students represent .4%, 2.7% of the students are Middle

Eastern, 1.1% are multi-ethnic, .3% are Native Americans, and 2.2% are Caucasian.

Student achievement is near the bottom of the county.

An educational collaborative between a Midwestern university and this urban school district was created to address student achievement. This partnership was designed to effect change in the district through effective leadership practices (Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004).

Prior to the doctoral cohort that is being studied, a reading cohort was created to support teacher learning. It was designed as an extended form of professional development that would improve teachers' content knowledge and improve their skills. This would in turn improve student performance. The goal was to develop a collaborative relationship that would change the district. Knowledge learned within the cohort setting was applied within the schools and classrooms throughout the district (Muchmore et al., 2004). The first cohort was designed to affect student performance. The subsequent doctoral cohort was designed to create leaders within various schools and classrooms that created a culture that asked questions, examined data, and shared responsibility for student achievement (Muchmore et al., 2004).

### **Problem Statement**

Doctoral educational leadership programs must be based on learning theory that addresses the needs of the adults' self-concept, need for affiliation, problem-centered orientation, and control over the learning process (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Knowles, 1984; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Norris et al., 2002). The programs themselves must be the models of leadership that promote growth and empowerment for

those who will lead teachers (Norris et al., 2002). We must develop leadership programs “as a reciprocal process where a community of learners inspires both individual and group development” (Norris et al., 2002, p. vii).

Barnett et al. (2000) suggested that we need research to discern if educational leadership programs are impacting leadership practice. A more complete understanding of teacher leadership helps researchers to discover whether participation in a learning cohort affects teachers’ desire to expand their responsibilities into areas outside of the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This study assesses the perceptions and experiences of the school district teachers of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of the doctoral cohort. It examined how the process of the doctoral learning cohort that existed between the university and the school district worked from multiple perspectives. This study provides descriptions of the experience from the viewpoint of cohort members and their non-cohort colleagues.

The social and shared aspects of learning cohorts are designed to create positive emotional ties that produce good student outcomes and reduce attrition (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). It is imperative that experts and practitioners develop a body of knowledge that enumerates the influences toward teacher leadership.

This study sought to access the viewpoint of both cohort and non-cohort members within the same district. The study is based on the following research questions:

1. How do the cohort members describe their shared experience?

2. How did participation in the cohort change the teachers' roles or participation in building and district decisions?
3. What was the reaction or perception of non-participants on the participation of teacher leaders in the program?
4. What changes short and long term (if any) occurred in the building and district at the conclusion of the teacher leadership cohort?
5. What were the drawbacks or negative aspects of participation in a learning cohort?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study builds on the case study done by Kopy (2005) of the same cohort partnership. She suggested a return to the same site to determine the long-term effects of this partnership. As Kopy recommended in her study of the same cohort, further research should seek to assess “the perceptions of all the stakeholders in the partnership” (p. 151). Based on her suggestion, the current study assesses non-cohort colleagues as well as cohort members that may have been included in the previous study in order to capture the perceptions of stakeholders with a variety of viewpoints in relation to the partnership.

The literature of postsecondary cohort learning will be enriched by this study. It provides insights into an alternate method of program delivery that develops educational leaders. This study also builds on the study of the efficacy of a university cohort by Kopy published in 2005. It examines the same cohort from the perspective of cohort members as well as non-cohort members. The resulting thick, rich descriptions will help explore students' experiences as they participated in a doctoral cohort and will aid universities in

planning future cohort learning programs. Cohort learning is a unique method that produces an innovative approach to creating a community of learners. This study will enhance the understanding of the processes and influences of a community of learners (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001). Price (2005) uses the term *differential impact*. This study adds to the information of the impact of learning cohorts on the doctoral students as well as on the school district by exploring doctoral students' first-hand experiences, as suggested by Barnett and Muse (1993).

Developing leaders from the abundant talent of teachers is necessary to establish agents of change and pedagogical reform (Leander & Osborne, 2008). This study will assist in providing information to universities as they plan programs in educational leadership.

### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative phenomenological study that discusses how the participants of a phenomenon describe and perceive the process (Creswell, 2003). This is an in-depth study of the experiences of the members of a collaborative partnership between a Midwestern university and a small Midwestern urban school district and their colleagues. The “lived experiences” of the participants provide insights into the meaning that is assigned to those experiences (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). This study illuminates relationships among cohort members, between members and administrators, as well as between members and their peers. It explores the changes in their perceptions of leadership practices after involvement in the cohort. The experiences of the members, their non-cohort colleagues, and the district are explored (Creswell, 1998). The resulting

narrative provides descriptions, perceptions, and the personal judgments of the respondents.

Qualitative studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system. This bounded system is defined by the parameters of the cohort within the school district and their colleagues. The process by which things changed within the members, their non-cohort colleagues, and the district is explored (Maxwell, 1996).

This investigation studied 5 teachers who participated in a cohort through a Midwestern university and a small Midwestern urban school district, and 5 who were tenured teachers in the school district during the cohort program, but not cohort members. Each non-cohort member had 7 or more years of experience in the school system. Experiences of cohort members through an evaluative phenomenological study will provide insight into the impact of learning cohorts on the role of participating teachers in the cohort, their leadership contributions, and building and district change that occurred as a result of their teacher leadership.

A purposeful sample (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) of 5 cohort teachers and 5 non-cohort members participated in this study. All 10 of the respondents experienced the phenomenon of the university–school district collaborative, either directly through their coursework or by proximity to cohort members. They all have experiences with the same phenomenon and were able to articulate these experiences (Creswell, 1998). Ten teachers were interviewed. Interviews were taped, transcribed, grouped, and coded. The resulting themes were developed and a narration of the experience was created.

Care was taken so that responses that were unanticipated could emerge. Maxwell (1996) used the term *interactive qualitative research*. Each section in the design of a

qualitative study impacts the other. As the responses were sorted, any unexpected influences were researched, and, when necessary, further questions were created that addressed new concepts.

The interviews took place at a location convenient to the respondents. The questions were asked in a relative order, but allowances were made for the respondent to change the direction of the questioning or to elaborate at length. The interviews were relatively unstructured like a conversation.

### **Interview Questions**

Interview questions were created that assessed the experience and tenure of each respondent in the district's schools. The introductory questions were designed to assess the background of the respondents as well as their awareness of the doctoral cohort and its members. Succeeding questions sought information about the relationships between cohort members and non-cohort members to ascertain their memories and perceptions of the cohort experience. The remaining questions provided opportunities to describe, judge, and discuss the cohort experience from both member and non-member viewpoints. The same interview questions were asked of both cohort and non-cohort members.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Concepts of teacher leadership have become embedded in the language of educational improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). A clear picture must be created of conditions responsible for nurturing leadership practices. Innovative programs, sensitive to teachers' personal needs and preferences such as learning cohorts, must be created

(Wenzlaff & Wiese, 2004) at the university level to nurture the development of teacher leaders.

The revitalization of schools to effectively meet the education of students requires restructuring or re-engineering. Restructuring must emerge from within and involve teachers, those most intimately involved in education and the educational process (Fullan, 2000; Lambert, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Change can take place only when people at all levels are actively involved (Fullan, 2001). This requires new leadership roles for teachers. The leadership team must be expanded. The role of a principal is too complex and demanding, and teachers must assume leadership roles if the needs of students and society are going to be met (Barth, 2001). Grubb and Flessa (2006) discussed collaborative decision-making power as a balance between leaders and teachers and the concept of non-traditional principals. Researchers and leaders must determine if participation in a cohort enhances and accelerates a teacher's desire and ability to develop into a teacher leader and impact the effectiveness in the building and district.

Crowther et al. (2002) suggested that university courses, professional training, and leadership development must be modified or re-engineered to improve schools. We need to produce school leaders capable of fundamental improvement (Tucker et al., 2005).

Gaps exist in describing the paths that are taken from teacher to teacher leader. Much has been written about the definition and responsibilities of teacher leaders (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Additionally, an abundance of literature exists describing the differentiation of responsibilities of teacher leaders (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Many writers describe

factors that enhance teacher leadership such as peer coaching, principal mentorship, collaborative relationships, as well as impediments to successful leadership like structural isolation or a lack of shared vision. Barnett et al. (2000) suggested that we need research to help discern if educational leadership programs are impacting leadership practice. A more complete understanding of teacher leadership helps researchers to discern whether participation in a learning cohort affects teachers' desire to expand their responsibilities into areas outside of the classroom.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was confined to 5 doctoral students in the university–school district learning partnership and 5 of their non-cohort colleagues. The non-cohort peers of the school district were 5 tenured teachers with 7 or more years of experiences. Creswell (2003) defined delimitations as the way in which the scope of a study is narrowed.

Unknown factors such as observer effects (Patton, 2002) and researcher bias were carefully monitored and checked by member responses. Bringing multiple perspectives into one unified document required extensive and frequent data review and careful sorting into themes or issues (Maxwell, 1996).

Experiences of the members of an educational partnership between a Midwestern university and a small Midwestern urban school district were analyzed. Discovering the perceived changes that occurred within students, the culture of the school, and the district because of participation in this doctoral learning cohort was the goal of this phenomenology. This study was designed to discover the multiple perspectives, judgments, and meanings of the doctoral cohort experience.

Examples of teacher leadership that emerged from this program as well as changes within the school district were examined from the perspectives and perceptions of the respondents. A narrative was created of the data collected through interviews. This information will be used to develop future learning cohorts and create educational leadership programs that address the challenges of educational reform and create teacher leaders for tomorrow.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the viewpoints of both cohort members and non-cohort members of a doctoral educational leadership program. The doctoral program was an educational partnership between a Midwestern university and a small Midwestern urban school district. Participants in this study were 5 teachers who taught in the school district for 7 or more years, but were not members of any collaborative program between the university and the school district, as well as 5 teachers who were part of the doctoral program. It examined and described perceived changes in the district, the culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of the cohort. Data were collected from both cohort members and non-cohort members. Information has been compiled that informs future postsecondary cohort learning programs.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This study assesses the perceptions and experiences of the school district teachers of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of the doctoral cohort. It will provide descriptions of the experience from multiple perspectives.

Half of the participants in this study participated in a learning cohort that was part of an educational partnership between a small Midwestern urban school district and a Midwestern university. Half of the participants were colleagues of the cohort members who worked alongside them during the 5 years of the doctoral coursework. Their perceptions, descriptions, and observations of changes in the district, their colleagues, and the culture are assessed by this study. This study examined their experiences and provided insights into the factors that enhance and develop teacher leadership practice and the effects of graduate learning within a structured learning cohort. This study is designed to discover the multiple perspectives, judgments, and meanings of the doctoral cohort experience.

The framework for this literature review is built on concepts that give form and support for understanding cohort learning in a graduate educational leadership program. Educational leadership programs create leaders who will oversee the progress of education for the 21st century. The literature review begins with education reform and the implications for teacher leaders. Reform efforts have impacted policies, use of resources,

and the pedagogical soundness of current educational programs. The review of literature includes definitions of *teacher leadership*, key theorists, and literature related to teacher leadership. It also includes a history of the term *teacher leader* and the metamorphosis of the term, from the Carnegie Task Force report (1986) to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, as well as encompasses current trends in teacher leadership.

Adult learning theory is included because many theorists describe knowledge construction and learning as a collaborative and social experience, such as that used in cohort learning.

Definitions of *cohort learning* and related literature are included. The innovations and history of both cohort learning and learning partnerships will be discussed. The final section discusses current theories regarding adult education and relates them to cohort learning.

Because the current educational climate focuses on educational reform, graduates in education leadership programs must have skills and knowledge that create a climate for change as well as provide the best possible educational opportunities for today's students. "Of all the kinds of leadership that require exceptional political skill, the leadership of reform movements must be among the most exacting" (Burns, 1979, p. 169). This literature review will begin with education reform.

### **Education Reform**

In the current education climate, standardization, accountability, and testing are the prevailing ideas. These are closely aligned to government mandates that have resulted in increasing governmental control and the diminution of local control. Performance-

based accountability is at the heart of today's reform efforts (Leithwood et al., 2002). Who controls education has direct implications for what happens educationally in schools and classrooms (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) connected global competition to the quality of education and we became a nation of reform (Lewis, 2006). After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a tide of educational reform swept the country that ultimately led to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, or Pub. L. No.107-110 U.S.C. 4201.

### **Implications of the No Child Left Behind Act**

Efforts to improve schooling have always been complicated. The law presumes that external accountability and sanctions will force school improvement and force teachers to change their instructional practice (Sunderman et al., 2006). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) uses test scores as a measure of teaching quality and student learning as criteria to regulate school performance (Elmore, 2002). Idealistically the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 asks for authentic school reform.

The law is meant to spur improvement, encourage reform, and inspire new initiatives so that every child, regardless of his or her race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or level of English language proficiency, has the opportunity to achieve and be successful. (p. 1)

Hallmarks of the NCLB legislation are the threats and sanctions that are given to schools that do not perform adequately. NCLB calls for stringent measures such as restructuring, availability of free tutoring for students in schools who fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), or encouragement to switch public schools.

Replacement of staff members or management authority is also a possibility after a 4-year failure to meet AYP. Unique to the NCLB Act is the graduated proficiency requirement for students with disabilities and those learning English (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001; Olson, 2006). Those students with limited language proficiency (LEP) must take the same assessment as native speakers in mathematics and science and receive no exemption from testing after 1 year in the United States. Their testing must be done under standard accommodation rules for native speakers after 1 year. Students with disabilities must increase their standardized test scores each year by a percentage of the scores of students deemed proficient by individual school districts.

Many critics of the NCLB question the authenticity of the tests in core subjects, as well as the financial cost of implementation many districts incur, especially those in high poverty districts (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). This implementation has also led to the development of financial windfalls to private companies created to provide specialty services to schools such as teacher training, administration, and non-instructional functions (Burch, Donovan, & Steinberg, 2006). There are no easy ways to address these NCLB requirements and accompanying strictures (Elmore, 2003; Fullan, 2000; Lewis, 2006; Meier, 2002). “Sanctions, lack of funding, noncompliance with NCLB provisions, and testing issues seem to have no instant solutions” (Lewis, 2006, p. 1).

Critics like Lewis (2006), as well as Kim and Sunderman (2001) in their article, “Influences on State Policy on Standards and School Practices,” have questioned whether achievement in high poverty areas is really climbing. Kim and Sunderman (2005), in their article “Measuring Academic Proficiency Under the No Child Left Behind Act: Implications for Educational Equity,” described design flaws in the NCLB and questioned

the indicators of school effectiveness because they reflect large differences in the academic skills and socioeconomic backgrounds of students before they enter school. While there is much opposition and criticism to NCLB, it remains the governing educational policy of this country. One program requirement in Sec. 111 requires states to replace school staff in schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress and reduce the authority of the leadership at the school level. Outside experts are then appointed to advise the school on ways to achieve adequate yearly progress, and if that fails after 1 year, the schools will be restructured into charter schools, managed by a private company or turn over the operations of the school to the State Department of Education.

Governmental reform initiatives call for responses from school administrators as well as teachers. Ultimately, it is the teacher who implements large-scale reform. Teachers are pressured to make fundamental changes in their teaching because public policymakers are unhappy about student learning (Feiler et al., 2000). This pressure to create reform results in large variations of reform initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2002). Instructional methods that improve test scores are favored to maintain governmental funding.

Burch et al. (2006) expressed concern that NCLB is helping to drive district demand for content-specific programming. Under the law, accountability is measured by students' performance on standardized tests in reading and mathematics. With federal funds tied to improvements in these areas, districts have a much greater incentive than in the past to concentrate resources in these areas (p. 133).

Policymakers have an obligation to establish policy and standards as well as monitor performance. But as Fullan (1993) asserted, "you cannot mandate what matters"

(p. 22). Complex educational change cannot come from mandates that require narrow and specific goals, forcing teachers to don the role of technician.

The teacher is ultimately responsible for student success as judged by national standards as well as for educating students to their fullest capacity, yet NCLB's definition of teacher quality is based solely on test scores (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Standards and assessment-driven curricula may interfere with sound pedagogical decisions designed to address the individual and diverse needs of a wide diversity of students (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Darling-Hammond (1997) discussed the ways government accountability mandates resulted in inflexible policies that do not treat students in accordance with their needs. It becomes necessary to ask which strategies might be more appropriate in particular circumstances. Excessive bureaucratization limits flexibility for allocating resources, limits classroom flexibility for determining appropriate methods, results in overspecialization, and increases paperwork to monitor activities (Hargreaves, 1994; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Teachers must become the change agents within school communities that create learners who are productive members of a larger social system (Crowther et al., 2002; Fullan, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Schlechty, 1990). Student performance must become public and teachers become accountable for learning outside of the classroom (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Fullan (2001) wrote that, although schools are in the business of teaching and learning, they are terrible at learning from each other. School leaders must anoint teachers to become change agents who recreate schools as true learning environments and, at the same time, achieve the accountability required by the NCLB Act.

Pedagogical soundness is seriously affected by testing as a measure of school success (Olson, 2006). Teaching strategies cannot be adaptive because of the need to cover a tightly constrained curriculum in a specific manner. The uniform treatment of students may result in increased student dropouts or change to alternative schools. Those who are unable to leave are alienated in regulated impersonal public schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The cornerstone of the NCLB is the threat of “high stakes” consequences for schools that do not make AYP. Olson (2006) discussed the shortcomings of the NCLB, specifically of the effects of the NCLB on raising student achievement: “[T]here’s little evidence to suggest that some of the more stringent measures that the law authorizes for troubled schools actually raise student achievement” (p. 1). Leithwood et al. (2002), in their discussion of the response of educators to the performance-based methods for large-scale school reform, questioned how much is known about the effects of increasing school accountability: “[E]ducators are a diverse group and are likely to respond in diverse ways to the same accountability initiative, depending on the sense they make of it” (p. 95). Elmore and Fuhrman (2001) expressed concern that the use of sanctions and rewards does not actually cause schools and the individuals that work in them to perform at higher levels as the proponents of NCLB expect. He surmised that strong negative outcomes of pressure and stress to improve performance and the focus on test scores severely limit the curriculum. Meier (2002) stated that other subjects that are not part of the core curriculum and are not part of national testing, like music, dance, or visual arts, are driven from the curriculum. Popham (2004) indicated that important curricular content is being tossed out as a result of content testing in NCLB. Jennings and Rentner

(2006) concluded that the law's impact has meant that "schools are spending more time on reading and math, sometimes at the expense of subjects not tested" (p. 110). Jennings and Rentner added that high poverty districts have increased time requirements for reading in elementary schools, again affecting other subjects like social studies. That requirement is higher for high poverty areas.

There are many unintended consequences of NCLB. Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, and Orfield (2004) examined teachers' responses in their survey *No Child Left Behind: The Teacher's Voice*. Teachers did not believe that identifying schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress would result in school improvement. The transfer options were viewed negatively, as were the sanctions that would punish teachers. It would cause them to transfer out of the schools not making adequate progress, resulting in difficulty with long-term commitment to teach in poorly performing schools. Transfer options would actually worsen those schools designated as needing improvement. Often racially and ethnically diverse schools are sanctioned the hardest. Using a single mean proficiency level does not adequately measure school effectiveness and does not isolate the contribution of schools to school learning and growth separate from mean test scores (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Fullan and Miles (1992) stated that "educational reform is as much a political as an educational process, and it has both negative and positive aspects" (p. 746).

Hallmarks of the NCLB legislation are the threats and sanctions that are given to schools that do not perform adequately. NCLB calls for stringent measures such as restructuring, availability of free tutoring for students in schools who fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), or encouragement to switch public schools.

Replacement of staff members or management authority is also a possibility after a 4-year failure to meet AYP. Unique to the NCLB Act is the graduated proficiency requirement for students with disabilities and those learning English (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001; Olson, 2006). Educational reform is hampered by loose coupling (Halverson, 2006). The traditional practice of loose coupling was designed to protect the autonomy of teachers to improve their own practice and adapt to changes in students and community without disturbing practice (Weick, 1976). It relied on teacher initiative and volunteerism for change. It is this practice that is responsible for the prevention of direct inspection and improvement of instructional practices and educational reform (Halverson, 2006). Loose coupling is also connected to teacher isolation. It is this isolation that impedes teachers' ability to develop professional standards of practice through consensus (Lieberman, 1990). Owens (2001) described the autonomy and latitude that teachers possess. Schools and school systems are characterized by structural looseness. "[T]eachers in their classrooms are under only very general control and direction of the principal" (p. 115). Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) described optimal organizational learning, that which promotes critical reflection about their own learning, as occurring best under conditions of collaborative and harmonious cultures. Cultures that allowed decision making by teachers and staff consensus were found to enhance professional learning and convey high performance expectations by teachers (Leithwood et al., 1998).

Bolman and Deal (2003) state:

A professional bureaucracy responds slowly to external change. Waves of reform typically produce little impact because professionals often view any change in their surroundings as an annoying distraction from their chosen work. The result is

a paradox: individual professionals may be at the forefront of their specialty, while the institution as a whole changes at a glacial pace. (p. 77)

Fessler and Burke (1983a), in their article “Interaction: An Essential in Developing Professional Growth Programs,” developed a model of supervision designed to promote professional growth. This model is designed as a theoretical framework for personalized supervisory attention to promote teacher growth. They espouse a definition of supervision as “a systematization of the interaction between and among people who are responsible for an activity” (p. 44). It accounts for differing needs of teachers at differing times. Fessler and Burke (1983b), in the article “The Regions and Zones of Teacher Behavior,” personalize the differences in teachers’ development stages and needs and adapt supervision to address these needs.

Teacher commitment toward school reform has been studied both internationally and nationally by Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, and Jantzi (2003). Teachers who are involved in reform efforts are “being asked to exert extra effort at both individual classroom and whole school levels aiming to improve education” (p. 250). When governments create policies that reduce educators’ discretion and sense of control over their work, it is imperative that authentic educational solutions to increased mandates are created (Leithwood et al., 2002). It is essential to understand how teachers respond to and experience change if the efforts toward reform are to become successful and are sustained (Hargreaves, 2005). Teachers frequently create their own modifications of external change (Leander & Osborne, 2008). These shifts of the structures of reform reveal the dichotomy of reform efforts. If teachers modify change designs, has change actually occurred, or, as Cuban (1993) questioned, whose perspective on change counts more—

the researcher as policymaker or the teacher's view? Leander and Osborne (2008) suggested that teachers' voices must be recognized as hybrids of various positions of identity and authority that teachers must navigate. They are enmeshed in a socio-political culture of school that limits their ability to change within broad institutional forces (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Change for teachers requires the interplay of personal, social, and institutional forces. Often teachers resist change initiatives because of a fear that certain students would be disadvantaged (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006). "But educators are a diverse group and are likely to respond in diverse ways to the same accountability initiative, depending on the sense they make of it" (Leithwood et al., 2002, p. 95). Leithwood et al. (2002) did an extensive study on teacher responses to reform initiatives. The majority of teachers did not believe that the accountability initiatives of the government were based on educational concerns, but on political reasons. Reform initiatives also had the negative effect of eroding teachers' confidence and sense of self-efficacy, and their ability to respond productively to the reform initiatives. There was a strong fear of the misuse of the data by media. Teachers felt that the crisis of accountability was created by the government. The government initiatives eroded teachers' sense of self-efficacy and confidence. Mistrust of the reasons for reform initiatives, as well as fear of the use of data, produced anxiety and negative feelings, which is consistent with studies done by Leithwood et al. (2002) that found the need for participation in decision making, and receiving the resources necessary for implementation. Teachers' perceived sense of control changes their emotional state and willingness to comply with policy changes. When curriculum-related policy changes were created with the sole purpose of improving teaching and learning, teachers were

positively motivated to implement these changes (Leithwood et al., 2002). Spillane and Zeuli (1999) recommended that focusing on the core intent of reforms is necessary to create changes in classroom instruction that are meaningful to assist teachers in revising their practice and changing their instruction.

### **Teacher Leaders**

Another concept important to the framework of graduate cohort learning is that of teacher leaders. Teacher leaders are included in this literature review because of the necessity to understand exactly what the term implies as well as the impact that they have on the success of educational reform. Creation of new leaders must come from the pool of teachers who lead and bring about educational change.

### **Definition of Teacher Leaders**

The term *teacher leadership* permeates the literature on education reform. The definition of teacher leadership has transformed throughout the last two decades since the Carnegie Task Force (1986) report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. The report called for more professional responsibilities for teachers that included lead teacher positions, and greater opportunities for teachers to participate in decision making within their schools. Little (cited in Carnegie Task Force, 1986) defined a teacher leader as an individual who is more interested in professional opportunities to mentor, and more dedicated to the encouragement and improvement of the quality of teaching throughout the profession, than competition for promotion and career advancement. Little portrayed teacher leadership as a necessity to professionalize teaching and create a career ladder.

“Teachers who lead leave their mark on teaching. By their presence and their performance, they change how other teachers think about, plan for, and conduct their work with students” (Little, 1988, p. 84). Sykes and Wilson (1988) echoed Little’s call for professional-level responsibility for teachers. Professionalizing of teachers creates an environment of greater accountability. Whitaker (1997) stated that teacher leaders should be cultivated to enhance the professional status of teachers. They would be grade-level team leaders, mentor teachers, and staff development specialists.

Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) described three recent waves of teacher leadership. During the first wave, teachers had formal titles such as department head, head teacher, master teacher, or union representative. The second wave of teacher leadership focused on the expertise of teachers by appointing them to roles such as curriculum leaders and teacher mentors. The third wave is the current one in which emphasis is placed on improving instruction through teacher learning, collaboration, and reculturing of schools—a more informal and less precise definition.

The definition of *teacher leadership* has both a formal and informal dimension. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) included both formal and informal dimensions in their definition and encompass most of these transformations when they state, “Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 5). Crowther et al. (2002) also integrated both formal and informal roles in his definition: “Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term enhancement of

community life” (p. 10). Many authors describe various forms of teacher leadership, but are ambiguous in their definition. Wasley (1991) defined teacher leadership as “the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader” (p. 170). Lambert (2003) offered an idealistic definition of teacher leaders as “those whose dreams of making a difference have been kept alive or have been reawakened by engaging with colleagues and working within a professional culture” (p. 33). Smylie et al. (1999), along with Shapiro (2002), defined teacher leaders as agents of change: student change, social change, and change in school improvement.

Fullan (1993) described how teacher leaders extend the capacity of schools beyond the immediate administrators, as change agents who exemplify a learning profession through searching for their own sense of purpose, inquiry, building competence, and collaboration.

Pankake and Moller (2007) described teacher leaders as coaches who focus on instructional leadership. Ackerman and Mackenzie (2006) characterized teacher leaders as caretakers of the conscience of a school. Their definition of a teacher leader is less formal. They feel that teacher leaders are those who challenge the status quo and voice concerns for attaining the ideal. Silva et al. (2000) echoed the same definition and described teacher leaders who challenge the status quo as “raising children’s voices” (p. 799). Patterson and Patterson (2004) and Phelps (2008) discussed ways that teacher leaders create resilient school cultures. These are cultures that respond to change by collaborative efforts characterized by high levels of efficacy. The role of teacher leader as advocate of educational practices that achieve student success is espoused by Barth (2001), Lieberman and Miller (1999), Phelps (2008), and Ackerman and Mackenzie

(2006). These definitions are diverse and contradictory. The metamorphosis of definitions continues, and places teachers at the forefront of school reform.

### **Roles, Actions and Emerging Forms of Teacher Leadership**

The Carnegie Task Force report (1986) was written in response to *A Nation at Risk*. “A policy stance that enables rather than prescribes practice resonates with the central message of the Carnegie report” (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). The Carnegie report called for the reinvigoration of the teaching profession, asking for teachers to become leaders in curriculum, instruction, professional development, and school redesign. This was the beginning of an onslaught of discussion about what are the roles of teachers as leaders. This report asked that professional autonomy be allotted to teachers and they should be participants in the goal setting for their school, standards of performance, and be accountable to these standards. Lead Teachers should be designated to foster collegial decision making. New certification standards must be developed for Lead Teachers who would hold advanced certification. There are provisions in this report to provide support staff for teachers to increase their effectiveness and productivity. Schools would be mandated to provide a variety of approaches to school leadership. The Carnegie report also called for teacher participation in goal setting for schools. As teachers set goals, they are given more accountability for achieving higher standards of performance. The Carnegie report stated that decision making should be done collegially with the central role of leadership held by Lead Teachers who have advanced teacher’s certificates from a national board of teaching standards. The publication of this report opened the doors for new interest and studies in teacher leadership.

The concept of teacher leadership was relatively new when Wasley's (1991) landmark book *Teachers Who Lead: The Rhetoric of Reform and the Realities of Practice* was published. She stated that teacher leadership had the potential to strengthen the educational system for students and teachers. It is also necessary for teacher leaders to recruit other teachers to experiment with instructional practices and then examine these practices for greater student engagement. As a result of her case study with teacher leaders, she concluded that empowering responsibilities must accompany decisions made by teacher leaders. They must also have the autonomy to decide which strategies work, the freedom to experiment with those techniques on students and with other teachers, and the necessity to be involved in learning about the foundations of the methods they recommend to their colleagues.

Phillip Schlechty (1990) also advocated more autonomy for teachers. He suggested that principals relinquish some aspects of decision making to teachers. Schools must grow their own leaders from within and nurture participatory leadership. "Leaders of the schools for the twenty-first century must learn to teach others to make decisions rather than reserving the decisions to themselves" (p. 152). Those who are affected by educational decisions should be involved in shared decision making. Current leaders must develop teachers who make decisions rather than reserving decisions for themselves. This will release the creative capabilities of teachers to be educational leaders.

Echoing the ideas emerging in the early 1990s, Roland Barth (1990) stated that all teachers can lead. They harbor extraordinary leadership capability and teacher leadership is a major untapped resource for improving schools. His discussion from the vantage point of a school principal identifies improvements in school function, culture, and

ultimately test scores as a result of teacher leadership. Barth's idea for teacher leadership is not just sharing and delegating jobs, but nurturing and encouraging leadership. He wanted schools to become places where everyone's vision has an opportunity to come to life through leadership that results in becoming a community of leaders. This is like Wasley's (1991) teacher leader who does not prescribe to others but creates a climate that supports understanding of the complications and difficulties of teaching. Like Barth, Wasley recommended that the teaching practice be examined against hopes for student success. It will result in a development of additional instructional repertoires that address student success. Crowther et al. (2002) has created a framework for teacher leadership. He would like teachers to have more responsibility and authority. The framework described a specific matrix of actions to be taken by teacher leaders that would improve student outcomes, elevate the quality of school life and community, and create new meaning for people within the school community.

Feiler et al. (2000) described a study conducted at the laboratory school of UCLA, Seeds University Elementary School. These researchers experimented with the role of teacher leaders in an effort to define the role and discovered that teacher leadership roles do not have to become institutionalized. Roles can be created to meet specific needs and then become diminished or terminated. Potential teacher leaders are identified and nurtured to attain a wide repertoire of leadership skills as well as expertise in content areas. Continual professional growth is a requisite for all teacher leaders, as is the need to encourage colleagues to grow, change, and acquire new skills. Teacher leader development is the first step in improving school capacity for student learning. Whitaker (1997) discussed the far-reaching ramifications of expanded teacher leadership roles. The

new roles of teacher leadership disperse leadership responsibility to many individuals rather than a single person at the top. Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (2000) elaborated on the ramifications of these new roles when they stated, “Part of the ideology developed in these new roles is the belief that there are different ways to structure schools and different means to work with teachers and other members of the school community” (p. 364).

There is an immense range of roles for teacher leadership (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Silva et al., 2000; Smylie et al., 1999). Patterson and Patterson (2004) defined a teacher leader as someone who formally or informally works with colleagues so that improvements can be made in teaching and learning. Smylie (1995) contended that teacher leadership “is influenced by, and exerts influence on the structural, social, political, and cultural dimensions of school organizations. It is very difficult to understand teacher leadership without also understanding the contexts in which it functions” (p .6). His many theoretical, qualitative, and quantitative studies of teacher leadership define roles of teacher leaders as lead teachers who collaborate with peers as well as work individually with them. They also contribute to leadership at the building and district level. The lead teacher is involved in organizational, administrative, and instructional decisions.

Silva et al. (2000) described ways teacher leaders “reculture” schools. The closed doors would be opened for teacher collaboration, discussion of common problems, and development of strategies to improve both pedagogy and deeper student engagement with learning. They question the status quo and challenge typical hierarchical structures of school. Their voices are necessary to educational reform efforts (Fullan, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992). Silva et al. and Leander and Osborne (2008) stressed the need for

collegial collaboration. They suggested that teacher leaders position themselves to address both the political and social settings that are part of the school culture. Teachers were described as agents of curricular and pedagogical reform.

Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) studied how teachers in an urban district gained legitimacy as leaders. They discovered that teachers were deemed leaders by their subject matter expertise. Individual teachers were admired by their techniques in different areas like math manipulatives or different strategies used for language arts. They developed the cultural, social, and human capital to lead within their schools. Teachers with these qualities were more likely to be perceived as leaders than administrators. Teacher leaders are the agents of change who would transform schools into learning institutions that focus on professional community, place learning at the center, and emphasize inquiry and leadership (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Because teachers possess the knowledge and conditions to control learning, they are the necessary agents to change schools. Bowman (2004) agreed with the concept of changing education through teacher leadership. The influences teacher leaders wield over their constituencies are powerful. While Lambert (2003) stated that authority should be widely distributed among the participants of a learning organization, she envisioned teacher leadership as both an action and a role. Within positions such as team leader, department chair, or literacy coach, teachers must redefine their roles as they adopt new responsibilities and tap inner resources. Actions of teacher leaders encompass sharing ideas and practices with others, as well as asking thoughtful questions that may precede new roles. Distributed teacher leadership is strongly advocated by many theorists. Spillane et al. (2004) claimed the practice of leadership is stretched between leaders and followers and changing according

to the situation. Gronn (2000) discounted the omniscience of the leader in favor of the connectedness of the leader and task performance. He stated that tasks, which are relatively undifferentiated, can be accomplished with a collaborative approach. Gibb (1999) discussed fluidity of circumstances in which leadership can pass from one individual to another as situations change. Elmore (2003) observed the distribution of expertise along with pedagogical knowledge. The cry for distributed teacher leadership was echoed by Mayrowetz and Smylie (2004) in the new paradigm they call work redesign. Gronn framed distributed leadership as a new form of the division of labor and a change in current organizational leadership practices.

Initiating dialogues about data, and partnering with other teachers and the community are other examples of teacher leadership action. Murphy (2005) proposed unique teacher leadership roles constructed beyond informal and administratively determined hierarchical roles. Roles that underscore the educational dimension of leadership rather than the managerial aspects, and enhancing the importance of teachers' work were included in his new definition.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) discussed lead teachers in her book *The Right to Learn*. She discussed the redesign of teaching careers. Efforts to establish an accreditation program for lead teachers through a national board are cited. It is these lead teachers who "serve as consulting teachers for beginners and for veteran teachers who are experiencing difficulty, curriculum developers, clinical faculty in district's teacher education partnerships, and leaders for school-based teams and departments while they continue their own teaching" (p. 329).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) indicated that leadership roles were separated into three functions. A teacher leader offers leadership to a student or colleague as they carry out their responsibilities. A teacher leader may contribute to operational tasks within or outside the school. Thirdly, teacher leaders may participate in school governance or decision-making capacities within or outside of the schools. Through the informal form of teacher leadership, they proposed that teacher leaders offer leadership to students or colleagues as they carry out their teaching role. It is critical that teachers offer support to new teachers and others new to the subject area or setting. Observing and coaching others' practice is another form of teacher leadership. New and innovative approaches within the school or exchanging materials with colleagues or finding unique ways to organize the educational setting are all part of Katzenmeyer and Moller's first form of leadership: leadership of students or other teachers. The second form is leadership of operational tasks. These more formal roles of teacher leadership have been present for many years. Leadership of operational tasks involved serving as team leader or department chairperson or might involve action research in collaboration with a local university. The third form of a teacher leadership role is through decision making or partnerships. School improvement teams and advisory councils, and partnerships with parents, businesses, and community members are representative of partnership leadership.

Smylie, Conley, and Marks (2002) discussed unique and new approaches to teacher leadership. The first is teacher research as a form of teacher leadership. Although they do not use the term *action research*, they described teacher research as learning by doing and changing classroom practices as a result. School-wide research teams might also be used as change agents to promote a more collaborative, reflective climate. The

second approach to teacher leadership is distributive leadership. A shift away from role-based and individual concepts of leadership is suggested in favor of organizational and task-oriented conceptions of leadership. In this concept, leadership is defined as certain kinds of work. Mayrowetz and Smylie (2004) used the term *work redesign* as a shift in teacher leadership roles. They also called for participation in teacher research.

Participation as researcher might be a cause of increased retention rate of teachers.

Embedded in work redesign is the necessity to overcome the organizational hierarchy that separates middle line administrators from the core of teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) discussed teacher research as action research. Dialogue with other teachers generates theories that are grounded in practice. Action research by teacher researchers might be more sensitive to issues of race, gender, or socioeconomic class. The conclusion of Smylie et al. is that “these new approaches to teacher leadership appear to be more effective than formal leadership roles for individual teachers in promoting school improvement” (p. 181).

### **Adult Learning**

Reviewing the literature on adult learning is important because the theory of adult learning and adult development is the underlying element of learning communities. The final structural element in learning communities and cohort learning is adult learning theory.

Mezirow (1996) characterized transformative learning as a model for adult learning. Transformative learning is learning that shifts assumptions and subsequently changes behaviors. Mezirow described learning as situated and social, with schemata

constantly changed, and meanings constantly transformed. Mezirow, Senge (1990), and Baumgartner (2001) discussed learning as meaning-making processes. Both Mezirow and Senge insisted that learning is accompanied by a change in worldview. The theory of transformative learning places great emphasis on the social dimension of learning, but also the historical and cultural dimensions. “Together they provide us with both our meaning perspectives and meaning schemes; and society determines whose privileged voices may participate fully and freely in discourse and what the limits are of critical reflection” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 165). Baumgartner (2001) called this transformational learning. She described both action learning—groups of people who solve a problem or issue through reflection and dialogue, and collaborative inquiry—where the group frames the question of interest, as examples of transformative learning. Senge (1990) characterized transformative learning as resulting in “metanoia” or a fundamental shift in one’s mind as the deeper meaning of learning is grasped. This is the heart of a learning organization.

Fosnot (1993) in Sullivan and Glanz (2000) stated, “Learning is a self-regulated process of resolving inner cognitive conflicts that often become apparent through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection” (p. 52). Dewey (1986) advocated the experiential philosophy of learning. The principles of experiential learning allow for the development of infinite educational possibilities from ordinary experiences. These experiences accompanied by the experimental method are the means and goals of education. Both Dewey and Vygotsky (1978) concurred that learning is mediated by shared social experiences.

An adult's response to educational change varied according to age and stage of their career in a study that was conducted by Hargreaves (2005). Reform efforts must be adapted to the stages of career development of the teachers and sensitive to the concerns that are found at each stage. Similar sentiments were given by Bennis and Thomas (2002) in their book *Geeks and Geezers*. During the course of a career, employees experienced different developmental cycles. Organizations must learn to accommodate these differing needs. Clemson-Ingram and Fessler (1997) postulated staff development models that use personalized approaches that address the various career stages of teachers. Supports that are sensitive to the characteristics of various career stages can initiate leadership in a variety of ways throughout a teacher's career. Smylie et al. (2002) defined adult learning as social. The implications for teacher education are quite revolutionary. Social learning was less likely to occur in formal, bureaucratic contexts. Innovative thinking and conceptual learning and change would best be accomplished through an egalitarian setting. Cohorts supported this type of learning.

Knowles (1968) suggested that adults learn differently than pre-adults. The concept of andragogy directly addressed the concept of independent self-directed learners. Adult's reservoir of experience is a rich source for learning. That learning climate should foster respect and support as well as equality between student and teacher. Learning should be scaffolded from teacher-directed to learner-directed. Adult educators must accept the connections between experiences and learning (Merriam et al., 2007).

### **Constructivism and Adult Learning**

These theories of adult learning are constructivist in nature. Sullivan and Glanz (2000) stated that constructivist learning is a theory about knowledge and learning. Meaningful knowledge and learning is constructed through collaboration and reflection around a social experience. Gabelnick (1997) concluded that collaborative learning communities result in models of constructivism that are inherently democratic. The center of authority is shifted from the teacher to the interactions between student and teacher. This imbeds social justice, community responsibility, and respect for differences into the program. Collaborative learning is constructivist in nature. Fosnot (1993) recommended that all teacher education programs be constructivist. She suggested that constructivist education inherently creates learning communities where the teacher becomes the facilitator as learners take ownership of their knowledge.

The goal of constructivist theory is the autonomy and empowerment of learners. Block (1993) was adamant about giving people choice in their own learning. Block's description of failed professional development attempts stressed the importance of common goal setting. Even across-the-board learning experiences, those where the entire staff is present, are short-lived when learners have no voice or ownership in the outcome. Block characterized some types of professional development as "institutionalized caretaking" (p. x). These are the antithesis of constructivist learning experiences as shown by Sullivan and Glanz (2000), Gabelnick (1997), and Fosnot (1993). Wisnewski (2003) described a constructivist model of a leadership education program that "seeks to explore and describe the interactive processes occurring between learners and their environments

and the ways in which this interaction defines meanings” (p. 34). Wisniewski would agree with the concepts set forth by Senge (1990) that embrace mental models, team learning building a shared vision, and systems thinking. Achilles (1994) suggested that educational administration programs should embrace a constructivist paradigm, which would require preparation programs to address changing technologies, instructional methodologies, change, ambiguity, and diversity. Merriam et al. (2007) discussed constructivism as active, not passive learning. It “occurs through dialogue, collaborative learning, and cooperative learning” (p. 292).

### **Personal and Psychological Growth**

Maslow (1954) stated the motivation to learn is inherent in human existence. Basically people are good and desire to become physically, psychologically, and spiritually healthy and that learning focuses on the individual and self-development. This is compatible with the democratic emphasis on education espoused by Dewey (1986). Frederick Herzberg (1966) discussed psychological growth as “knowing more, seeing more relationships in what we know, being creative, being effective in ambiguous situations, maintaining individuality in the face of the pressures of the group and attaining real psychological growth” (p. 70). Maslow’s (1970) study of the motivation to work and job satisfaction found five factors that motivated learners: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement. The last three are of greater importance for lasting change of attitude. Argyris (1976) identified steps in which organizations learn and the characteristics of organization members as they encounter organizational change. True learning that is not a result of coercion occurred when the situation offers valid

information, free and informed choice, as well as internal commitment. Clark and Meloy (1990) described a continuum of adult development processes that strives toward self-actualization. Deterrents to participation in adult learning are not singular but the result of the synergism between one or more causes (Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990). Simple delineation of the causes of non-participation in adult learning is not constructive in creating adult education programs that address the complexity of the non-participation. Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) conducted a study that created a typology of different subgroups by gender, education, employment, and income. The study categorized five subgroups that were deterred by personal problems, deterred by lack of confidence, educational costs, not interested in organized education, and not interested in available courses. Merriam et al. (2007) discussed a combination of psychological and social factors as deterrents to participation. In localities where there was great availability of undergraduate programs and available seats along with higher educational levels of the state's adult population, there was greater participation in adult higher education (Jung & Cervero, 2002).

### **Diversity: Issues of Race, Class, and Gender**

Delpit (1995) stated:

There can be no doubt that issues of diversity form the crux of what may be one of the biggest challenges yet to face those of us whose business it is to educate teachers. In the wake of reports proposing the complete reformation of teacher education has come a groundswell of concern about the effects of reform-related activities on the participation of ethnically and culturally diverse teachers in the workforce. (p. 105)

Merriam et al. (2007) discussed the perspectives that feminist theory, Marxism, critical race theory, multiculturalism and critical theory place on adult education. Merriam et al. espoused the necessity for a just society where power is not the main determinant of knowledge, and education creates emancipatory knowledge free of oppression. Freire (Freire & Macedo, 2000), a strong proponent of radical social transformation, recommended liberation to be the ultimate goal of education. Teitel (1997), involved in cohort learning in an urban setting, discovered that an unanticipated result of cohort design was the change in the depth of discussion, especially about sensitive issues like race. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) were vehement in their call to educate school leaders as both models and proponents of social justice issues. Ross-Gordon (2003) stressed the importance of curriculum in adult courses that is relevant to their cultural background and provided several recommendations for classroom practice with adult learners, including recognition of personal goal-setting, connection with the larger world, and acknowledging life-changing experiences of the students. Designing a curriculum that is inclusive with regards to the cultural background of students and is a mix of learner-centered and teacher-centered is a necessity. Courses must be adapted to account for differing learning styles as well as gender, cultural, and racial differences.

Barnett and Caffarella (1992) purposefully included diversity issues within the curriculum of cohort experiences. They divided these issues into gender, ethnicity, and social class. Issues of diversity are addressed within each instructional component of the cohort group. They asserted that because of the length of time that cohorts spend together, and their interactions, it is an ideal setting for addressing issues of diversity. Mezirow

(1996) noted that educators have the obligation to be cognizant of the inequities of race, gender, and class. Larson and Ovando (2001) stated that discrimination persists in the United States. They suggested that educational institutions must work to level the playing field. Slavin and Madden (2001), strong proponents of educational models for high-poverty settings, emphasized that urban, high-poverty schools have the greatest “distance to travel to ensure that every child receives the best of instruction every day” (p. 33). Leadership programs designed by Barnett and Caffarella (1992) addressed issues of diversity through the use of materials on multiculturalism, racism, and equity. Summers, Beretvas, Svinicki, and Gorin (2005) found strong gender differences in assessing the effects of collaborative learning in community. Women were more likely to feel more connected in collaborative learning settings regardless of class size. The design of the study was to affect students’ openness to diversity within the classroom through the use of cooperative instructional methods. Teitel (1997) stated that cohort models contribute to a deeper trust among members. This trust provided opportunities to discuss powerful issues about race and culture among cohort members.

### **School–University Partnerships and Cohort Learning**

The previous sections have built the foundation for understanding the reasons to incorporate cohort learning at the graduate level. Educational leadership programs are designed to create leaders who decide what directions educational institutions are headed. Developing professional learning communities is a unique approach to address the delivery of educational leadership programs. Communal learning has many advantages in changing the perceptions of teachers.

### **Definition of Cohort and Educational Partnerships**

Cohort educational leadership programs have a history dating back to the 1950s. Achilles (1994) discussed various educational leadership cohort programs that were sponsored by foundations and reform initiatives, namely the Kellogg Foundation, the Cooperative Program in Educational Administration, and the Leadership in Education in Appalachian Project. Barnett et al. (2000) described cohorts of educational leadership as an innovation that is increasing in popularity. The typical cohort program was one in which intact groups of students take all of their coursework together at the same pace.

Bentley et al. (2004) characterized a doctoral cohort program in educational leadership in which the students enrolled in a program that consisted of a series of seminars that continued through the completion of the program. The membership remained the same and the journey toward the end of the program is traveled together. Cohort members transformed from a group to a team with “strong sense of common identification, a strong sense of common goals, and begin to envision personal growth as best achieved through high task interdependence . . . in short, they solidify into an interdependent team of mutually supporting friends and colleagues” (p. 40). Barnett et al. (2000) described multiple cohort doctoral educational leadership programs. The strength of these programs was the building of leadership skills through exhibiting and modeling the elements of leadership through real world experiences. Bentley et al. stated that participation in a cohort was personally and professionally life-changing.

Saltiel and Reynolds (2001) defined *cohorts* as part of an umbrella term that includes learning communities, collaborative partnerships, and other formal and informal

ways that connect learners outside of the classroom. While cohort groups are variable in their composition and experience, individual experiences and outcomes vary. Their study of cohorts includes a sequence of courses with groups of students that stay intact and create connections that not only enhance learning, but also retention. Norris et al. (2002) used the term *learning community* as they describe four doctoral cohort programs. They developed a learning community model that synthesizes individual and group development as a result of cohort learning.

Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, and Elmore (2006) advocated that learning communities accept collective responsibility for how the community should engage in its work. Lambert et al. (2002) called for school university partnerships that will blend theory and practice and provide leadership opportunities for the leadership candidates. Kopy (2005) described educational partnerships as relationships between universities and schools that have shared planning, implementation, and evaluation. She enumerates schools that have formal partnership agreements. Lambert (2005) discussed an educational leadership program developed to improve leadership between administrators and teachers that would reform schools. The program consisted of a 2-year program of cohort experiences. This program was co-designed by university faculty as well as the superintendents of local communities. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) advocated partnerships, particularly between urban districts and universities that meet their own specific needs. They concluded that this type of collaboration can redefine leadership roles, particularly if it is based on social justice within the school district's own context.

### **Philosophy of Cohort Learning or Educational Partnerships**

Muchmore et al. (2004) described a unique school–university partnership in which they were involved that investigated teachers within a single school district in collaboration with a Midwestern university. The doctoral cohort that developed between the university and the school system was based on the ability to effect change through effective leadership practices. This program was based on shared vision, goal setting, and communication among the cohort members. The school district’s superintendent sought to increase teacher leadership capacity in the school district. The superintendent noted investing in teachers was critical to developing a successful urban district. Teachers must become problem solvers instead of isolated dispensers of information. The emphasis in the district was on empowering the educators involved in the cohort to act as leaders. Program developers felt that transforming the hierarchical roles of teachers and administrators into a collaborative relationship would result in sustainable change throughout the district. The cohort would be a model of collaborative efforts at school reform. Kopy (2005) stated, “The [school district] cohort participants discussed the knowledge gained in the university classes and then applied them in the schools and classrooms throughout the district” (p. 6). The school district–university initiative was similar to the Leadership Training Module program described by Lambert (2005).

Barnett and Muse (1993), in their study of learning cohorts, discussed the conceptual principles of adult learning through the development of affiliation, where adults engage in meaningful personal and professional relationships. Mutual learning, another principle, creates feelings of affiliation and eliminates isolation. Decision

making, the second principle, provides students some control over the learning content.

The last principle in the structures inherent in cohort learning for adults is that the instructor is the facilitator instead of the purveyor of all knowledge. Cohort learners change the relationship between members and professors. Bentley et al. (2004) described cohort learning with a metaphor. The professor is a tour guide; each student has an idea of their destination but enlists the help of the tour guide for tips about the terrain, landmarks, directions, and alternative paths.

Cooperative learning results in improvement in school development (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Learning cohorts provide educational leadership development that creates a reciprocal process that blends theory with practice (Lambert et al., 2002). Lieberman and Miller (1999) suggested strongly that cohort learning links research to practice. Collaborative learning is a form of professional development where “teachers have the opportunity to learn from theory and practice as part of their job” (p. 60). Rallis et al. noted that cohorts must work to improve practice and develop a community of practice and that professional adults learn best in a setting with peers who share real problems. Saltiel and Reynolds (2001) emphasized that when learners are connected to one another, both their learning and retention are enhanced. Stefl-Mabry, Goodall-Powers, and Doll (2006) stressed cooperative learning partnerships. They provided opportunities not only to explore theory but also to integrate theory into pedagogical practices. When teachers work together collaboratively toward a common vision, they will change their instructional practices. Brownell et al. (2006) indicated that “the act of planning and working together, by itself, is a powerful professional development tool” (p. 1). Barnett et al. (2000) discovered that

student's academic performance, as well as interpersonal relationships, is greatly influenced by participation in a cohort. Support and encouragement among members affected students as well as created a collective sense of accomplishment. Importantly, they also felt that participation in a cohort has great influence on the students' professional relationships and practices.

Teitel (1997) delineated five areas of impact found in cohort design, emphasizing changes in sensitivity about racial issues, changes in power relationships between students and faculty, as well as changes in program planning and decision-making dynamics. Brownell et al. (2006) characterized teacher learning as a central element to school reform. Schein (1992) discussed shared organizational culture created by group learning:

The process of culture formation is, in a sense, identical to the process of group formation in that the very essence of "groupness" or group identity, the shared patterns of thought, belief, feelings, and values that result from shared experience and common learning, results in the pattern of shared assumption that I am calling the culture of that group. (p. 52)

Barnett and Muse (1993) suggested that "[the] purpose of a cohort group is to create a supportive learning environment where trust, openness, and mutual respect are valued" (p. 403).

### **Drawbacks of Learning Cohorts**

Muchmore et al. (2004) stated that "Small rifts have at times risen between project participants and non-participants" (p. 243). Barnett et al. (2000) stated that cohort students demand more from faculty than students in traditional programs, and are likely to challenge conventional instructional approaches. Teitel (1997) found that some students

noted that they and their classmates were “boxed into” defined roles. Barnett and Muse (1993) indicated that cohort learners change the relationship between members and professors. This could be a drawback if professors are unprepared for these changes. Ross, Stafford, Church-Pupke, and Bondy (2006) described the development of cliques within a cohort based on family or social background.

Barnett and Muse (1993) found that cohort groups may be more vocal regarding the quality of teaching and the relevance of the courses and materials. Personal dilemmas may become more evident as faculty is required to address more personal problems than in a normal setting. Ross-Gordon (2003) indicated that adult female students have a strong concern with teacher-student interaction. Stefl-Mabry et al. (2006) discussed an assessment made by a cohort in which students had difficulty moving from the instructor as “sage on the stage” to a constructivist environment where explicit step-by-step instructions were lacking. Maher (2005) recounted a cohort assessment in which students felt that they became “boxed into” defined roles in the cohort. Price (2005) enumerated reasons that implementation of cohort communities is not commonplace. Costs for creating cohorts are often prohibitive when faculty members are required to team-teach. The advanced and intense planning for faculty collaboration required additional release time or additional pay and it is not well documented which aspects of learning communities are responsible for positive student outcomes. Barnett et al. (2000) noted that existing cohort research is in its infancy and relies on limited samples, descriptive accounts, and the perception of students and faculty. Barnett and Muse (1993) addressed the difficulties in grading students in a non-traditional setting. Traditional concepts of grading are often competitive, which is inconsistent with collaborative learning

communities. The research focuses on universities using cohorts and does not study universities that have rejected the cohort approach.

### **Summary**

The review of literature described the historic and evolving definition of teacher leaders. The emerging manifestations of teacher leadership were reviewed as well as their relationship to educational reform and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Elmore, 2003; Lieberman et al., 2000; Silva et al., 2000). Cohort learning and university partnerships are innovative approaches to the development of educational leaders as well as models of new paradigms for teaching and learning (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Gabelnick, 1990; Mountford, 2005; Norris et al., 2002; Price, 2005; Salteil & Reynolds, 2001; Teitel, 2000).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study assesses the perceptions and experiences of school district teachers of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of a doctoral educational leadership cohort by using qualitative methods with a phenomenological design. It examines how the process of the doctoral learning cohort that existed between a Midwestern university and a small Midwestern urban school district worked from multiple perspectives. The purpose of the 5-year program was to strengthen leadership capacity within the school district and to increase student achievement for the 4,200 students who were in the district at that time. This study provides descriptions of the experience from the viewpoint of cohort members and their non-cohort colleagues. This study is designed to address the following five research questions.

1. How do the cohort members describe their shared experience?
2. How did participation in the cohort change the teachers' roles or participation in building and district decisions?
3. What was the reaction or perception of non-participants on the participation of teacher leaders in the program?
4. What changes short and long term (if any) occurred in the building and district at the conclusion of the teacher leadership cohort?

5. What were the drawbacks or negative aspects of participation in a learning cohort?

### **Background**

The school district in this study is a small urban school district in the Midwest. It is the only school district in the county that accepts schools-of-choice students across county lines. The district consists of seven schools. There is one high school, an academy housing eighth and ninth graders, a middle school with sixth and seventh graders, three kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools, and an early education program with preschool through second graders. The current district enrollment is 3,427 with 64.6% at-risk students. African Americans represent 92.4% of the student population. Asian students represent .9%, Hispanic students represent .4%, 2.7% of the students are Middle Eastern, 1.1% are multi-ethnic, .3% are Native Americans, and 2.2% are Caucasian. The enrollment in the school district has fallen by 773 students since the inception of the first collaborative partnership with the university. As enrollment drops, teachers are cut proportionate to the enrollment. These cuts are based on seniority, leaving a large percentage of seasoned teachers remaining in the district. Two schools will be closed at the conclusion of the school year 2009-2010 and 100 teachers have received layoff notices.

The impetus for the collaborative program came from discussions between the then-superintendent and assistant superintendent. Initiatives to improve student achievement metamorphosed into the school district–university collaborative. “For an increasing number of districts statewide, and most districts in urban areas, developing the

internal capacity to improve school performance and increase student achievement has become a matter of survival” (Marx, 2001, p. 4).

This educational partnership between the university and school district was created in 1999. This was a customized professional development program designed to promote teacher learning. The unique degree program was grounded on correlating the educational experiences of the degree program with the daily work of the teachers. The course content was created so that it was relevant to the cohort members themselves. It was a field-based degree program delivered to 32 employees of the district. The uniqueness of the school district cohort was that it was a part of the district-wide improvement plan, the instruction given through the cohort was job-embedded at the same time that it met the requirements of a master’s degree program, and the cohort members were from all of the four elementary schools with representatives of the administration. The district’s assistant superintendent was a co-director who aligned the instruction with the needs of the district, schools, and teachers (Marx, 2001).

A subsequent master’s and doctoral program was implemented as an additional collaborative between the university and the school district. Initially 32 teachers enrolled in the second master’s and 45 in the doctoral cohort. Some of the doctoral students were graduates of the first collaborative, while others were teachers who had previous master’s degrees. This second cohort included teachers from all grade levels throughout the district. The focus on the second cohort was on leadership. The doctoral program was aligned with the educational leadership doctorate offered by the university with the same rigor and legitimacy as that offered at the main campus (Muchmore et al., 2004). Coursework was modularized or extended across semesters. Student input was an

important aspect of the course design. Creating a sense of community was built into the design of the reading cohort and this concept continued throughout the doctorate. The purpose of the 5-year program was to strengthen leadership capacity within the school district and to increase student achievement for the district's students through the creation of leaders who had greater community influence and create a culture that shared responsibility for student achievement (Muchmore et al., 2004).

### **Sample Selection**

Phenomenological studies describe the meaning of the lived experiences of individuals through a long interview protocol. Traditionally a phenomenology studies multiple individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon through a long interview protocol (Patton, 2002). A purposeful sample (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) of 10 teachers participated in this study. This study examines people who have experienced the same phenomenon as suggested by Creswell (1998). The subjects of this phenomenological study included 5 teachers who participated in the doctoral cohort in educational leadership through the partnership between the school district and the university, and 5 teachers who were not participants, but were colleagues of the participants. The interview protocol suggests interviews with up to 10 people (Creswell, 1998). The purpose of the partnership was to deliver a doctoral program that was able to “empower teachers to act as leaders” (Muchmore et al., 2004, p. 242). Experiences of cohort members were explored through a qualitative phenomenological study.

## **Description of Subjects**

### **Cohort Members**

The doctoral students all differ in their years of experience. Some have over 30 years, and some have 10 years. Any cohort member was a potential subject. Those that I have selected have all worked in the same building with me at some time in their careers as well as been a fellow student in the doctoral partnership with the university. All cohort members taught at the elementary level during the doctoral cohort. Participants were a Title I teacher, a union representative, and 3 classroom teachers who were members of the doctoral cohort. Three are African American, and 2 are Caucasian. There are 2 men and 3 women. Three of the cohort members were also part of the first collaborative that resulted in a master's in reading. Two were new to the collaborative having received a master's degree prior to the first collaborative.

### **Non-Cohort Members**

The non-cohort members were 5 teachers in the district with 7 or more years of experience within the school district, but not members of the doctoral program or the previous educational partnership. They include 2 early education teachers, an art teacher, a special education teacher, and an upper elementary teacher. One of the teachers is African American, one is native to another country, and 3 are Caucasian. Two of these are men and 3 are women. The subjects are all colleagues of mine within the district. I have chosen the non-doctoral and non-cohort members from among teachers who have been colleagues, and with whom I have worked in the past or present. The district is very

small. I have worked at many buildings both at the elementary and secondary level over the past 20 years. During the partnership and the doctoral cohort there were six schools in the district. I have worked at four of those for at least 5 years each.

### **Procedure for Contacting Subjects**

Each participant was approached 2 weeks prior to the study. A letter was sent to each in the inner-school mail. The purpose of the study was explained. They were asked to participate in a study that reflected on their cohort experiences as well as on the changes that have occurred in the district as a result of these experiences. Non-cohort members were asked to reflect on the cohort of their peers. The introductory letter stated that there would be two interviews, 2 weeks apart, lasting 1 hour each. Each interview would be tape-recorded with their approval and last for 60 minutes. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience and availability of the participants. I contacted each participant personally within 1 week of the initial correspondence.

A risk of the study is the possibility of the participants being identified. Efforts have been made to protect their identity. When reporting data, respondents were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity.

### **Qualitative Phenomenology**

Qualitative research tells a story. It uses prose and literary techniques that describe and elicit images (Wilson, 1979). It is more concrete and sensory than abstract. A qualitative phenomenological study was used because of the richness of data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam 1998; Patton, 2002). A phenomenology was chosen to examine the cohort

experience and the meaning that it holds for those who experienced it together (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting “where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning for the participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (Creswell, 1998, p.14).

Qualitative studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system. This bounded system is defined by the parameters of the cohort within the school district. The insights gained from this study provide an understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved in the study (Merriam, 1998). It builds a complex, holistic picture showing the multiple dimensions of a problem (Creswell, 1998). This phenomenology recreates these experiences through multiple interviews and multiple analysis techniques (Berg, 2004). This study illuminates relationships among cohort members, between members and administrators, as well as members and their peers. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the inner changes that occurred within the members themselves, both cohort and non-cohort respondents. It also explores perceived changes in culture of the school and explores their views of differences that the program made on the leadership skills, not simply positions of leadership, of the cohort members. A phenomenology is designed to capture “how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p.104).

## **Interview Setting**

The setting was the natural setting of the teacher's choice. Data collection occurred in classrooms of the interviewees, outside of the building, in a coffee shop, in a restaurant, and in the classroom of the researcher.

The interview was semi-structured with questions that were open-ended, allowing for elaboration so that they can elucidate the data necessary to answer the research question (Maxwell, 1996). Background information about the participants was obtained; this included the length of time that they have taught, years in the same building, and past buildings. Some of them have taught different subjects throughout their careers and these experiences have been carefully described. Patton (2002) stated that the use of open-ended questions allows people to respond in their own words and minimizes predetermined responses. This study sought to discover what involvement in the school district's educational leadership cohort meant to the participants, and the emotions, motivations, and meanings they assigned to the experience.

## **Method of Questioning**

Two separate interviews took place with each of the participants. More than one interview occurred so that after reviewing the data the researcher had an opportunity to follow with probes or new questions or issues that emerged from the initial session (Merriam, 1998). These interviews happened over a 3-week period. Participants were assured of their confidentiality. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing some questions to be open-ended (Merriam, 1998). I responded to individual situations by

adjusting questions to assist in deeper understanding, establishing context, or further clarification of the responses. Probing questions were asked to clarify or expand on the meaning of the responses.

In qualitative research, researchers can address the emerging ideas and concepts of the respondents (Merriam, 1998). Care was taken so that responses that were unanticipated could emerge. Patton (2002) cautions that the aim of the inquiry is to avoid predetermined responses. This mindset enables the researcher to understand the points of view of others without predetermining those points through questions that are highly structured.

As Patton (2002) suggested, these questions were placed unobtrusively and strategically throughout the interview. “The interviewee needs to needs to become actively involved in providing descriptive information as soon as possible” (p. 352).

Interviews were the only method of information gathering from the subjects. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded. Interview questions were designed without any preconceived expectations of the response and are devoid of terminology that may bias the participant. Each section design of a qualitative study impacts the other. As the responses were sorted, any unexpected influences were researched, and, when necessary, further questions were created that address new concepts. Maxwell (1996) uses the term *interactive qualitative research*.

Questions were asked in a relative order, but allowances were made for the respondent to change the direction of the questioning or to elaborate at length. The interviews were relatively semi-structured. Sequencing of the questions was not rigid. A discussion of the purpose of the study began each interview. Questions about present

behavior and activities were asked, encouraging descriptive responses. True open-ended questions allow subjects to respond in their own words. It is important to remove any predetermined responses or implicit constraints on the respondent (Patton, 2002). Other questions might arise from the response given by the subject. Probes were used during the interview to glean insight into the ideas and concepts that were being discussed. Member checking was also used. The notes were given to the participants after they were transcribed and then checked for accuracy by the respondents. This prevented misinterpretation of the meaning of what the respondents said as well as clarified their perspective (Maxwell, 1996). This also ensures that the perspectives of the respondents were accurately recorded. Any corrections were made when necessary. I have taken every step to avoid bias, being aware that the presence of the researcher alone can produce “observer effects.” Maxwell (1996) discusses the researcher’s influence on the setting as reactivity. Controlling for the researcher is often difficult. What the respondent says is often a function of the researcher and the interview situation. Avoiding leading questions is one method for compensating for this effect.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection and data analysis is simultaneous in a qualitative study (Merriam, 1998). Collection and analysis began immediately with the first interview. Because qualitative studies are naturalistic inquiries, the emergent nature of the findings provides opportunities for immediate analysis for patterns and themes that are generated at the onset. Occasionally this altered the course of the questioning or the probes. Insights and hunches that unfolded led to the refinement and reformulation of the questions.

Interviews provide indirect information that was filtered through the views of the respondents (Creswell, 2003).

The following is a list of the predetermined questions. Questions for the cohort members are the same as the questions for the non-cohort members; however, the wording is occasionally different to reflect the differences in membership. The following questions will offer insight into the perspectives of the respondents.

## **Questions**

### **Cohort Member Questions**

1. Please share how long you have been in the district, at your school and your subject area.
2. What does the term *cohort* mean to you? How did the cohort members of the school district partnership reflect or impact your expectations of a cohort?
3. Describe the relationships among cohort members, as you perceive them.  
What impact did you feel that the cohort had on your interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort? How did the relationships evolve?
4. How has your teaching changed since your participation in the cohort? Explain.
5. Do you feel that you assumed roles of leadership as a result of the cohort?  
What are specific examples of teacher leadership that you can attribute to participation in the cohort?

6. Schein (1992) defines culture as “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12). Describe something that is different in the culture of your school as a result of the cohort.
7. What changes, both long term and short term, have occurred in the building as a result of the educational leadership cohort? Please provide examples.
8. Reflecting on your experience with the cohort, what advice would you give to anyone considering a similar program?

#### **Non-Cohort Member Questions**

1. Please share how long you have been in the district, at your school, and your subject area.
2. What does the term *cohort* mean to you? How did the cohort members’ discussion of the school district partnership reflect or impact your perceptions of the cohort? Based on your interactions with members of the cohort, what were your impressions of the cohort? In retrospect, do you wish you would have participated in the cohort?
3. Describe the relationships among cohort members as you perceived them. What impact did you feel that the cohort had on your interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort? How did the relationships evolve?

4. Have you seen a change in the teaching of the members of the cohort? Please provide a concrete example of an attitude change or a change in their teaching practices. Explain.
5. Would you describe any of the cohort members as leaders? If so, give examples of their leadership. Can you attribute this to participation in the cohort?
6. Schein (1992) defines culture as “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12). Describe something that is different in the culture of your school as a result of the cohort.
7. What changes, both long term and short term, have occurred in the building as a result of the educational leadership cohort? Please provide examples.
8. As an observer of the cohort members, what are your thoughts about learning through a cohort?

### **Data Analysis**

Rigor in a qualitative study is a result of the relationship between the researcher and the participants and the interpretation of their perceptions. This interactive process allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings. The result is rich, thick descriptions of the data (Merriam, 1998). The data were collected in oral form on a tape recording. These recordings were transcribed, edited, corrected, and made easily readable. Duplication of the data occurred continually, with external computer storage devices. Listening to the interview tapes as well as transcribing them was an initial

method of analysis (Maxwell, 1996). During this time, notes were kept on tentative ideas for themes or categorization.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that memos are a regular part of data analysis. These act as reflections and facilitate analytical thinking and insights. The data were collected and themes were identified during this coding process (Creswell, 2003). Maxwell (1996) also suggests sorting the data into broad themes or issues. The researcher looked for relationships that connect statements within a context that created a coherent whole. Creswell (2003) described data analysis as an ongoing process that requires continual reflection about the data and asking analytic questions as well as writing memos throughout the process.

Tally sheets of the themes were created as suggested by Berg (2004) and a matrix of the themes was created. These themes are separated by cohort and non-cohort membership (Table 1).

Tesch (1990, cited in Creswell, 2003) suggested assigning codes to the topics and entering the codes in the appropriate place within the text. The codes were alphabetized and analyzed for frequency of 65-70% and the coding was refined. Themes or categories were generated from these codes. This coding process helped generate a detailed rendering of the information as well as elucidate themes or categories (Creswell, 2003). Patterns and themes emerged and the coding helped to identify complex theme connections. Once the codes were analyzed for frequency, a criterion of 65-70% recurrence determined the themes.

Table 1

*Cohort and Non-Cohort Thematic Responses*

Cohort Thematic Responses					
Cohort Members	Mr. Sutton	Mrs. Clark	Mrs. Russell	Mr. McDaniel	Mrs. Oliverio
Teacher Leadership	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge	X	X	X	X	X
Collaborative	X	X	X	X	X
Collegiality	X	X	X	X	X
Confidence	X	X		X	X
Deterrents		X			X
Servant-leader			X	X	
Non-Cohort Thematic Responses					
Non-Cohort Members	Mrs. Rodgers	Mr. Paul	Mrs. Matthews	Mr. Van Horn	Mrs. Kuhn
Teacher Leadership	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge	X		X	X	X
Collaborative	X	X	X	X	X
Collegiality	X	X		X	X
Confidence	X	X	X	X	X
Deterrents					X
Servant-leader					

Qualitative research employs the term *hermeneutic circle* as a method of analysis.

This is a process in which the research analyzes the data in a circuitous fashion. The researcher must construct the meaning of the whole from the meaning of the parts. This is

analogous to grasping the meaning of a poem from the first few lines when it is necessary to understand the meaning of the poem first. It aids the researcher in maintaining an objectivity that will enhance the validity of the interpretation. Both transcripts and data have been continually re-analyzed and assessed for concepts that might not have been obvious at either the first or second analysis. An outline of the themes, patterns, and connections was created and then evaluated for coherence and authenticity among each concept. The transcripts of the interviews were provided to each respondent and checked for accuracy of fact and meaning.

Narrative passages have been used to convey the findings. Careful and thorough descriptions were made of the contexts and the participants (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Structural and textual descriptions were written to create a general description of the experience. Themes are shaped into a general description (Creswell, 2003). Thick rich descriptions provide detail, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships among people (Denzin, 1989). Quotations from participants have been interspersed with the researcher's interpretations. A balance between what Lofland (1971, cited in Maxwell, 1996) calls "descriptive excess" and reasonable conclusions was written.

Finally, an interpretation of the data follows. The data have been compared to theories and the general literature on cohort learning. Reasonable conclusions and generalizations have been reached that are based on the preponderance of the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In Chapter IV, results are presented under each of the five research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As a participant in this cohort, I bring personal experiences to this study. I am a participant-observer (McMillan, 2000; Patton, 2002), which means I am fortunate to be in the same role as those who are being studied (McMillan, 2000). My personal worldview or paradigm may contain assumptions that have gone unquestioned. Patton (2002) cautions against value-laden prejudices. As a participant in the cohort, I am not neutral. My history within the district as an elementary music teacher, middle school reading and social studies teacher, as well as a member of the doctoral cohort gives me a perspective that is unique. As a member of the cohort, I have had interactions or personal relationships with all of the other cohort participants. I am integrally involved in the culture of the district as well as the leadership cohort.

Locke et al. (2000) suggested that researchers highlight their perspective since they will be the primary research instruments. Qualitative research is interpretive research. The researcher has a sustained and intensive relationship with the participants that is unique and is further influenced by personal relationships as member of the group being studied (Creswell, 2003). Any qualitative study is written from the viewpoint of an observer who comes with individual perspectives.

I have sought alternate views that may expose any potential prejudices or biases. My position as participant-observer may have been an advantage in illuminating the reader's understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were transcribed and presented to respondents. Each read the transcripts and was able to verify the meaning and intent of the interview. Capturing and understanding the

participant's experiences was enhanced because of my participation as a member of the cohort (Locke et al., 2000).

### **Summary**

This chapter has detailed the design of the study of cohort members in a small urban school district in the Midwest. Qualitative researchers collect data that are open-ended and continually emerging, and use these data to develop themes (Creswell, 2003). This qualitative phenomenological study approach is appropriate to discover the perceptions, feelings, judgments, descriptions, and memories of the doctoral students from the school district and their colleagues. A qualitative study produces a “complex narrative that takes the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity” (Creswell, 1998, p.15). Developing individual descriptions of the cohort experiences can be done through a phenomenological qualitative study. The ability to capture patterns and nuances is a hallmark of the qualitative study (Berg, 2004). Because the researcher is also an observer-participant, biases may exist as the researcher reflected on the same experiences and may have a different view. Member checking of the data was crucial for an observer-participant. Care was taken when selecting the data to minimize any preexisting theory or preconceptions (Maxwell, 1996).

The resulting thick, rich descriptions explored students' experiences as they participated in a doctoral cohort. This phenomenological study has the ability to develop an overall description of the school district collaborative experience and will aid universities in planning future cohort learning programs.

The study examined changes that occurred to the individual respondents who were cohort members and colleagues of the cohort members. It also examined their perception of leadership contributions, their perceptions of the changes to the school, perceptions of change to the district culture, and changes in the relationships within their buildings and district as a result of the creation of the educational leadership cohort.

The results provide insight into the impact of educational leadership programs that are delivered through learning cohorts. The resulting narrative paints a portrait of cohort members and the complex relationships and multiple dimensions of cohort learning. The literature of postsecondary cohort learning will be enriched by this study. It will provide insights into an alternate method of program delivery that develops educational leaders.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of the study was to assess the perceptions and experiences of school district teachers of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of the doctoral cohort. The investigation examined how the doctoral cohort involving the university and the school district worked from multiple perspectives. This study provides descriptions of experience from the perspective of cohort members and their non-cohort colleagues. The doctoral leadership cohort focused on leadership and theories of leadership with the overarching goal, to increase student achievement in the school district. These theories maintained that the development of leaders helped to create change and transform the traditional roles of teachers and administrators into a collaborative relationship. District leaders surmised that in order for leaders to create change, the traditional roles of teachers and administrators had to be transformed to impact student learning. This involved shared leadership, and a sense of shared responsibility between teachers and administrators (Muchmore et al., 2004).

This study accessed the viewpoint of both cohort and non-cohort members within the same district. It also examined how the doctoral learning cohort functioned and whether the process improved or increased teacher leadership from the perspectives of cohort and non-cohort members. This study was based on the following research questions.

1. How do the cohort members describe their shared experience?
2. How did participation in the cohort change the teachers' roles or participation in building and district decisions?
3. What was the reaction or perception of non-participants on the participation of teacher leaders in the program?
4. What changes short and long term (if any) occurred in the building and district at the conclusion of the teacher leadership cohort?
5. What were the drawbacks or negative aspects of participation in a learning cohort?

Kopy (2005) studied the school district–university partnership, focusing on changes in the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of the members of both the master's and doctoral cohorts. This investigation builds upon the research of Kopy. The study examined the perspectives of doctoral cohort members and teachers who were not part of either the literacy or doctoral cohort. The focus was on changes that occurred in schools and the district as a result of participation in the cohort.

Prior to discussion of findings of this study, a brief history of the partnership between the university and the school district is presented. The findings derived from the data and a description of the participants will follow. An overview and brief discussion of the themes precede a narrative account of the interviews as they correlate to the themes. This chapter will conclude with a chapter summary.

### **The University and School District Partnership**

The school district cohort was designed to improve student performance through increasing the leadership capacity of teachers and administrators. The partnership was between the school district and the university's Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. 2002) provides punitive measures that threaten the survival of under-performing districts. Improving student achievement for urban districts is necessary for their survival. Providing professional development opportunities through a school-university degree program was an innovative solution for increasing teacher leadership skills to improve student performance through coursework that was relevant to their teaching. Combining a degree program with intensive professional development represented a creative way for teachers and administrators to increase their skills (Muchmore et al., 2004).

The leadership cohort was the second of two cohorts. The first school district–university cohort focused on literacy and culminated in a master's degree in reading. The rationale for the program was that a focus on balanced literacy would improve reading scores and increase student performance on the state proficiency exam (Kopy, 2005). Following completion of the first master's program, school district officials developed a second cohort with the university. This cohort focused on leadership and offered students three degree options that included a master's degree, specialist, and a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Program developers sought to create new opportunities for all teachers, instead of focusing on the elementary level, as was the case with the literacy cohort. The rationale for the change from pedagogy to educational leadership was to

include an effort to develop collaborative relationships between teachers and administrators, and to create leaders who could impact student learning. Like Maxwell (1996), the program's developers understood the concept of "leadership" as transcending formal titles or position; teachers with or without formal leadership positions can enjoy greater community influence than do their administrator counterparts (p. 242).

The specialist and doctoral cohort began in the fall of 2001 with 45 teachers from all grade levels and differing subject areas. Many specialist and doctoral candidates participated in the literacy cohort. "Approximately 30 teachers enrolled in the second master's cohort and 45 enrolled in the specialist and doctoral cohort" (Kopy, 2005, p. 73). Five students have completed their dissertations as of June 2009. Coursework of the doctoral leadership cohort contained the same rigor as the on-campus courses (Muchmore et al., 2004). Courses were tailored to the professional development needs of the school district cohort while concurrently meeting accreditation standards of other educational leadership courses. Several courses extended across multiple semesters and were woven into the content strands of other courses. Many courses were taken by both master's and doctoral students. However, some courses were optional for the doctoral students and required for the master's students. Doctoral students started and completed the classes as one group. Classes met after school and on Saturdays. The school district paid the student tuition for the coursework during the first 2 years and the students were liable for all costs thereafter.

## **Overview of Results**

Participants in this study included 5 elementary teachers who participated in the doctoral cohort, and 5 elementary teachers who were employed by the school district during the timeframe the cohort was held, but did not participate in the leadership cohort. Experiences of cohort members were explored through this qualitative phenomenology and also the perception of staff members who were non-participants.

The study examined relationships among cohort members, between cohort members and administrators and their peers. The investigation explored perceived changes in participant leadership practices as a result of their involvement in the cohort. This qualitative study also explored changes in cohort participants, the school culture, and the impact that the program had on the leadership skills. Results of the study are discussed in this section under each of the identified themes. All the subjects are anonymous and the participants have been given pseudonyms.

This chapter presents the analysis of the data derived from the study of doctoral cohort members and their non-cohort member colleagues. It is a narrative account of their experiences of change that occurred during and following the coursework of the doctoral cohort. Themes and categories have been identified after careful sorting, coding, and analyzing the transcripts of subject interviews. A matrix was designed that showed the interrelationships between categories mentioned by the respondents. Codes were assigned to the topics that were mentioned and analyzed for frequency. Themes or categories were generated from these codes. Codes were analyzed for frequency, and a criterion of 65-100% recurrence determined the themes. A brief discussion of each theme precedes the

narrative account of the data analysis as well as descriptions of the criteria for the subject's inclusion in the study. A matrix of the themes was created to help with data analysis. After coding of the topics, broad themes have emerged which are interconnected with the concept of leadership as it relates to change. A frequency chart has been created of each respondent's categories, in which 65-100% recurrence is used to determine the themes.

Careful data analysis resulted in three main themes that illuminate the attitudes and views of the respondents following the doctoral cohort. Below is a description of the themes mentioned by each respondent.

The first of the three main themes is collaboration. Every cohort member interviewed addressed the topic of collaboration. Three of the 5 non-cohort members also addressed the topic of collaboration. Each respondent discussed the exchanges between cohort members and between cohort members and their non-cohort colleagues. Cohort and non-cohort members were struck by the opportunities that cohort members took to share their knowledge with each other as well as their colleagues who were not members of the cohort. The purpose of the educational partnership between the university and the school district was to create sustainable change in the district that transformed the traditional hierarchical roles of teachers and administrators into a more collaborative relationship (Muchmore et al., 2004).

Every respondent addressed the concept of knowledge. Members of the cohort as well as non-members were struck by the opportunities that cohort members took to share their knowledge with each other as well as their colleagues who were not members of the cohort. The doctoral cohort curriculum encompassed 5 years of coursework that was

shared by every doctoral student. It was designed to be relevant to the teachers in the school district, and had the same rigor as the on-campus programs at the university.

Leadership emerged as the final theme. Every subject responded strongly regarding the evidences of leadership that they witnessed by members of the cohort. The term was consistently mentioned in interviews, and evidences of leadership examples were frequently given by both groups of participants (cohort members and non-cohort members). Cohort members referenced leadership theorists as the foundation of their studies during the 5-year program. During that period the cohort members were immersed in a rigorous program of educational leadership.

### **Description of Cohort Members**

Five participants were teachers who participated in the doctoral educational cohort between the university and the school district. These teachers represented different buildings, grade levels, and ethnicities of the cohort members, although they all taught at the elementary level in one of the four elementary schools during the doctoral cohort partnership. During the doctoral cohort there were 199 teachers in the school district. The 5 in this study represented 22 of the doctoral cohort. Two were male and 3 were female. Three were African-American and 2 Caucasian. All taught at the elementary level. The four elementary buildings (at the time of the cohort) represent two-thirds of the district.

### **Description of Non-Cohort Members**

Five elementary teachers in the school district with 8 or more years of experience within the district were also part of this study. These 5 teachers were neither members of

the doctoral program nor the first or second educational partnership between the university and the school district. They have taught from 11 to 21 years. Each taught at the elementary level during the doctoral cohort. Four of the teachers were female teachers and 1 was male. Four were Caucasian and 1 was African American.

### **Emergent Themes and Subthemes**

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the data. These were collaboration, leadership, and knowledge. Every cohort and non-cohort member discussed teacher leadership, knowledge, and collaboration. The subtheme of collegiality was addressed by every cohort member and 4 out of 5 non-cohort members. The subtheme of confidence was addressed by 4 out of 5 cohort members and every non-cohort member.

The subthemes will not be addressed separately, but considered as part of themes. Confidence, a synonym for self-assurance, is a by-product of professionalism. As knowledge is increased and practice is improved, levels of self-assurance are increased. The ability to trust and rely on one's skills and abilities improves one's confidence.

Collegiality is a subtheme of collaboration. It can be defined as "a working relationship among colleagues" (Merriam-Webster, 1997). Collaboration requires collegial relationship and interaction among group members who work toward a unified purpose. The concept of collegiality, while not synonymous with collaboration, can be perceived to be a prerequisite for collaborative systems.

## **Overview of Themes**

### **Collaboration**

Lambert et al. (2002) called for school university partnerships that blend theory and practice and provide leadership opportunities for the leadership candidates. Cohort learning is collaborative learning. Bentley et al. (2004) stated that cohort members are able to work as team members, sharing common goals and mutually supporting the team. The school district–university educational leadership collaborative was designed as a cohort of district teachers who remained together throughout their coursework. The collaborative learning of the school district’s leadership cohort was designed to develop real world leadership skills that turned theory into practice. They were immersed in courses that provided leadership theory and practice. Combining theory and practice is a benefit of learning communities (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Rallis et al., 2006; Stefl-Mabry, Goodall-Powers, & Doll, 2006).

Another goal of the university–school district partnership was to create a collaborative culture within the district. Creating a change force through effective leadership practices that created shared vision, built consensus, and a culture of shared responsibility was important to the creators of the program (Muchmore et al., 2004).

### **Knowledge**

Knowledge was also a strong theme, addressed by both cohort and non-cohort members. Knowledge that is transmitted from one part of the organization to another is a source of inspiration and insight. Fullan (2001) recognized that knowledge creation is a

chief component of school change, and effective leaders seek every opportunity to exchange knowledge. Senge (1990) discussed learning as a way to extend our capacity to create, a process that generates new knowledge. His use of the term *personal mastery* describes persons who live in a learning mode. Individual learning is the basis for building a learning organization. Darling-Hammond (2005) discussed knowledge that is developed within the context of teaching and the knowledge that is developed in a professional context.

It was the goal of the school district–university partnership to create a group of leaders who were knowledgeable about establishing a culture that asked questions, examined data, and shared the responsibility for student achievement. The school district is striving to “grow its own leaders” (Lieberman & Miller, 2004).

## **Leadership**

The focus on educational leadership was to create a sustainable change in the district through the development of effective leadership practices (Muchmore et al., 2004). Theoreticians in leadership practices guided them in creating a leadership program that sought to understand motivation, create a shared vision, set measurable goals, and establish a two-way nonthreatening communication among all of the stakeholders in the success of the district. The goal was to transform the hierarchical roles of teachers and administrators into a more collaborative relationship. This form of leadership transcended formal titles and positions and sought to empower the teachers to act as leaders, “thereby improving communication among teachers, administrators, and parents and establishing a culture in which questions are asked, data are examined, and the responsibility for student

achievement is shared among all stakeholders” (Muchmore et al., 2004, p. 242). Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested forgetting the chain of command and fostering collaboration through cooperative goals and trust building. The school district collaborative was a model of Lieberman and Miller’s (2004) definition of teacher leadership as groups of teachers who work together to transform the culture in which they work and lead. Katzenmayer and Moller (2001) reported the need to develop the leadership of every teacher. Through building relationships and finding a use for each person’s skill, talent, or passion, we are creating leaders in every teacher.

Table 2 presents the cohort thematic responses.

Table 2

*Cohort Thematic Responses*

Cohort Members	Mr. Sutton	Mrs. Clark	Mrs. Russell	Mr. McDaniel	Mrs. Oliverio
Teacher Leadership	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge	X	X	X	X	X
Collaborative	X	X	X	X	X
Collegiality	X	X	X	X	X
Confidence	X	X		X	X
Deterrents		X			X
Servant-leader			X	X	

**Research Question #1: How do teachers describe their shared experiences?****Collaboration**

The theme of collaboration was mentioned by every cohort member. Each of the members responded strongly to the concept of collaboration and collegiality. Since the design of the partnership with the university was based on a cohort model of learning, it is not surprising that the cohort members responded strongly and profusely about the cohort experience. For many, the concept of cohort learning was novel. Others came with the out-dated ideas of “group work,” where some students could succeed without much effort by freeloading other students’ work. Collaboration and the concept of collegiality were woven into every response to the research question asking them to describe their experiences.

Mr. Sutton is a young Caucasian teacher in his early thirties. His entire career, including his internship, has been spent at the same elementary school in the district. He has been here for 11 years and has taught third and fourth grades. He is currently teaching fifth grade.

Mr. Sutton was in the reading cohort as well as the doctoral cohort. He was enthusiastic about the changes from the master’s program to the doctoral program. He was dissatisfied with the split in the first cohort. The first cohort had been divided into two equal-sized groups. When asked about how the cohort changed his expectation of a cohort, he replied, “They actually changed it because they improved on the first cohort that was offered. When they divided us up (in the master’s cohort) it took away some of the unity.” The second cohort had more participants, but met as one body. He still

reminisces about missing the camaraderie and the friendship. When asked what the term *cohort* meant to him, he stated, “I think of people supporting each other through a task.” He has an intern teacher who is in an undergraduate cohort and notices, “There is a big difference between her and other student teachers in the level of support that she gets from other student teachers in her cohort.”

When asked to describe the relationship among cohort members and how they evolved, Mr. Sutton replied:

They were just supportive of each other, even when they were complaining. There weren't any cliques. The doctoral people invested much more into the program than the master's did. They weren't there just to get the degree. Those who dropped out (of the doctoral cohort) did so for family reasons or time constraints. The people are more professional in the doctoral cohort.

Mr. Sutton felt that the cohort had a great impact on his interactions with teachers both inside and out of the cohort. He vehemently asserted how the cohort changed him:

It changed me as a professional. Even when I wasn't in the cohort, and was doing the independent dissertation work, I still felt the cohort's presence. People from the cohort would ask me, “How's it going? Where are you at on your work?”

He is melancholic when he reflects on the completion of the coursework. There were no longer regularly scheduled classes, and no scheduled opportunities to interact with each other.

Mrs. Russell is an African American teacher in her early fifties. She has been teaching in the school district for 16 years. She was at the elementary level during the course of the doctoral cohort. She moved to the middle school 4 years ago.

Mrs. Russell had no prior expectations of what a cohort was, but was precise in her descriptions of the advantages of cohort learning. She stated:

The members were pretty enthusiastic about being members of the cohort, and they worked well together and helped each other. I think we were all relieved that we didn't have to drive somewhere to get to class because the professors were coming to us. (*The professors alternated their travel and one or more drove to the school district from the university campus for each class meeting*). It was a nice group of students. We worked hard and enjoyed each other's academic feedback.

Mrs. Russell enjoyed the relationships developed in the cohort experience. She responded to the question asking for advice she would give to someone considering a similar program:

With a cohort you have a group of people that are studying the same thing that you are studying. It's a plus, a big plus to be able to study together. You don't have to look for someone because you're working in the same district and the same building. You can get together and work. That made all the difference in the world.

When asked what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers inside and outside of the cohort, she replied:

I think if I focus on the teachers that were with me in the cohort, we built up closer relationships, by virtue of being in the same program together and sharing some of the same experiences. We were not treated differently by those who were not in the cohort, but when you go through something together, you just have an automatic closeness. You felt more comfortable dealing with teachers outside of the cohort.

When Mrs. Russell was asked to further elaborate on the relationships among the cohort members, she revealed, "From the viewpoint of when we were taking classes together, we had a tendency to work together, because our expectations were similar and we were going through coursework together and we needed each other." Mrs. Russell feels that "Those who participated in the cohort seemed to have benefited the most." She was saddened by the ending of regular opportunities to meet with cohort members.

Since the end of the coursework and people don't meet together, we don't have as close of a relationship. There still is the friendliness and the willing to help each other. We all have something different that we are involved in and I still feel that

we're still on the same page, but we're working on different things that don't bring us together.

Mrs. Oliverio is a young Caucasian teacher in her 14<sup>th</sup> year in the school district. She taught fifth grade for 12 years, and has taught third grade for the last 2 years. She was in the first reading master's cohort as well as the doctoral cohort. All of her postgraduate work was done in a learning cohort.

When asked what the term *cohort* meant to her, she replied, "A group of people collaborating together, working toward a common goal for the betterment of something." Her expectations of a cohort were changed by the openness of the school district partnership.

What I expected was more a rigid program; I didn't expect it to be so open. It became a family of a sort, where we dialogued so much and really grew together, I thought.

Often collaborative learning is treated suspiciously by students because of the chasm between traditional sage on the stage courses and the flexibility of collaborative courses. The school district collaborative was different from a traditional university course in that the courses were modularized and extended over the course of multiple semesters. Opportunities were provided for student input. The coursework was job-embedded, different from the typical university structure (Marx, 2001).

Mrs. Oliverio's advice to others considering a similar program was:

Go for it. Sit back, take it in and enjoy it. Go with the flexibility and changes and the personal experiences you're going to encounter with one another and how much you're going to grow together. Don't worry about it not being structured; that's what it's about. The goal is the relationships, the flexibility and the growing together and not being set in stone. What we needed for the district would change, and that was important that we worked for change in the district. It made everything real, and authentic.

Mrs. Clark is an African American woman who has been teaching in the school district in an elementary classroom at various grades for 19 years. Prior to coming to the district, she spent 3 years teaching in a private nursery school. She was not a member of the first reading cohort.

Discussing what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, she responded:

Inside the cohort we were together and could build a community where we could discuss what was going on in the district. Outside of the cohort, we would talk about things we were doing in the cohort. It helped the teachers outside to share with us things we were doing and had more dialogue.

When asked how the members in the cohort reflect or change her expectations of a cohort, she said, “The leadership in our school became more cooperative (the principal in her building was also a cohort member). We were part of a community that wanted to discuss what was going on.” When asked to describe the relationship among cohort members, she said, “Members of the cohort that were from our school became a team. Many of us were already friends and knew each other. We got more insight into what kind of people they were.”

She modeled the strategies learned in her coursework when she redesigned her classroom. “I think more of how I change working with my students. I think of my students as leaders and allow them to operate within the class as leaders.”

Mr. McDaniel is an African American teacher in his late forties. He has taught in the district for 10 years. He taught fourth grade for 4 years and fifth grade for 3 years. He was a member of the reading cohort as well as the doctoral cohort. He did his internship

in the district and taught fifth grade during the coursework. He has recently moved into a leadership position at a building that had few doctoral cohort members.

When asked what the term *cohort* meant, Mr. McDaniel said, “A group of like-minded individuals that came together for the purposes of learning.” When asked how the cohort members changed his expectation of a cohort, he said, “They didn’t change things so much as we grew together.” He described the relationship among cohort members fondly: “We became, not exactly family, but all a part of the tribe.” Mr. McDaniel’s use of the term *tribe* is descriptive of the relationship among cohort members. They became an extended family of learners. The common interest that everyone shared within both an educational as well as a social group created a unique bond. Team learning along with a shared vision created a true collaborative community.

He remains a staunch supporter of the school district collaborative as well as a supporter of cohort learning. When asked what advice he would give to anyone considering a similar program, he replied, “Go for it. It is a life-changing experience. This experience is like a drug addict who is continually craving and wishing for more opportunities to replicate that first experience. You are continually looking to become part of another cohort.”

## **Leadership**

In describing their shared experiences, every cohort member also discussed leadership. The elementary cohort members were concentrated at two schools. One cohort member remained at each of the other two elementary buildings.

Mrs. Oliverio was strongly aware of her own changes in leadership. She feels confident that she has grown in her leadership skills as well as in her willingness and desire to seek leadership opportunities. She said:

I do know that I take more initiative to get things rolling if I feel that strongly about it. I'll take more of a leadership role if I feel that this program needs to be implemented, more than I would do so before. I feel a stronger sense of confidence, as a teacher leader, and I feel that I am a teacher leader in this building and the district as well.

When asked if she assumed the roles of leadership as a result of participation in the cohort, she replied "absolutely."

Another cohort member, when asked if she assumed leadership roles as a result of the cohort, responded that she did not. Mrs. Russell responded:

No, I don't, to be honest with you. I like to lead by following. I like helping other people out that way, so if you consider that as leading, that's more of the role that I find myself playing. I'm not the one to be out front.

Mrs. Russell was, however, the chairman of the district-wide Battle of the Books competition for 14 years. When probed about assuming a leadership position, she demurred, "Whatever leadership skills I might have, have come about because I've followed those who are the leaders."

Servant leadership is evident in the roles assumed by Mr. McDaniel. Since participating in the cohort, he has become a Title I teacher, with additional responsibilities that might be associated with an assistant principal. He is aware of his leadership status.

I'm looked at as one of the leaders in the building. I'm one who looks for solutions to solve problems that can distract us from the primary focus; that is student achievement. I look at things from a systems point of view.

He gave a lengthy description of the types of accommodations that he makes for his staff. He was able to change the district-wide policy of required records for transfer students so that teachers can have a more accurate record of the academic performance of newly enrolled students. The master clock was not working properly. This greatly affected the efficiency of the school. Rather than wait for district maintenance to address a work order, he called the company that services the clocks and had someone walk him through the reprogramming of the master clock. He listed other similar undertakings that are reflective of a servant leader.

As a result of the cohort, I found that being a servant leader means that you do things that are often other people's responsibilities for the greater good, even though it's often a sacrifice of personal time. Had I not been exposed to the literature on leadership and systems thinking I would have been the person who was unable, for a multitude of reasons, to get things done.

Mr. McDaniel began to see himself as a leader during his tenure in the cohort. When asked about his interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, he replied, "I began to see myself as a leader. Because of that, I was less likely to fall in line with the mob or group thought. I became more of a reflective practitioner." Using the new knowledge gained from the cohort, Mr. McDaniel was able to maintain his individuality in the face of pressures of the group.

During the coursework, Mr. McDaniel was in a building with the highest concentration of elementary cohort members. He is now in a leadership position in an elementary building that had only one member of the doctoral program continue past the comprehensive exams. He no longer has daily interactions with former cohort colleagues.

Following the collaborative coursework of the doctorate, Mr. McDaniel has moved to a building that has no other cohort colleagues. He misses opportunities to interact with former classmates who shared the same vision for the district.

What's different in the current school that I'm in, I respond to people's needs because there are no other people in this building who were in the cohort for any length of time. There is a huge leadership void in this building. Some who began in the cohort left very early and were not the beneficiaries of what we were exposed to. You and I have conversations about best practices for the students, but that is not common in this building.

Mrs. Clark responded to the questions asking her to provide examples of teacher leadership that she can attribute to the cohort. She elaborated that "others come to members and ask them what to do about things, and help solve problems."

When asked what changes, short term and long term, have occurred in her building as a result of the cohort, she said:

Those of us who participated in the cohort are in the role of teacher leaders. We are also involved in different committees throughout the school; an example is the school improvement committee. The change in leadership has also changed attitudes of administrators.

Mrs. Oliverio says that she has assumed leadership roles since participation in the cohort. She responded to the question about changes in her teaching:

I do know that I take more initiative to get things rolling if I feel that strongly about it. I'll take more of a leadership role if I feel that this program needs to be implemented, more than I would do so before. I feel a stronger sense of confidence, as a teacher leader, and I feel that I am a teacher leader in this building and the district as well.

Mr. Sutton did not discuss changes in his own leadership activities, but did discuss increased leadership opportunities for fellow cohort members. He responded to the question asking for specific examples of teacher leadership that are attributable to participation in the cohort:

I wasn't oblivious to the need to be a leader, but it wasn't the right time. The recent cohort that I completed with the [county] Writing Project pushed me over the edge to be ready to start taking leadership responsibilities. I have been doing it this year, and it feels good.

## **Knowledge**

Mr. McDaniel, formerly an upper elementary teacher, now in a leadership position, was a member of both the first reading master's cohort and the doctoral cohort in educational leadership. There is excitement in his voice as he stated:

We were devoted to live our research. We were committed to the research information that we received. We did much reading, research, and application. It influenced me and impacted what I was doing in class. I became a reflective practitioner.

Mr. McDaniel was evaluating his own performance and searching for new answers when he needs to find them. His knowledge acquisition is expanding exponentially. He stated his participation in the cohort "has changed my teaching, how I feel about teaching; it has changed how I think about teaching."

Mrs. Oliverio's growth in knowledge about leadership styles helped her understand her administrator better. In response to the question asking the impact of the cohort on her interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, she said:

But once we had leadership classes and we learned the different styles, it was easier to understand where that person was coming from and their style. When you understand that someone just has a different style, you can communicate better and work better together.

Continual collaboration with each other changed the relationships among cohort members. She also changed her worldview of her school community, not just her cohort community. Growth in her knowledge helped her become aware of the changes needed

for the district. She said, “What we needed for the district would change, and that was important that we worked for changed in the district.”

Mrs. Clark is the early elementary teacher who worked in a building with the most cohort members, including an administrator. In addition to sharing the newly acquired knowledge with the administrator in her building (he too was a member of the doctoral cohort), Mrs. Clark felt that the cohort members shared the knowledge learned during the cohort with non-cohort colleagues. Her worldview changed as she understood her colleagues differently. She replied to the question asking what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort. “We got more insight into what kind of people they were.” In response to the question regarding change, she said, “When something occurs, I look at it from different angles instead of just pouncing on it. I take it at face value, and look at it from a different angle.”

Mrs. Clark reflected how she and other cohort members changed. When asked how the culture of the school changed, she responded, “We have more dialogue, not to complain about what’s wrong, but what we can do to change things. We worked within the framework of change. What things can we do to make the students successful.”

Mr. Sutton, an upper elementary teacher, was a member of the first cohort as well as the doctoral cohort. He has continued to teach in an upper elementary classroom. Reflecting on the relationships among cohort members, he addressed the change in knowledge. He felt that people were more professional in the doctoral cohort than the first cohort. “One person in particular who was a seasoned teacher grew immensely. She became more open to new ideas.” This teacher changed her mental model about teaching after participation in this learning opportunity.

Mrs. Russell is a seasoned teacher. She joined the second cohort as a doctoral student. Responding to the question asking her to describe something that is different in the culture of her school as a result of the cohort, she said, “I think the teachers were given more leeway in terms of doing certain things in their classrooms, for instance. If we saw where a certain program was needed, more teachers were allowed to try things.” The professors and administrators provided opportunities for the cohort members to experiment and try out new strategies in the classroom. She feels that her own teaching has changed following participation in the cohort. In response to the question asking how her teaching has changed, she replied:

As I’m doing my planning and I’m still doing research on my own paper, I’m reminded of educational research that we did in class and am reminded of leadership authors like Burns and others. I do find myself, I think, making an effort to put more into my planning as a matter of fact. There is this thing inside of me that makes me want to see if I can take everything a little step further because I feel like I should after all of the time I’ve put into it, so I try to take everything a little bit deeper as a result of being in the cohort.

**Research Question #2: How did participation in the cohort change the teachers’ roles or participation in building and district decisions?**

Both teachers and administrators who participated in the cohort as well as non-cohort members were asked to respond to this question. The non-cohort respondents are 5 teachers in the district with 8 or more years of experience within that district.

Table 3 presents the non-cohort themes.

**Leadership – Non-Cohort Members**

Every non-cohort member discussed changes in leadership of the cohort members.

Table 3

*Non-Cohort Thematic Responses*

Non-Cohort Members	Mrs. Rodgers	Mr. Paul	Mrs. Matthews	Mr. Van Horn	Mrs. Kuhn
Teacher Leadership	X	X	X	X	X
Knowledge	X		X	X	X
Collaborative	X	X	X	X	X
Collegiality	X	X		X	X
Confidence	X	X	X	X	X
Deterrents					X
Servant-leader					

The collaboration of the school district and the university was designed as a catalyst for individual and organizational transformation. The program is a leadership laboratory, where content and collaboration are united to change the paradigm of educational leadership programs. The hallmark of this program was the uniting of cohort members for the common purpose of empowering teachers to act as leaders and “establishing a culture in which questions are asked, data are examined, and the responsibility for student achievement is shared among all stakeholders” (Muchmore et al., 2004, p. 242). This collaboration was about creating leaders for change in the school district.

Mrs. Kuhn is a Caucasian woman in her late forties who has worked in the district for 21 years. She taught first grade for 15 years and has recently received an endorsement to her special education certification to teach children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She taught in one building for 16 of those years.

When asked what changes in the teaching of the cohort members she has seen, she replied:

One of the members does more things on a research-based program as a result of being involved in the cohort. She references authors and data, and is more aware of what needs to be done to get the results that are needed. Her program is more outcome-based.

The tacit leadership of cohort members occurs when they encourage members to improve their teaching strategies. Cohort members are engaging in and modeling professional growth with their non-cohort colleagues.

Mrs. Matthews is an early education teacher. She has taught for 10 years, all in the school district. She is in her first year teaching second grade. She reflected on cohort members at her school who have led workshops in the district as well as throughout the county. These same teachers are involved in giving information to district administrators about educational concerns.

The goal of the doctoral partnership to transform the hierarchical roles of teacher and administrator is apparent in this account. Mrs. Matthews responded to the question that asked her to describe something that is different in the culture of her school as a result of the cohort. She said:

When I first came to this school, if I came to a member of the cohort regarding lessons or students who were struggling, she would help with lessons and help problem solve. One person in the school who was a part of the cohort had a vision for the schools while we were in AYP. When we were meeting with the ISD she had a vision of how we could improve the climate of this building or academic achievement.

She was aware of the differences in the roles of cohort members. “A few of the members that I know are on staff and they have a confidence about themselves and their abilities,” she replied. When asked about examples of leadership, she replied, “I have

seen some of them be presenters at workshops throughout the district. Some of them have also been selected to do things outside of the district.” She also was aware of other positions being held by cohort members. “There are people who rose to the occasion as to being on committees throughout the district, and assisted central office in district decisions,” she replied to the question asking if she would describe any of the cohort members as leaders.

When asked what short- and long-term changes she has observed, Mrs. Matthews stated that cohort members have brought about changes in the district. She elaborated:

Long-term I have seen people who started in that group and now have more leadership within the district. An example is our Title I teacher, as well as the person who helped during the time that we were in AYP. Short-term, they bring their experiences in a small group setting as we try to problem-solve and generate ideas of new strategies for learning.

Mr. Van Horn is the only elementary art teacher. He teaches in every elementary building. He admired the cohort members for their knowledge and the leadership they gave when they acted as resource or lead teachers. When asked what short- and long-term changes have occurred in his buildings as a result of the educational leadership cohort, he reflected:

The teachers throughout the district have excitement and knowledge. We can bounce off each other for ideas. It was quite successful, to a point where we have almost every teacher has been empowered, at least everybody that was in the cohort, to be a teacher leader.

These teachers are models of professional growth. As they help others with challenges that others are experiencing, they are creating a community of practice. Mr. Van Horn participated in surveys that the cohort members created to assist the students. “Cohort members would do surveys and find out better ways to serve the students,” he

said. The culture of the cohort is committed to the support of all members of the school community, and through that process, they are creating a community of learners. Cohort members willingly shared their knowledge of strategies and skills with teachers outside of their immediate domain.

Mr. Van Horn responded to the question regarding the relationships among cohort members. He stated:

I think the relationships evolved beyond just the statistics class. I think that the teachers began to understand their strengths and who can help lead, like, for example, at one school I noticed Miss Smith, Mr. Jones, and Mrs. Johnson were doing a lot of things with the writing workshop and there were other teachers that took a different angle working in mathematics or science. I think that the relationships evolved very well, to a point that we created teacher leaders.

Mrs. Rodgers, a special education teacher, reflected on the way that cohort members would share with each other and enthusiastically share information with other teachers. She experienced the same openness with cohort members as Mr. Van Horn. Mrs. Rodgers recalls the way that cohort members would volunteer to be in charge of new ideas presented at staff meetings. "They would always volunteer to lead this group or the next or to be in charge of a group," she reflected. She witnessed their acquired knowledge being applied. "They took what they got from the cohort and used it in school and in their classroom with their students," she said.

Mr. Paul, who taught middle elementary during the second cohort, felt that those teachers who had previously shown signs of leadership potential displayed their efforts at leading new ideas or group projects more openly during the cohort. When asked if he would describe any of the cohort members as leaders, Mr. Paul replied, "I don't know.

Mr. Jones and Mrs. Smith were always working toward leadership and everyone else seemed to stay where they were because I thought that was where they wanted to be.”

### **Collaboration – Non-Cohort Members**

Mrs. Rodgers is an African American woman in her mid sixties who has taught for 11 years. Mrs. Rodgers is a special education teacher who has been at two different elementary schools during the course of the doctoral coursework. She teaches learning disabled students who are included in general education classrooms. She has had many opportunities to interact with cohort members whose students also shared special education services.

Mrs. Rodgers understood the relationships among cohort members, as well as the goals and purposes of the program. When asked what the term *cohort* meant to her, she reflected:

They were all excited, very excited from the beginning. The teachers enjoyed being together as a team, as a group of educators. I think there was this excitement I think because they were together as a group, they knew one another and it just made it effective, working with the students, and working with one another.

As she described the relationship among cohort members Mrs. Rodgers responded, “They were friends and were always working with each other and trying out new ideas with the students.” She felt the enthusiasm among the cohort members and watched them share with others. They eagerly shared their knowledge with other teachers, “The information would trickle down to the other teachers,” Mrs. Rodgers said.

When asked what is different in the district as a result of the cohort, Mrs. Rodgers replied, “Their whole experience has enlightened the teachers that have participated and made them want to be more effective with students and other teachers.”

Mrs. Kuhn has been in the district for 22 years. Sixteen of those years were spent in first grade. She has taught students with ASD for the last 4 years. Mrs. Kuhn witnessed the interactions between cohort members. When asked to describe the relationships among cohort members, she responded, “There was camaraderie, support and encouragement. Sort of, ‘you’re on the right track, let’s keep moving, and let’s get this done.’” She identified with cohort learning because she had taken courses online with a cohort group. She compared this to what she observed in the school district cohort. When asked what her thoughts were about learning through a cohort, she responded, “I really enjoyed it. You were getting ideas from lots of people and you didn’t feel isolated in your own situation, and you saw good things that were happening in other places as well as not-so-good things.”

Mrs. Matthews is a young Caucasian teacher who has been teaching for 10 years, all of them in the district. She has taught kindergarten for 8 years, preschool for 1½ years, and second grade for 1 year.

When asked to describe the relationships among cohort members, she said, “I felt that they all had a common goal. They were happy to share any information about what they were doing.” They were collegial in their relationships with each other as well as other members of their respective staffs. She was effusive in her descriptions of cohort members’ sharing of information. She noted that one of the cohort members was extremely influential in helping them navigate the governmental mandates imposed when

the building was unable to meet AYP. “Short-term, they bring their experiences in a small group setting as we try to problem-solve and generate ideas of new strategies for learning.” They were eager to collaborate with staff members and generate new ideas. The cohort members created a collaborative atmosphere in the schools. They transferred their learning to other staff members. Collective contributions were prominent by the cohort members.

When asked if she wished that she had been a member, she responded, “I would have loved to be a member of the cohort. I was in my last semester at Marygrove and I wished that I had been a part of it.”

Mr. Paul is a Caucasian man in his late forties. He has been teaching for 20 years, all of them in the district. He has taught mostly fourth grade. He taught third grade for 2 years, a 4/5 split, and second grade. Mr. Paul is certified as a Rigg’s trainer—a method of teaching phonetics as a foundation to reading and writing. He is currently a fourth grade teacher.

Despite the large number of cohort members in his building, Mr. Paul felt that he was not affected by the community of learners that surrounded him. When asked what impact the cohort had on his relationships and interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, he responded, “My relationship with the cohort didn’t change much of what I do.” When asked how he perceived the relationships among cohort members, he said:

They seemed to have a good relationship with each other and they seemed to have a good relationship with the staff. There might be a difference with the cohort teachers to each other, but I don’t think it has spread to the rest of the staff.

When asked if he wished he had been a part of the cohort, he replied that if he ever got his doctorate it would be on phonetic education and what the cohort was doing wasn't in his area of interest.

Mr. Paul admitted that he was isolated from the effects of the collaborative community. When asked what impact the cohort had on his interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, he responded, "I try to stay in my room to do my job, so I don't know what's going on with other teachers." He is absent from opportunities for cooperation and a connection among his peers.

Mr. Van Horn is in his early fifties and is an art teacher in the school district. He was raised in a small European country and received his college education in the United States. He has been teaching art at both the elementary and secondary level for 20 years and social studies for 6 years when music, art, and physical education were eliminated. Currently he is the only elementary art teacher and travels to all of the elementary schools.

Mr. Van Horn was expansive in his description of the cohort's philosophy and relationships among the members. When asked what the term *cohort* meant to him, he replied, "The term means cooperation. I think of it as cooperation between the university and the students who want to take the doctoral program." He was aware of the relationships among cohort members and recalled, "I saw them buddy-up with each other when they had a statistics class and worked to better understand statistics. There was definitely camaraderie with each other."

Although he was not a member of the cohort, he received many benefits from their collaboration. Unlike Mr. Paul, Mr. Van Horn has been involved in many

opportunities to increase connections among his peers, as well as opportunities to become involved in cooperative and collaborative efforts of cohort members. When asked to reflect on his interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, Mr. Van Horn responded:

I always felt that if I had a problem with educational concepts like presenting something to the students or how to better connect with them on their level, I would see a cohort member who was next door to me and ask them about the ideas.

The goal of the educational partnership to improve communication among teachers and establish a culture that takes responsibility for student achievement has been met in the interactions with Mr. Van Horn. “The cohort members were very willing to share,” he replied when asked about his interactions with teachers. He also witnessed them in collaboration with each other. He recalled earlier discussions of cohort members at the outset of the doctoral program: “Students organized themselves into study groups in preparation for the comprehensive exams, as well as during a challenging statistics class.” None of the cohort members reflected on the mass hysteria that ensued during the stressful statistics class, yet he reflected on witnessing the phenomenon. Mr. Van Horn reflected, “I saw them buddy-up with each other when they had a statistics class and worked to better understand statistics.”

### **Knowledge – Non-Cohort Members**

Four of the five non-cohort members were impacted by the knowledge brought to their buildings by cohort members.

Mr. Van Horn, the elementary art teacher, who was not a member of the cohort, was greatly impacted by cohort members. He was aware of the purpose of the cohort and the resources that cohort members could provide.

When asked what his impression of the cohort was, he astutely stated:

The purpose of this program was to elevate the staff's knowledge of the types of students that we teach. It was designed to reach the needs of the students and how to better serve them, and how to adjust educational concepts to their needs. There is a lot more sensitivity by the teachers.

In response to the question "What impact did the cohort have on your interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort?" Mr. Van Horn said that he consulted with cohort members on strategies that would "best teach concepts in art history that required writing." Mr. Van Horn sought out members of the cohort to assist him with ideas to improve his teaching.

Mr. Van Horn was aware of the changes in the teaching of the cohort members and their openness to other points of view. He replied:

They are empowered with all kinds of knowledge that most of us don't have. They still further their education by going to workshops to improve the MEAP scores of our students. They are excited educators and in turn excite other educators. During a recent workshop, there were discussions of the MEAP scores and an analysis of the changes. This was led by a cohort member. I made suggestions regarding the gap between the ability to decode and the leap to comprehension of longer paragraphs. He (the cohort member presenter) was very open to my suggestions and I don't know if he would have been without his exposure to the cohort. I think it's a very valuable thing (the cohort).

Mr. Van Horn used the accessibility to cohort members to improve his teaching.

He responded:

I always felt that if I had a problem with educational concepts like presenting something to the students or how to better connect with them on their level, I would see a cohort member and ask them about the ideas. We looked upon them as resource teachers or lead teachers.

Cohort members willingly shared their knowledge of strategies and skills outside of their immediate domain. Although Mr. Van Horn was an art teacher, they were able to enhance his teaching through knowledge cohort members shared with him.

Another non-cohort member was also influenced by the knowledge that cohort members brought to their buildings. Mrs. Kuhn, a special education teacher, stated:

One of the members does more things on a research-based program as a result of being involved in the cohort. She references authors and data, and is more aware of what needs to be done to get the results that are needed.

Mrs. Matthews, the early childhood teacher, recently completed her master's degree at a local university. When asked to describe the relationships among cohort members, she offered:

They were always eager to share what they were doing, and there was a focus on student learning. When we did grade level meetings, there was a lot of information that they brought to the table. Some of the cohort members have been presenters at workshops throughout the district as well.

The cohort members had a strong impact on the non-cohort members; not only did they disseminate their new learning, but also their vision and goals regarding student learning. In response to the question regarding changes in the expectation of a cohort, Mrs. Matthews said, "The teachers in the doctoral program gave us a lot of feedback in what they were working toward."

Mrs. Matthews was in a master's program at a local university during the time of the doctoral coursework. Her program was also a cohort. Although her cohort was comprised of members from differing communities, she made comparisons to what she observed in the school district collaborative.

My cohort was small group of teachers that taught perspectives and got to know people from different backgrounds and how things are in different districts. It involved a lot of collaboration, sharing and generating ideas. There were many different perspectives that I may not have considered at the elementary level.

When asked what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, she said:

I feel for me not being in the cohort and also being in a different one at the time there was someone that I could share things with and we could relate our experiences share information that we had from each of the those groups and I guess those who weren't in the cohort were just always asking questions and seeing how it was going and things like that. I feel that we had a connectedness even though we weren't in the same groups.

One non-cohort respondent did not feel influenced by the new knowledge of the cohort members. When asked what the cohort meant to him, another non-cohort member, Mr. Paul, observed that teachers in his building consulted more about their teaching, although he did not feel that they had any impact on changing or influencing his teaching. Mr. Paul talked about being unaware of any effects of the cohort. Mr. Paul changed the subject and voluntarily discussed his displeasure with the previous master's cohort in which they strove toward a balanced literacy program. The language arts program he prefers does not coincide with the focus of the district's language arts program. He was strongly vested in a phonetic approach to reading, in sharp contrast to the balanced literacy approach of the first master's cohort.

As a special education teacher who has taught in two different schools since the inception of the cohort, Mrs. Rodgers has had relationships with many of the elementary teachers who were in the cohort, and is a strong supporter and cheerleader for the program. Her admiration of the cohort members bubbles over. When asked what the term

*cohort* meant to her, she excitedly recalled the changes in the curriculum that the cohort members made. She stated:

I think they enhanced the reading, language arts program at the different schools, especially the teachers that were involved. They took what they got from the cohort and used it in school and in their classrooms with their students. They helped one another and shared ideas about what was working best with the students.

In both of the elementary schools that Mrs. Rodgers worked during the cohort, there were 16 cohort members. There were 9 in one building and 7 in the other. Because she had a resource classroom that supported mainstreamed students in all grades, she interacted closely with many teachers and many cohort members.

When asked what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers inside and outside of the cohort, she replied, “Inside the cohort, I could feel the enthusiasm that they had by just being in the cohort and being able to share with each other.”

She also observed changes in individual teachers. When asked what changes in the teaching of cohort members occurred following the cohort, she described a fellow teacher and cohort member:

An example is one gentleman, a fifth grade teacher at one of our schools—an excellent, excellent teacher, I think he was a good teacher before the cohort and now I think he is a better teacher as a result of the cohort. The cohort program brought out something within him.

She feels cohort members influenced the district in many ways. “Because of their cohort experience, they were able to initiate helping students learn efficiently and better,” she responded to the question asking her to name something that is different in the district as a result of the cohort.

## **Knowledge – Cohort Members**

Mrs. Oliverio did discuss a change in her increased worldview and understanding of others in the district. Her knowledge was expanded as she encountered other cohort members from different buildings and different backgrounds. In response to the question asking what impact the cohort had on her interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, she said:

It helped me to become more open and receptive toward other's views, whether it be teaching strategies or leadership styles. It helped me to better understand the other people that I'm working with, in many different ways. I could understand where the leadership was coming from.

When asked how his teaching has changed since participation in the cohort, Mr. Sutton stresses that his attitude has changed the most. He said:

My teaching has changed because of the time I have spent thinking about and researching teacher resilience. When I'm in my classroom I can't get frustrated with the students, because I am the expert on teacher resilience. I'm the expert at liking what I do, liking this job. I've become more self-aware of my presence and what I represent, and I have to act accordingly.

He continued:

I'm much more of a professional person because of it (the cohort). I'm much more interested in my own reflection and learning. It's made me much more reflective. I think everybody who's in the cohort is more reflective than they were (before the cohort experience).

Mrs. Clark discussed a change in her growth in knowledge following growth in the cohort, but did not discuss a change in her participation in district decisions. She did note that one of the biggest changes occurred in her teaching. "I think more of how I change working with my students. I think of my students as leaders and allow them to

operate within the class as leaders,” she responded to the question asking how her teaching has changed.

Mr. McDaniel did not discuss the impact of his increased knowledge on district decisions but his move to a leadership position occurred after his participation in the doctoral cohort.

### **Leadership – Cohort Members**

Mr. McDaniel felt that his participation in building decisions was changed greatly as a result of the cohort. He became a Title I teacher at the close of the formal coursework. As a Title I teacher, he also had other responsibilities that were similar to an assistant principal’s. His new position required that he take responsibilities for building concerns as well as district-wide policy. He stated previously that he makes accommodations for his staff and has changed the district policy of obtaining records for newly enrolled students. When asked to describe any of the cohort members as leaders, he said:

Two people, come to the top of my head. One is a female who is in a prominent position in our bargaining unit. She is being challenged and her integrity is in question. She has become a lead teacher at the secondary level. She is now going to be in the position to change things and influence things and be able to allow teachers to have things that they need.

Mrs. Clark felt her role as a leader changed after cohort participation. When asked to give specific examples of teacher leadership that is attributable to participation in the cohort, she commented:

I didn’t think at first that there was any difference, but after reflecting, teachers would come to me and ask what I would do about certain things. They (other

teachers) would ask my advice about certain situations, and I began to think of myself as a leader.

Mr. Sutton feels that the cohort has changed the leadership roles of cohort members. He stated, “Two of the cohort members left this building to assume leadership roles in two other buildings.”

He feels his lack of change in leadership decision-making following participation in the cohort is because he is not seeking opportunities. When asked if he had any input on decision-making in the district, he said:

I could if I wanted to. I tend to focus on my own classroom and my own grade level right now, because that’s where I’m making the biggest difference. Any lack of input is on my own part, not the fault of the cohort or that the district doesn’t want to hear from me. Because I don’t have the time to devote to making big changes, I don’t want to make suggestions that I don’t have the time to follow through with in a leadership role.

Mrs. Oliverio feels strongly that her participation in the cohort has changed her role in her building. She is actively working on her leadership skills. When she was asked to give examples of leadership that can be attributed to the cohort, she responded:

I can give you a lot of simple examples. I have taken on a lot of leadership roles in extracurricular activities. I’ve run a winter festival within the building, I put together a science fair or I’ll run a talent show. That’s where my leadership benefits the students the most. I’ll get the group together because I feel that I’m more of a moral or transformational leader, this is for the kids and that’s why we’re doing this. I’ve become more of a moral leader once I realized exactly what it is. I’ve tried to strengthen that leadership style within myself. I have done that, and I still do it. I still work at it, even as grade level chair. I’m the leader of my team and it’s all about we’re here for the kids and what a great job we can do for the kids. We can’t forget that we are here for the students.

## Collaboration – Cohort Members

Having been a member of the first cohort, Mrs. Oliverio spent many years in a collaborative environment. She was surprised by the doctoral cohort. “What I expected was more a rigid program; I didn’t expect it to be so open,” she said responding to the meaning of the term *cohort*. She noted the change in the relationships of cohort members after the program. “The relationships between us in the cohort were strengthened and I believe there’s still a closeness,” she said.

Mr. McDaniel’s participation in the collaborative nature of the coursework ceased with his move to his new position. He moved to a school with one former cohort member and was not able to continue the collaborative conversations in his new building.

Mr. Sutton feels that the culture in his school is different as a result of the cohort. When describing something that is different in the culture of his school as a result of the cohort, he said:

Our cohort had many people from this school. It was a very slow process. The cohort started five years ago, and it’s still ongoing. There are still many of us working. Our relationship with [the] university is continuing. This building seems to be one of the more professional buildings. When you see a policy change, you see immediate results, but the changes have been more subtle due to the length of time that the cohort is working. All cohort members felt as if they have someone to talk to about education.

Mrs. Clark felt that the collaborative nature of the cohort spread to her non-cohort colleagues. She was asked what advice she would give to anyone considering a similar program. She reminisced about the collaborative nature of the cohort:

It was a wonderful experience. It gives you an opportunity to get to really know different people and how they think and how they feel about the students. It’s really insightful of other teachers. You feel that you are a part of a community.

**Research Question #3: What was the reaction or perception of non-participants on the participation of teacher leaders in the program?**

This question was answered by 5 five non-cohort colleagues. Every non-cohort member described instances of cohort displays of collaboration.

**Collaboration**

Mrs. Matthews, the early education teacher, reflected on cohort members at her school who have led workshops in the district as well as throughout the county. These same teachers are involved in giving information to district administrators about educational concerns. These cohort leaders are sharing their newly-earned knowledge within their school environment.

The goal of the doctoral partnership to transform the hierarchical roles of teacher and administrator is apparent in this account. Mrs. Matthews responded to the question that asked her to describe something that is different in the culture of her school as a result of the cohort. She said:

When I first came to this school, if I came to a member of the cohort regarding lessons or students who were struggling, she would help with lessons and help problem solve. One person in the school who was a part of the cohort had a vision for the schools while we were in AYP. When we were meeting with the ISD she had a vision of how we could improve the climate of this building or academic achievement.

She was aware of the differences in cohort members. “A few of the members that I know are on staff and they have a confidence about themselves and their abilities,” she replied. When asked about examples of leadership, she replied, “I have seen some of them be presenters at workshops throughout the district. Some of them have also been

selected to do things outside of the district.” She also was aware of other positions being held by cohort members. “There are people who rose to the occasion as to being on committees throughout the district, and assisted central office in district decisions,” she said when asked if she would describe any of the cohort members as leaders.

When asked what short- and long-term changes she has observed, Mrs. Matthews stated that cohort members have brought about changes in the district. She elaborated:

Long-term I have seen people who started in that group and now have more leadership within the district. An example is our Title I teacher, as well as the person who helped during the time that we were in AYP. Short-term, they bring their experiences in a small group setting as we try to problem-solve and generate ideas of new strategies for learning.

Mr. Paul was asked about the relationship among cohort members. He said, “They seemed to have a good relationship with each other and they seemed to have a good relationship with the staff.” He was unable to give specific examples of their collaborative efforts. He said in response when asked about the impact his relationship had with teachers inside and outside of the cohort, “My relationship with the cohort didn’t change much of what I do.”

Every respondent was asked to describe a change in the culture of the school as a result of the cohort. Mr. Van Horn was struck by the changes in collaboration. He replied:

Our students are more willing to learn and the teachers have become consultants with the entire staff. There is a willingness on the part of the entire staff to listen to all of the teachers and the teachers are more open to ideas wherever they are coming from. We are even beginning to get principals who are open to new ideas. In the past they were not always open to suggestions.

Mrs. Kuhn noted the collaborative nature of the cohort. “There was camaraderie, support and encouragement,” she replied when asked to describe the relationship among

cohort members. She continued, “Sort of, ‘you’re on the right track, let’s keep moving, and let’s get this done.’”

Mrs. Rodgers described the relationship among cohort members:

I think there was this excitement I think because they were together as a group, they knew one another and it just made it effective, working with the students, and working with one another. They helped one another and shared ideas about what was working best with the students.

She also noted the collaborative relationships of the cohort members that she observed from outside of the cohort. “They were friends and they were always working with each other and trying out new ideas with the students,” she said when asked to describe the relationships among cohort members.

### **Knowledge**

Four of the five non-cohort members discussed a change in knowledge displayed by the change in knowledge of cohort members as a result of the doctoral collaborative.

Mrs. Kuhn cited an example of teachers sharing knowledge that is directly attributable to membership in the cohort. Not only did the cohort members themselves use research-based programs, but they discussed it with non-cohort colleagues. Mrs. Kuhn witnessed “teachers who encourage others to use the research-based data in directing instruction.”

Mrs. Rodgers noted the change in cohort member teaching. “The cohort changed them as educators,” she said in response to the question asking her to describe a difference in the culture of her school. She continued, “They were always thinking of new and different ways to help the students.”

When asked if she had seen a change in the teaching in the members of the cohort, she responded:

An example is one gentleman, a fifth grade teacher at one of our schools, an excellent, excellent teacher; I think he was a good teacher before the cohort and now I think he is a better teacher as a result of the cohort. The cohort program brought out something within him.

Mrs. Matthews noted a change in the teaching of the cohort members. “A few of the members that I know are on staff and they have a confidence about themselves and their abilities,” she said in response to the question asking if she had seen a change in the teaching of the cohort members. Mrs. Matthews felt that the cohort members displayed their new knowledge as they present at workshops, and shared their vision for the school.

Mr. Van Horn has stated that there were changes in the knowledge of teaching strategies by the cohort members. He described previously how the cohort members used surveys to better serve their students. He also described the strategies that cohort members shared with him in improving his instruction. “They have innovative ways to reach the students who resist learning,” he said in response to the question asking him to describe changes that have resulted from the cohort. As he said previously, “They are empowered with all kinds of knowledge that most of us don’t have.”

## **Leadership**

Mr. Paul taught middle elementary grades during the second cohort. One of those years he taught third grade and the remaining years he taught fourth. He felt that those teachers who had previously shown signs of leadership potential displayed their efforts at leading new ideas or group projects more openly during the cohort. When asked if he

would describe any of the cohort members as leaders, Mr. Paul replied, “I don’t know. Mr. Jones and Mrs. Smith were always working toward leadership and everyone else seemed to stay where they were because I thought that was where they wanted to be.”

Mrs. Matthews has previously discussed the increase in leadership models created by cohort members. She said, “Long-term I have seen people who started in that group and now have more leadership within the district.” She has observed cohort members present at workshops throughout the district as well as present outside of the district.

When asked if she would describe any of the cohort members as leaders, Mrs. Rodgers said:

Definitely. One teacher who almost completed the doctorate program, but dropped out at the end, truly had leadership qualities. At our staff meetings she would always volunteer to lead this group to be in charge of this group or the next or to lead this group. After she dropped out of the cohort program, she decided to go into the ministry, which is another type of leadership.

Mr. Van Horn previously said in answer to the question asking what impact the cohort had on his interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort, “We looked upon them as resource teachers or lead teachers.”

When asked if he wished that he had participated in the cohort, Mr. Van Horn regretted that he had not participated in the cohort. He replied:

I regret that I couldn’t do it at the time. I had young kids at the time and had to go home right after school because my wife works opposite shifts from me. At that time I thought, why would I want a degree in education, because I’m an art person? I didn’t think it was that valuable at the time, but in retrospect, maybe I could have made different arrangements.

Mrs. Kuhn noted instances of teacher leadership in response to the research question that asks how participation in the cohort changed the teachers’ roles or participation in building and district decisions: “There appears to maybe more movement

from within the district, like going up the ranks a little bit. When there are positions available, some appear to be filled by members who were involved in the cohort.”

**Research Question #4: What changes short and long term (if any) occurred in the building and district at the conclusion of the teacher leadership cohort?**

**Leadership – Cohort Members**

Every cohort member discussed changes in leadership following the doctoral collaborative. The purpose of the leadership program was to create leaders from within the teachers in the district.

Mrs. Russell was at an elementary school with 5 other cohort members. At the end of the coursework, she moved to the middle school. One of the 2 cohort member principals moved from the elementary school with the most cohort members to the middle school where Mrs. Russell now teaches. Mrs. Russell discussed leadership when she was asked if she would describe any of the cohort members as leaders. She said:

I think the teachers were given more leeway in terms of doing certain things in their classrooms for instance. If we saw where a certain program was needed, more teachers were allowed to try things. More teachers were in charge of leadership roles. They headed more meetings, where before it had been administrators or others outside of the district. I think this is a feed off of the cohort. More and more of the teachers are being allowed to do some of the workshops.

Mr. McDaniel feels the impact of the leadership of cohort members is still continuing. “The people that were in it are still having an impact on the district, even if they’re still in the classroom. They are leading within their classrooms and looking for opportunities to collaborate.”

Another cohort member felt that leadership opportunities did not apply to his experiences until the cohort had ended. Mr. Sutton, elementary fifth grade teacher, replied in response to the question asking what specific examples of teacher leadership could be attributed to participation in the cohort:

The cohort made me reflective enough so that I was aware of my lack of leadership. I know that it was the right thing to do. I wasn't oblivious to the need to be a leader, but it wasn't the right time. The recent cohort that I completed with the [county] Writing Project pushed me over the edge to be ready to start taking leadership responsibilities. I have been doing it this year, and it feels good.

He noted two cohort members left his building to assume leadership roles in two other buildings. Mr. Sutton expressed a lack of opportunities for using his leadership skills. He addressed the lack of time that he has available as a classroom teacher to devote to district changes. He felt unable to display his leadership skills and knowledge outside of his classroom. "Because I don't have the time to devote to making big changes, I don't want to make suggestions that I don't have the time to follow through with in a leadership role," he responded. Leadership roles cannot be integrated into existing busy schedules. Time is a constraint in assuming effective leadership positions.

Mrs. Clark is an early elementary teacher. When asked what changes, short term and long term, have occurred in the building as a result of the educational leadership cohort, she responded, "Those of us who participated in the cohort are in the role of teacher leaders. We are also involved in different committees throughout the school. An example is the school improvement committee." The goal of the partnership was to create leaders as they interact with their colleagues. The theoretical basis of leadership was compounded by the opportunity to bring theory to life and become leaders.

Mrs. Oliverio noted a great change in the leadership styles of an administrator as a result of the cohort. She responded to the question asking her to describe something different in the culture of her school as a result of the cohort.

What did change, for a period of time, I don't know if it was sustained, I noticed that the administration (immediate supervisor) changed their leadership style from more of a transactional to more of a transformational leader. It was evident to me as well as to other teachers who were in the cohort that were in the same building. Even the language changed from that administrator. I don't know if it was sustained.

### **Knowledge – Cohort Members**

Every cohort member addressed the changes in knowledge following the collaborative.

Mr. Sutton was asked about long-term and short-term changes in the culture of his school as a result of the cohort. He reflected, "I can think of many others that have sustained their professional growth. They talk differently now and the level of conversation is different." He also sees a change in relationships among cohort members as a result of the cohort collaboration. At the onset of the doctoral cohort "they got together and talked to each other, sometimes because they were forced to within the context of the coursework, and sometimes because they wanted to."

Mr. Sutton was asked to describe something that is different in the culture of his school as a result of the cohort. He noted:

All of the cohort members feel as if they have someone to talk to about education. We had cohort members leave this building and go to other buildings to assume leadership roles. Their absence left a big void. There was a big loss when these members left.

Mrs. Oliverio feels that there have been curricular changes in the district. When asked what short- or long-term changes have occurred in the district, she stated, “There has been more curriculum development because of it.” She feels that those changes have not been permanent. She continued:

This too has not been sustained. The leaders that were involved with the cohort stopped the initiatives when the cohort no longer met. There was a big impact on school improvement by the cohort members. They were real strong.

Mr. McDaniel reflected on the meaning of the term *cohort*. He said, “It’s a group of like-minded individuals that came together for the purposes of learning.” He said previously, “We grew together. Because we were in it together, we were devoted to live our research. We were committed to the research information that we received. We did much reading, research, and application.”

Earlier Mrs. Clark described changes in the building as a result of cohort collaboration. The changes that occurred during the formal classes were not sustained after the coursework ended. The cohort member principal moved to a different building at the conclusion of the coursework. Two other cohort members moved into Title I positions, leaving the school with 4 cohort members where there had been 7 during the formal coursework.

Mrs. Clark remarked about the changes that have occurred:

When we were able to bring people who weren’t in the cohort in and everybody was working together as a team and we were building community, and now the culture has changed. It’s hard to have dialogue and discussion. Teachers are complaining about the way things are now (with the new principal) and nobody feels as if they have any input to make a change or a chance to do something to change the way things are. We feel powerless about making suggestions about how things could be and how to make suggestions on how something could work better.

Mrs. Russell felt the cohort experience changed the members. When asked to elaborate on what changes long-term and short-term have occurred in the building and the district as a result of this cohort, she said:

To both of these questions I would still say that those that participated in the cohort seemed to have benefited the most. When there is a workshop that is district-wide I find that often the presenters are those that participated in the cohort. I noticed that initially and even more so now, I feel that cohort members are involved in building leadership teams. There are teams like the PBS (Positive Behavior Support), and building leadership teams.

### **Collaboration – Cohort Members**

Collaborative activities were discussed by every cohort member. The collaborative nature of the program was its hallmark. Reflecting on the relationships has been a part of every cohort response.

As she described the changes in the district, Mrs. Oliverio emphasized the closeness of the cohort members. “I can see a cohort member and I feel that we are strong leaders within the district and we are all ‘on the same page’ and that will never go away,” she said.

Collaboration and collegiality was a strong component of Mr. Sutton’s cohort experience. He was aware of the diversity of members of the cohort. “People came in contact with people who weren’t part of the same subgroups or cliques. People networked with others they would never have met.”

Mr. Sutton also felt that change is continuing after the cohort. “When you see a policy change, you see immediate results, but the changes have been more subtle due to

the length of time that the cohort is working,” he replied to the question asking what is different in the culture of his school as a result of the cohort.

Mr. Sutton elaborated, “Much of the growth that appeared that people made they were able to sustain it. I can think of many others that have sustained their professional growth. They talk differently now and the level of conversation is different.”

A change in the cooperativeness between administrator and teachers became evident as the cohort progressed. Mrs. Clark noted that the administrator in her building became more collaborative with the teachers and a greater sense of community developed. “The leadership in our school became more cooperative,” she says of her principal that was also a cohort member. Collaboration is the hallmark of learning communities and this collaboration between administrators and teachers was the goal of the school district’s partnership with the university.

The inclusion of principals in the cohort provided opportunities to create a common vision between administrators and staff as well as a common body of knowledge, both theoretical and practical.

When asked if he had seen a change in the district as a result of the cohort, Mr. McDaniel reflected on the collaborative nature of the cohort. He replied:

The teachers live and rely on those cohort experiences. Those who were involved in the cohort affected a lot more people than just those who were in the cohort. There has been turnover in central administration, but those of us who have been a part of the cohort always can just look at each other and know that we have the same goals.

Mrs. Clark felt that the culture of the school was changed by the cohort collaboration. When asked about the cultural differences in her school, she said:

I saw the teachers who were in the cohort working together and sharing both inside and outside of the classroom. The administrators listened to feedback from the cohort, both from the teachers and the professors who were part of the cohort. They were listening to what those of us involved in this program had to say. Some of the changes that have come about are a result of the fact that we did have the cohort.

### **Leadership – Non-Cohort Members**

Four of the 5 non-cohort members remarked on the change in leadership initiatives by cohort members.

Mrs. Matthews was not encouraging about the short-term and long-term changes in the district following the cohort. She stated:

I think short-term there were a lot of things put into place and a lot of it came from cohort leadership that was in the school at the time, not long-term. There's been some turnover in our staff here so I think that has impacted as well as some of what was in place, not that it's not any longer but it's just followed through with in a different way, and that has been a long-term effect of what we initially had started and is now being carried out in a different way.

Mrs. Kuhn was not positive about the changes in leadership positions following the cohort. When asked what changes in the district are attributable to the cohort, she recalled one member who has applied for other leadership positions in the district, but only one member who has moved into a leadership position. "The people in the top administrative positions are the same. I don't really see the people from the cohort having an opportunity to advance themselves within our district," she responded.

When asked about the sustainability of the effects of the collaborative, Mrs. Rodgers was not hopeful. Although she felt the cohort members have influenced interactions within their individual schools, she does not feel that there is an impact on

the administrative positions that might have been available to cohort members. “I feel that the district didn’t have a use for them and all of their skills.”

When asked his thoughts about learning through a cohort, Mr. Van Horn said, “I think the cohort changed the district.” He named three teachers from one of his buildings that he feels have become leaders within school committees and workshop presentations and two within another.

Mr. Paul did not see any difference in the district as a result of the cohort. He said previously that he assumed that the teachers were in their positions because they wanted to be there. He was unaware of any changes in the leadership within the district.

### **Knowledge – Non-Cohort Members**

The knowledge brought to the district with the doctoral collaborative impacted many beyond the members themselves. Four of the 5 non-cohort colleagues discussed changes in the district as a result of the increased knowledge of cohort members.

Mrs. Kuhn also voiced concern over the sustainability of the effects of the cohort members and their expanding expertise. She reflected, “At one point one of the cohort members was more vocal about their knowledge, but with the leadership change, she’s taking more of a back seat, because she’s afraid that she may be intimidating the leadership.”

Mr. Van Horn previous responded that the teachers are empowered with all kinds of knowledge that has been used to improve the district. They have mentored him with pedagogical strategies, led workshops to present new ideas, and changed the attitude of

teachers throughout his buildings. He said, “The teachers throughout the district have excitement and knowledge. We can bounce off each other for ideas.”

Mr. Paul was disparaging about the pedagogical changes resulting from the cohort. In response to the question asking if the cohort made any difference in the teaching of his school, he replied:

I can only tell what other teachers are doing because I teach upper elementary and I get the kids from lower elementary. I have an idea of their standards. I also know that some of the things I think that we should teach, lower teachers are told that they don't have to teach it. Children are coming without basic writing skills and we're told, “Don't worry about mechanics, they need to get their thoughts on paper,” even though no one will be able to read it.

It is evident that the cohort goals and vision have not been shared with Mr. Paul, whether explicitly or by example.

Mrs. Rodgers remarked on the changes that occurred in her building because of the cohort.

The cohort changed them as educators. They were leaders within the classroom. They always wanted improve things for the students, and wanted to help other teachers accomplish this as well. They were always thinking of new and different ways to help the students.

Mrs. Matthews previously reflected on cohort members leading workshops, assisting the building through AYP. She responded to the question regarding short- and long-term changes with, “Short-term, they bring their experiences in a small group setting as we try to problem-solve and generate ideas of new strategies for learning.”

### **Collaboration – Non-Cohort Members**

The uniqueness of the partnership provided opportunities for cohort members to grow and develop collaborative relationships with each other. Most of the non-cohort

members were aware of their collaborative relationships as well as their collaborative sharing.

The interview questions were asked 1 year after the formal coursework of the cohort members. The previous literacy cohort had ended and the doctoral collaborative had been in place for 3 years. Mr. Paul responded to the question asking what the term *cohort* meant:

Um, I haven't heard all of the discussions but I heard it seemed there was team forming at Einstein and the district and it was called a cohort and they worked together and maybe became closer in their teaching. Beyond that, I don't know because I wasn't a part of that group.

The collaborative efforts of the 5 doctoral cohort members were not influential in changing the attitudes of Mr. Paul.

Previously Mrs. Matthews reflected on cohort members who used their newfound knowledge and leadership skills to collaborate with non-cohort colleagues. "When I first came to this school, if I came to a member of the cohort regarding lessons or students who were struggling, she would help with lessons and help problem solve," she responded to the question asking her to describe something that is different in the culture of her school as a result of the cohort.

When asked what the term *cohort* meant to her, Mrs. Rodgers described the excitement she witnessed among the cohort members. "The teachers enjoyed being together as a team, as a group of educators." She continued later with, "They helped one another and shared ideas about what was working best with the students."

Mrs. Kuhn witnessed "camaraderie, support and encouragement" as well as teachers who encourage others to use "research based data in directing instruction." There

was only one cohort member in her building and she did not have opportunity to see relationships among cohort members.

Mr. Van Horn remarked that cohort members have changed the culture of his school. When asked to describe something that is different in the culture of his school as a result of the cohort, he said:

Our students are more willing to learn and the teachers have become consultants with the entire staff. There is a willingness on the part of the entire staff to listen to all of the teachers and are more open to ideas wherever they are coming from. We are even beginning to get principals who are open to new ideas. In the past they were not always open to suggestions.

#### **Research Question #5: What were the drawbacks or negative aspects of participation in a learning cohort?**

#### **Cohort Members**

Mrs. Oliverio was the only cohort member who discussed problems within the relationships of cohort members. Mrs. Oliverio reminisced about how others seemed to judge cohort members at the onset of the doctoral program. She was a member of the first master's cohort and found the addition of members from the entire district to be a vast change from the close-knit group of the first cohort. Reflecting on her initial comments about members who judged others, she commented:

When I spoke about how people seemed to judge each other at the beginning, in retrospect, it was much ado about nothing. Being together and having the experiences together built relationships that overrode the initial feelings of judgment. We were together for three years, and occasionally we would get on each other's nerves. The collaborative relationships totally outweighed the little petty stuff. That occurs everywhere when you get strong personalities together. We are all leaders and had small conflicts.

Mrs. Oliverio was the only cohort member to address concerns about sharing the cohort with administrators. Two of the four elementary principals participated in the doctoral cohort. She supported the superintendent who was also an instructor, but regretted having administrators as members. She noted, “We would have become stronger and more effective if we had not had building administrators as part of the cohort. The superintendent was very supportive, and open. He was the reason for the cohort.”

Opportunities for collaboration changed. Mr. Sutton noted the loss of the relationships following the completion of the formal coursework. He replied:

Unfortunately, one problem is that we don’t have the things in place to have us all meet like we were able to. That was one of the goals of the cohort that didn’t happen. We are much more isolated now from people in other buildings. In the cohort we got together with them all the time.

Mrs. Russell was asked to elaborate on the relationship among cohort members. She responded:

From the viewpoint of when we were taking classes together, we had a tendency to work together, because our expectations were similar and we were going through coursework together and we needed each other. Since the end of the coursework and people don’t meet together we don’t have as close of a relationship. There still is the friendliness and the willing to help each other. We all have something different that we are involved in and I still feel that we’re still on the same page, but we’re working on different things that don’t bring us together.

Mrs. Clark enjoyed her experiences in the cohort. There were drawbacks that she felt could have been improved on. She would change the structure of the collaborative following completion of the formal coursework.

If the true meaning of cohort is used, it’s a fantastic opportunity. You are not by yourself. It’s a chance to work together with people of like minds. Initially a cohort should spend more time to get to know each other more, to address biases and prior assumptions about each other. Take more time to evolve a relationship. Get to know the people more, because they are the ones who ultimately will help

you get through. I am thrilled that people are getting their degrees and working on them, but it would have been better if we could have all gotten them together. I envisioned everyone walking across the stage at the same time. It would have been a higher degree of satisfaction not just for yourself, but for others as well. We still feel good for each other, but it would have been better to have all finished at the same time. I think earlier in the cohort many people had to drop out. If the support system had been stronger and more closely bonded together, it could have been prevented and many of them who dropped out might not have left the program.

Mr. McDaniel expressed negative comments regarding the district's lack of support for the cohort.

There has been change and the biggest change has been in the area of the greatest concern for the school board. They were initially concerned that teachers would leave the district after they finished with either the master's or doctoral cohort. Most of those people themselves are gone. There was a lot of misinformation spread that was spread. There were those who did not participate but communicated misinformation about the cohort. An administrator said he was sorry that the district paid for the teachers to get their master's and doctorate. He said that money could have been spent on kids. My response was that they spent it on teachers who are standing in front of our students every day.

### **Non-Cohort Members**

Mrs. Kuhn also voiced concern over the sustainability of the effects of the cohort members and their expanding expertise. She reflected, "At one point one of the cohort members was more vocal about their knowledge, but with the leadership change, she's taking more of a back seat, because she's afraid that she may be intimidating the leadership."

Some within the district did not support either the first master's (literacy) cohort or the subsequent doctoral (leadership) cohort. The superintendent at the time was an initiator of the program with the support of university faculty. He convinced the school board to support and fund the program. There were board members who worried the new

graduates would leave the district and not use their new degrees to enhance the district.

This did not happen. Only 3 members of either the literacy cohort or the leadership cohort left the district. One retired following the completion of the coursework. Another became a principal in another district. All others remain in the district.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions and experiences of school district teachers of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers as a result of the doctoral cohort that was developed in partnership between the university and the school district. It also examined how the doctoral cohort worked from the multiple perspectives of cohort members and their non-cohort colleagues. This chapter presented the philosophy of the partnership and the design of the program as well as an examination of the data that resulted from this phenomenological study. Each research question has been addressed within the parameters of the thematic responses. The analysis of the data disclosed the three themes of collaboration, leadership, and knowledge. Responses of cohort and non-cohort members have been presented within each research question. Both cohort and non-cohort members shared the same thematic emphasis. It is evident that the district impact of the cohort was relatively equal within both cohort and non-cohort participants.

This dissertation will conclude with Chapter V and a discussion of the results of this phenomenological study. Recommendations for further research will also be provided.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH**

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of a doctoral leadership cohort on changes in the district, school culture, and teachers in a small Midwestern urban school district. The goal is to describe the experiences of both participants in the doctoral cohort as well as school district staff who chose not to be participants in any of the cohort partnerships between the school district and the university. This phenomenology is an extension on the study done by Kopy (2005) of the same cohort. As suggested by Kopy, it assesses the viewpoint of non-cohort members as well.

The final chapter of this study will present a brief history of the partnership and participants. The theoretical base for this study will be explained so that the reader may gain an understanding of the foundation and objectives of the partnership. A brief review of the methodology precedes the findings. Next will be a discussion of the findings organized by themes of collaboration, leadership, and knowledge. The findings will be followed by a discussion of the research findings and implications for further research based on the discussions in Chapter IV. This chapter will end with a personal reflection.

#### **History of the University and School District Partnership**

The origination of the educational partnership came from members of the school district with the then-superintendent providing the impetus for its creation. The initial

cohort partnership was a master's degree program in reading designed to improve student achievement as well as to create the internal capacity of faculty to sustain this achievement. The first partnership was conceptualized as an extended professional development in educational pedagogy (Muchmore et al., 2004). Following the master's program, a doctoral program that focused on educational leadership was designed and implemented. The doctoral program featured coursework, academic content, and rigor similar to the on-campus program. Courses were often extended for more than one semester and, in many cases, several courses were grouped together. The practice of extending a course over more than one semester provided opportunities to revisit theoreticians from differing perspectives, as well as incorporate learning theory with leadership practices. This framework provided for a more intensive study of leadership concepts and their integration with current practice.

### **Theoretical Base for This Study**

The theoretical base for this study is a collaborative model for doctoral leadership programs. Creation of collaborative learning communities has the potential to develop educational leaders who can enhance organizational performance.

The second theoretical base for this study is the development of teacher leaders. Teacher leaders who influence others to improve practice are addressing the needs of educational reform. Teacher leadership is the path to educational reform.

The third theoretical underpinning for this study is adult learning. Collaborative learning communities are the model for adult learning. Knowledge gained in a

community creates greater satisfaction (Maslow, 1954). Adult learning was one of the theories that the university–school district collaborative used to design the partnership.

### **Methodology**

Ten subjects from the school district were interviewed. Subjects included 5 elementary teachers who participated in the doctoral cohort in educational leadership through the partnership between the school district and the university, and 5 elementary teachers who were employed by the school district during the timeframe the cohort was held, but chose not to participate in the cohort. Experiences of cohort members were explored through this phenomenology and also the perception of fellow staff members who were non-participants. I was the investigator as well as a member of the cohort group. All of the subjects were also professional colleagues. As a music teacher in multiple schools, I have also had interactions with each of the subjects over many years. Two separate interviews took place with each of the 10 participants. The interviews occurred over a 3-week period. All participants were assured of their anonymity. The interview questions were open-ended and questions were adjusted to assist in deeper understanding. The subjects received a transcription of the interview and each was checked for accuracy to prevent any errors or misinterpretations of the meaning. This also provided an opportunity to clarify the subjects' perspectives. A list of the questions is included in Appendix A.

Following the recorded interviews, transcriptions were created of each interview. The transcriptions were coded and sorted, and analysis began immediately with the data collection. Many readings and re-readings helped identify themes mentioned by each

participant. The data were sorted into broad themes or issues and a tally sheet was created. Careful descriptions have been made of the participants and their positions within the district. Conclusions have been reached based on the preponderance of the themes that have arisen from analysis of the data. The criteria were 65-70% recurrence in the analysis of the interviews.

### **Findings**

The central research question guiding this study was to discover the multiple perceptions and descriptions of changes in the district, culture of the school, and other teachers that occurred in the school district as a result of the doctoral cohort. The respondents were profuse in their descriptions of changes that occurred in the areas of collaboration, knowledge, and leadership. The results will be discussed within the three main themes.

#### **Collaboration**

All of the participants discussed the collaboration of cohort members among themselves, and with other teachers. The school district–university collaborative was a unique approach to a doctoral leadership program. It is evident from the responses that the goal of the partnership to create a collaborative culture was achieved.

The ramifications of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 require continually improving practices that create greater accountability for student achievement. Leithwood et al. (2002) suggested that changing the structure of schools into a collaborative culture would improve commitment by educators for educational reform. The school district

collaborative was designed to change the culture of the school district and it is evident from the responses that it created a collaborative culture.

Examples of collaboration were prominent in the non-cohort member responses. It is apparent that there was a concerted effort by cohort members to make themselves accessible to other staff members. Instances of collaboration with teachers and administrators in guiding a school through AYP, supporting instructional strategies for colleagues, devising unique lessons to assist others, as well as modeling lessons, abound.

Non-cohort members were very aware of the collaborative nature of the cohort and the vision and goals for district improvement. Mrs. Rodgers said that cohort members wanted to be more effective with students and other teachers. Mrs. Matthews was aware that there was a common goal and that was to share information with non-cohort members. Mr. Van Horn received assistance with instructional strategies and felt that the cohort members served as consultants to him as well as other non-cohort staff. Mrs. Kuhn, too, described instances when cohort members gave her information on data-driven instruction.

Collaborative learning creates a shared organizational culture in which “groupness” creates common beliefs, values, and shared basic assumptions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Schein, 1992). Collaborative learning groups also create supportive learning environments where acceptance of self and others occurs. The interactions among the diverse cohort members from all areas in the district, and the interactions with diverse non-cohort colleagues is an example of acceptance of themselves as well as others. Mrs. Rodgers, a non-cohort member, witnessed the relationships among the cohort members. “The teachers enjoyed being together as a team, as a group of educators,” she

said. Cohort members have discussed the support that they receive from other members. Mr. Sutton, a cohort member, described their relationship, “They were just supportive of each other . . . there weren’t any cliques.” Mr. Van Horn sought out cohort members for assistance on strategies to teach new concepts. The members of the school district cohort have created a collaborative community in which people openly seek out assistance between cohort members and between non-cohort colleagues. Each has enjoyed the collegiality, camaraderie, and support of their shared learning community. The personal as well as the collective values of the cohort community were shaped through the collaborative. Non-cohort members were able to articulate the goals of the cohort. Non-members were also able to witness members sharing their knowledge with those outside of their partnership.

Cohort members were the greatest beneficiaries of this collaboration. Mr. McDaniel feels a strong responsibility to ensure that his building runs smoothly. He talks in terms of systems thinking. Mrs. Clark feels that she has been able to contribute to her school community through collaboration with her principal. Mrs. Russell says that she shares a connection between cohort members. Mrs. Oliverio willingly took on leadership positions to improve her school community.

The structure of the doctoral cohort was designed to change members’ professional relationships and practices. Opportunities were provided by the creators of this doctoral collaborative to encourage alternative perspectives within a trusting collaborative environment. Leadership theories were tested within members’ respective buildings. Theorists such as Bolman and Deal (2003), Kouzes and Posner (2002), Senge (1990), and Burns (1979) became the model for their interaction with fellow teachers and

administrators. Each of these theorists articulated the role of leadership in change, and change was the goal of the cohort. Cohort members shared these theories and strategies with their non-cohort colleagues throughout the district. The goal of the program designers to create a shared vision and develop a culture of shared responsibility was realized. Cohort members developed strong relationships between themselves and as well as their non-cohort colleagues, and developed a sense of community within their buildings. They tested out leadership theory on the job. As Mr. Sutton reflected, “All of the cohort members feel as if they have someone to talk to about education.” He also feels that cohort members supported each other throughout the formal coursework. Mrs. Russell felt more comfortable in relationships with teachers outside of the cohort as a result of the collaboration. Mrs. Oliverio identified with other cohort members as a strong leader, one who shares the same goals for the district as other cohort members.

Discussed first in the literature review are concepts of adult learning. Cohort learning models address the principles of adult learning. The principles of adult learning encourage strong relationships with peers and capitalize on the roles that experience plays in adult learning. The formation of the school district cohort addressed those models of adult learning. Mr. Sutton said, “You find yourself interacting with people you would not normally have chosen. In a cohort everyone is there by choice.” Mrs. Oliverio, Mrs. Russell, Mr. McDaniel, and Mrs. Clark all noted strong relationships with other cohort members. Participation in adult learning is often motivated by the social experiences that have shaped their lives (Merriam et al., 2007). Mr. Sutton discussed opportunities to network with others that he would not have met outside of the collaborative. Another concept of adult learning postulates that critical reflection is a goal (Mezirow, 1990). Mr.

Sutton, Mrs. Russell, and Mr. McDaniel all discussed growth in reflection that has changed their teaching. The school district collaborative recognized the adult learners of the program as having a rich reservoir of experiences to share, ready to learn because of a shared social role, and more problem-centered—another characteristic of adult learners. Affiliation and mutual learning are important concepts in adult learning as well as cohort learning. Modeling this program on the principles of adult learning created the successes that have been observed throughout the interviews. Cohort members have changed their worldviews, initiated leadership opportunities, and created innovative solutions to problems through a very social environment. Cohort members talked about instances of receiving encouragement from fellow students, supporting each other through difficult courses, and feeling a connection with each other even after the formal coursework ended. One cohort member described the experience as being part of a family. Another described his experience as a member of a tribe. The cohort members themselves benefited from this extended relationship with their peers. Comments were made by every cohort member regarding the collegial and personal relationships that were developed by participation in the cohort.

This support was a direct reflection of the cohort experience. Collaborative learning creates a collective knowledge and skill greater than would be possible individually. Four of the 5 non-cohort respondents retell of multiple instances of members sharing with the greater community.

Cohort members have reflected on their ability to collaborate with administrators in important decisions. They discussed instances when administrators have listened to feedback from members, and witnessed change as a result. Learning communities shape

personal and collective values and are laboratories for transformational leadership (Burns, 1979; Norris et al., 2002). This cohort became a collaborative learning community. The collaboration had a positive impact on 100% of the respondents.

## **Leadership**

This cohort has focused on educational leadership. Creation of leaders in the district who could create sustainable change has been the cohort goal. Members' professional practice has been changed as evidenced by comments from non-cohort and cohort members. Every non-cohort member mentioned the display and growth of cohort member leadership practices. Mrs. Rodgers was representative of non-cohort members when she said, "They would always volunteer to lead this group or the next or to be in charge of a group." It was apparent to the peers of this learning cohort that leadership capabilities were present and were being used to improve the practice of the entire community. Improved skills and knowledge were noted by every respondent. The growth of their leadership skills is evident from the responses of members and non-members alike. The structure of the cohort provided a model for effective leadership practices. Sharing their new knowledge with each other gave them a confidence to share with non-cohort colleagues. Consensus building is an important skill for both cohort members and educational leaders. Their leadership skills have transformed the relationship between themselves and their colleagues into one which is collaborative and is modeled after their own educational experiences. Their leadership theory has changed their leadership practice.

Members have been sought out to lead professional development activities. Members have chaired committees and presented at workshops throughout the district. Members have used their leadership skills to mentor colleagues. Members have become resources for non-cohort colleagues. Mrs. Clark said, "I began to think of myself as a leader." Mrs. Oliverio feels confident as a leader in her building and the district as well. Mr. McDaniel has understood the concept of systems thinking that involves all elements of an organization influencing each other. He is addressing the needs of his building in a systematic way.

The individual personal and professional growth of the teachers involved was combined so that the district had a growth that was proportionately larger than the number of members involved.

### **Knowledge**

Cohort members were immersed in coursework for 4 years. They had opportunities to discuss their acquired knowledge with fellow cohort members. They shared a body of knowledge that was unique to their group. They used this knowledge to improve the teaching of their non-cohort colleagues. When Mr. Van Horn reiterated, "They are empowered with all kinds of knowledge that most of us don't have," he reflected many other non-cohort members' admiration of the skills that cohort members developed during their participation in the collaborative. One example is an emphasis on data-based instruction that was disseminated among non-cohort colleagues. Another is their willingness to share strategies with non-cohort colleagues.

Creation of a collective sense of accomplishment is evident from their responses. Knowledge and acceptance of themselves and others were prominent in their responses. Mr. Sutton felt more professional and felt that his cohort colleagues were also more professional. Displays of knowledge by cohort members were prominent in the responses of non-cohort members. Assisting non-cohort colleagues with teaching strategies, modeling collaborative learning, leading workshops, and helping restructure a school are examples of non-cohort responses. It was evident from non-cohort colleagues that the cohort members were eager to share their knowledge. They also shared the vision and goals that they developed for the district with their non-cohort colleagues.

Cohort members also shared their enthusiasm for their new learning. They remarked about the sense of confidence regarding their professional abilities. They used their theoretical knowledge and turned it into practice. This study agrees with that done by Barnett et al. (2000) of faculty using cohorts in educational leadership programs. They too discovered mutual support and team learning creation as a result of the cohort structure.

### **Findings in Light of the Existing Research Studies**

This study builds on the case study done by Kopy (2005) of the same cohort. She suggested a return to the same site to determine the long-term effects of this partnership. As Kopy recommended in her study of the same cohort, further research should seek to assess “the perceptions of all the stakeholders in the partnership” (p. 151). Based on her suggestion, the current study assesses non-cohort colleagues as well as cohort members

that may have been included in the previous study in order to capture the perceptions of stakeholders with a variety of viewpoints in relation to the partnership.

The literature of postsecondary cohort learning will be enriched by this study. This phenomenology provides insights into an alternate method of program delivery that develops educational leaders. While this study adds to the literature on cohort learning, it provides a view from the perspective of colleagues of cohort members who were not doctoral cohort students. Exploring the perceptions of both participants of cohorts as well as their colleagues is unique. It broadens understanding of cohorts in doctoral leadership programs and provides an additional dimension to the study of cohort learning. This study found no instances of personal discord mentioned among respondents. The term *participant serendipity* seems to apply to the 5 cohort respondents.

This study has explored students' experiences as they participated in a doctoral cohort and may be used to aid universities in planning future cohort learning programs. Cohort learning is a unique method that produces an innovative approach to creating a community of learners. Understanding the processes and influences of a community of learners will be enhanced by this study (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001). Price (2005) uses the term *differential impact*. This study adds to the information of the impact of learning cohorts on the doctoral students as well as to the school district by exploring doctoral students' first-hand experiences as suggested by Barnett and Muse (1993).

Developing leaders from the abundant talent of teachers is necessary to establish agents of change and pedagogical reform (Leander & Osborne, 2008). This study will assist in providing information to universities as they plan programs in educational leadership.

This study confirms the findings of a study of a collaborative doctoral leadership program by Mountford (2005). He discovered an increase in transformative learning that changed leadership behaviors. This study also underlines the findings of Barnett and Muse (1993) of a cohort educational leadership program. They too discovered that the cohort structure creates an environment conducive to improving the skills and self-confidence that are necessary for educational leaders. This study can help shed light on the processes and outcomes of student learning communities and can add to the research that shows the dynamics that influence learners in group settings as suggested by Saltiel and Reynolds (2001). This study also adds to the volume of research on educational administration graduate programs. Barnett et al. (2000) stated that existing cohort research is in its infancy and relies on limited samples.

### **Summary of Results**

This investigation sought to discover whether increased teacher leadership resulted from this cohort, and if the teachers' roles or participation changed in the buildings or district. The results of this study show that increased leadership resulted from the participation in the doctoral cohort partnership between the university and the school district. Members achieved a goal of the cohort designers to create a sense of shared responsibility. As cohort members, they became resource teachers and collaborators with their non-cohort colleagues. Kouzes and Posner (2002) encouraged a collaborative environment to build a climate of trust and support face-to-face interactions. They were able to set the example for their non-cohort colleagues as leaders who encouraged others to improve their standards. They modeled the collaborative environment of their doctoral

cohort. A collaborative environment improves performance and creates a climate of trust. This became an interdependence that improved the culture and climate of their buildings as many of the non-cohort respondents noted. They created a sense of community with shared values and goals. The doctoral students themselves felt a strong sense of attainment of leadership characteristics. Cohort members applied their leadership knowledge immediately to the creation of a larger community of learners within their own settings as exemplified by Mr. Van Horn's reflection of members acting as resource teachers, Mrs. Matthews' comments regarding leading a school through AYP, and Mrs. Rodgers' perception that students learned better.

This investigation also sought out the perspectives of the respondents on short- and long-term district changes. Short-term changes in the district involved improved practice and the development of a shared vision with non-cohort colleagues. Improving practice is the first step in a path toward accountability for improved student achievement. A few of the respondents discussed changes in the roles of teachers and administrators. Others said that these changes were short-lived. The short-term changes in administrative-teacher collaboration were not sustained.

Mrs. Clark discussed a change in the relationship between fellow cohort members and her new principal. The cohort principal changed positions at the conclusion of the coursework and the collaborative nature of that relationship has ended. Mrs. Clark said,

. . . nobody feels as if they have any input to make a change or a chance to do something to change the way things are. We feel powerless about making suggestions about how things could be and how to make suggestions on how something could work better.

Mr. Sutton too feels that there are few long-term changes within the district. The initiatives that the cohort designers began have ended with changes in leadership. Mr. Sutton said, “The long-term things, I’m reluctant to say how systemic they were. Definitely individuals showed long-term changes.”

Long-term the district maintains the collaborative relationships among cohort and non-cohort colleagues, but little has changed in creating a collaborative relationship with administrators. Both the district superintendent and assistant superintendent left the district following the coursework. The new superintendent has hired new administrators from outside of the district. Cohort vision and values are not shared with new administrators.

This study also sought to discover the drawbacks of participation in a learning cohort. All of the cohort members miss the professional and social relationships of the program. The members spent 3 years together in classes that met biweekly and had frequent contact with others across the district. District-wide meetings where all levels and subject matter faculty converge are rare.

Two of the four elementary principals participated in the doctoral cohort. Mrs. Oliverio was the only cohort member to address concerns about sharing the cohort with administrators. She supported the superintendent who was also an instructor, but regretted having administrators as members. She noted, “We would have become stronger and more effective if we had not had building administrators as part of the cohort. The superintendent was very supportive, and open. He was the reason for the cohort.”

The superintendent at the time was an initiator of the program with the support of university faculty. He convinced the school board to support and fund the program. After

the first year, the funding for the program was withdrawn. The number of members decreased, but it is not possible to determine if the cause was financial or expected attrition.

### **Implications of Study for Theory**

Adult learning theory is embodied in cohort learning. Adult learning theory is included because many theorists describe knowledge construction and learning as a collaborative and social experience, such as that used in cohort learning. Knowles' (1980) learning theory suggests that adults' self-identity is derived from their experiences. Not only do they call on their past learning experiences, they become resources for each other for learning events. Mezirow (1996) discusses transformative learning that is both situated and social. Both he and Senge (1990) discuss a change in one's worldview as a result of learning. Dewey (1986) and Vygotsky (1978) concur that learning is mediated by shared social experiences. This cohort was a model of adult learning as well as a model of professional development that used personalized approaches and addressed differing needs of students. Basing a doctoral program on the principles of adult learning ensures opportunities to engage learners in a variety of ways at every stage of their careers.

Cohort members reflected strongly on the collaborative nature of this program. They reminisced about the camaraderie and social nature of the coursework. The desire of every cohort member to continue their association with cohort members and recreate the cohort experience is an affirmation of the success of the program.

### **Cohort Learning**

The school district cohort was based on the concept of a professional learning community. Creating a shared vision, goal setting, and communication among the cohort members was a basic premise of the program developers (Muchmore et al., 2004). This program addressed the needs to create a doctoral program that provides educational leadership development that blends theory with practice (Lambert et al., 2002; Lieberman, 1999).

### **Implications for Doctoral Cohorts**

While this study adds to the literature on cohort learning, it provides a view from the perspective of colleagues of cohort members who were not doctoral cohort students. Exploring the perceptions of both participants of cohorts as well as their colleagues is unique. It broadens understanding of cohorts in doctoral leadership programs and provides an additional dimension to the study of cohort learning.

The findings collected from this study show that the doctoral leadership collaborative between the university and the school district was effective in improving the leadership practices of the cohort members. Cohort members became resources for instructional leadership practices to their non-cohort colleagues. Those teachers in this study who were not participants in the doctoral cohort had positive feelings about the cohort members. Both cohort and non-cohort members felt that the cohort members developed greater knowledge and leadership practices as a result of their participation.

The perceptions of both cohort and non-cohort members regarding short-and long-term changes in the district was the same. Both groups agreed that the strength of the cohort was greatest during the formal coursework under the leadership of the administrators who instituted the partnership. The long-term changes occurred within the cohort members themselves and their improved knowledge and leadership skill acquisition.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The unique nature of doctoral cohorts requires additional research. Because educational leadership programs are designed to improve the practices of future leaders, further studies might focus on the impact of cohorts on improving student achievement. Due to the unique nature of educational cohorts, another suggestion for further research is a study of the long-term ramifications of doctoral cohort programs. Additional studies might address the impact of administrative changes on the gains made by the school district cohort. Comparison of doctoral student successes and/or attrition rates of traditional doctoral leadership programs to cohort learning would also be an important topic for future research.

Issues of social justice are important considerations in creating collaborative communities. A study of changes in perceptions of race, ethnicity, or gender as a result of an educational collaborative would be informative.

### **Concluding Comments**

As a member of this cohort, I feel, as Bentley et al. (2004) stated, that participation was a life-changing event. I have been changed as a teacher, learner, and member of my school and home community. I hope that members of this collaborative have opportunities to become educational leaders who will focus on collaborative leadership and model the collaborative structure that they experienced as members of this doctoral leadership cohort.

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**Appendix A**  
**Subject Interview Questions**

## Subject Interview Questions

### Cohort Members

1. Please share how long you have been in the district, at your school and your subject area.
2. What does the term *cohort* mean to you? How did the cohort members of the school district partnership reflect or change your expectations of a cohort?
3. Describe the relationships among cohort members, as you perceive them. What impact did you feel that the cohort had on your interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort? How did the relationships evolve?
4. How has your teaching changed since your participation in the cohort? Explain.
5. Do you feel that you assumed roles of leadership as a result of participation in the cohort? What are specific examples of teacher leadership that you can attribute to participation in the cohort?
6. Schein (1992) defines culture as “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12). Describe something that is different in the culture of your school as a result of the cohort.
7. What changes, both long term and short term, have occurred in the building as a result of the educational leadership cohort? Please provide examples.
8. Reflecting on your experience with the cohort, what advice would you give to anyone considering a similar program?

### Non-Cohort Members

1. Please share how long you have been in the district, at you school and your subject area.
2. What does the term *cohort* mean to you? How did the cohort members' discussion of the school district partnership reflect or impact your perceptions of the cohort? Based on your interactions with members of the cohort, what were you impressions of the cohort? In retrospect do you wish you would have participated in the cohort?
3. Describe the relationships among cohort members as you perceived them. What impact did you feel that the cohort had on your interactions with teachers both inside and outside of the cohort? How did the relationships evolve?
4. Have you seen a change in the teaching of the members of the cohort? Please provide a concrete example of an attitude change or a change in their teaching practices. Explain.
5. Would you describe any of the cohort members as leaders? If so, give examples of their leadership. Can you attribute this to participation in the cohort?
6. Schein (1992) defines culture as "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 12). Describe something that is different in the culture of your school as a result of the cohort.
7. What changes, both long term and short term, have occurred in the building as a result of the educational leadership cohort? Please provide examples.
8. Reflecting on your experience with the cohort, what advice would you give to anyone considering a similar program?

## **Appendix B**

### **Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval**

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board



Date: September 12, 2008

To: Van Cooley, Principal Investigator  
Sharon Davis, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair *Amy Naugle*

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-08-15

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "A Case Study Examining the Perceptions of Members and Non-members of a Doctoral Cohort in Educational Leadership in a Small Midwestern Urban School" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 12, 2009