A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE IDEAL COMPONENTS OF AN ORIENTATION

FOR A DISTANCE EDUCATION DOCTOR OF EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

Kristy Ann Motte

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model for a distance education (DE) Doctor of Education (EdD) program orientation based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators. As students pursue a DE EdD, they must navigate a variety of stages and may require different levels of support at each stage. To develop a model that bridges the different stages of the EdD, this study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) How do DE EdD students persist in each stage of the doctoral journey? (b) How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities? (c) What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE EdD programs? To answer these questions, the researcher collected data through surveys, student, non-persister, faculty, and alumni interviews, and focus groups with faculty members from two different institutions. The data from individual programs were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding and then cross-case analysis occurred across the different programs to generate the model for an orientation to DE EdD programs. This study found that five types of support were vital throughout the doctoral journey. As a result, institutional, departmental, faculty, peer, and familial support components were integrated into a three-part (i.e., entry, coursework, and candidacy) orientation to DE EdD programs.

Keywords: orientation, Doctor of Education, online, attrition, retention, doctoral persistence, distance education, scaffolded support, family orientation, familial integration

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List of Abbreviations

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED)

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)

Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

Distance Education (DE)

Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC)

Doctor of Education Degree (EdD)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Leader Scholar Communities (LSC)

Learning Management System (LMS)

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Problem of Practice Dissertation (POP)

Research Training Environments (RTEs)

School of Education (SOE)

Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)

United States (US)

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

With a competitive job market in the U.S. (Ayers & Senne, 2011; Kitson, 2010), increasing unemployment (Hayes, 2010), and the return of the non-traditional student to the classroom (Inoue, 2007), distance education (DE) is continuing to gain popularity. While overall college enrollment declines, DE and blended learning enrollments continue to grow (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). To be considered a DE program, a program's courses must be "predominately" delivered at a distance, or to students who are separated from their instructor (DEAC, 2019, p.10). While there are many different DE models, including correspondence, multimedia, video/DVD, and telelearning, the online format is currently the most popular (Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Taylor, 2001a). According to Bacsich, Bourne, and Mayadas (2009), "Online education is established, growing, and here to stay" (p. 49). For the working professional or adult with a family looking to further his or her education with a degree, a distance program is flexible and convenient (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). For others, distance education provides the opportunity to complete a degree at a lower cost (Combe, 2005).

For educators and career switchers looking to pursue an advanced degree, DE is an attractive option. DE Doctor of Education (EdD) programs provide convenient, flexible, and economic options, but for these students, the outlook is not entirely positive. DE EdD students' potential risk of attrition from the program, at 60-70%, is much too high (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006) and is further complicated since the EdD, when compared to other disciplines, also has one of the longest time-to-degree completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Gravois, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006). For the students who do persist in DE

EdD programs, it may take up to 10 years for them to complete their degrees (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Gravois, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

With the presence of such long time-to-degree completion and high attrition rates, it is imperative for educators and researchers to consider how to increase persistence and success in DE EdD programs. One strategy that may impact persistence and success is the implementation of an orientation. Literature supports the value of and need for orientations (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Pintz & Posey, 2013; Putre, 2008; Salani, Albuja, & Azaiza, 2016) as they relate to the ability to increase student commitment and equip students for success (Lorenzetti, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). However, a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs does not currently exist. To develop such a model, one must better understand the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of students who persist in DE EdD programs. It is also important to understand how these persistent students successfully integrated into their programs and the support they obtained throughout the doctoral journey. It is also beneficial to consider the experiences of students who have departed from DE EdD programs to better understand how to prevent departure. Once these factors are understood, a model for an orientation to such a program can be developed to foster persistence and increase retention.

Background

Before a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs can be developed, it is important to begin with an understanding of the history and nature of EdD programs and distance education. This foundation provides the appropriate context for the problem this study explores.

EdD Programs

The first doctor of education degree program was created in 1920 by Harvard University (Saalbach, 1955) with the first DE EdD programs emerging in the 1970s at Nova University

(Evans, Hickery, & Davis, 2005). There are many similarities of EdDs and PhDs, such as the requirement of a graduate degree prior to admission and the inclusion of a dissertation or capstone project. However, the creation of the EdD was intended to balance research and practice (Townsend, 2002). The focus of the PhD tends to be mastery of the research process and creating scholars. The EdD still sought to produce competent researchers, but the purpose of that research was future implementation through classroom practice (Boote & Beile, 2005). Despite these differences, studies have revealed little difference between the two types of degrees (Baez, 2002; Perry, 2012). From inception, the identity of the EdD degree was uncertain, as it was nearly indistinguishable from its PhD counterparts (Golde & Walker, 2006; Perry, 2012).

The value and rigor of the EdD was questioned at the launch of the degree (Perry, 2013) and this discussion continues today as educators seek to balance the PhD's focus on theory and the EdD's focus on practice (Perry, 2012; Townsend, 2002). Perry (2012) concluded that because the identities of the EdD and PhD in education were not clearly distinguished, neither degree fully met the needs of their students by focusing on preparing practitioners (EdD) or researchers (PhD). Furthermore, it is rare for both EdD and PhD of education graduates to practically apply theoretical knowledge (Perry, 2012).

The EdD continues to evolve as institutions and educators evaluate the degree and consider how to truly distinguish it from the PhD. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED, 2018), which is comprised of a group of institutions, began examining the EdD in 2007. The project has grown to include over 100 schools united to distinguish the EdD from the PhD (CPED, 2018). CPED seeks to reclaim and redesign the EdD as part of the transition to the second generation of the EdD degree (CPED, 2018; Maxwell, 2003). This shift centers on the EdD as a professional practice degree where the workplace and doctoral learning

intersect (CPED, 2018; Maxwell, 2003). It is practitioner-focused rather than scholar-focused like the PhD and the first generation EdD (Boyce, 2012; Perry, 2012; Santovec, 2008).

As institutions work to differentiate the EdD from the PhD, attention is given to the structure and components of the degree. While the new EdD still develops researchers, the focus is on practical research to solve the problems faced by all facets of education (Boyce, 2012; CPED, 2018; Santovec, 2008). This is partially accomplished by the inclusion of signature pedagogies and a recommendation to replace the traditional dissertation with a capstone project that seeks to solve a real problem faced in the field of education (Boyce, 2012; CPED, 2018).

POP dissertations. Within the movement of second generation EdDs, a capstone project has emerged that redefines the dissertation (Storey & Maughan, 2015). The capstone project is labeled a Dissertation in Practice (DiP) or a Problem of Practice (POP) Dissertation; its emphasis is on the impact of the student's research and problem solving on his or her local context and workplace (Storey & Maughan, 2015). The format of CPED's DiP/POP is not as limited as the traditional five-chapter dissertation, though the five-chapter format is acceptable (Storey & Maughan, 2015). The DiP/POP may also be a compilation of publications over time, a professional portfolio, or involve collaboration with multiple students as a group dissertation (Storey & Maughan, 2015).

Signature pedagogies. As the EdD transitions between first and second-generations, researchers have also highlighted the importance of signature pedagogies in second-generation EdD programs. The signature pedagogy is a chosen structure that dictates what is taught, how it is taught, and the beliefs and values behind the profession (Shulman, 2005). Organizing EdD programs around signature pedagogies makes the program both meaningful and practical (Olson & Clark, 2009). According to Zambo (2011), signature pedagogies are essential for an effective

EdD program because they convey the "profession's implicit rules, values, and norms" (p. 263). A single prescribed signature pedagogy for all EdD programs does not exist; instead, a signature pedagogy typically reflects the values and nature of the program's institution, administration, and faculty.

One example of signature pedagogy in an EdD program is the Leader-Scholar Community (LSC). The LSC enlists a group of students and faculty and acknowledges both parties as experts- the students in their personal contexts and the faculty in research, writing, and scholarship (Olson & Clark, 2009). The family-like community meets face-to-face for 90 minutes each month to share resources, to encourage each other to stay on track with program milestones, and to provide "mutual support to all members, intellectually, practically, and socially" (Olson & Clark, 2009, p. 217). Students in LSCs testify of the benefits of the group and the its ability to help circumvent the feelings of isolation and uncertainty that often surface in the dissertation stage (Olson & Clark, 2009).

Another example of signature pedagogy for EdD programs is action research (Zambo, 2011). At Arizona State University, all EdD students perform action research every semester as they solve a problem at their worksites. The program then culminates with an action research dissertation (Zambo, 2011). As a result, Zambo (2011) discovered that students who graduated from the EdD program at Arizona State had indeed become stewards of practice (as asserted by CPED) "with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to identify educational problems, design solutions, and lead change" (p. 270).

Currently, the EdD is stuck somewhere in transition between the first and second generation as CPED continues to test and refine its studies. While the second generation EdD

aims to intersect doctoral learning and the workplace, DE EdD programs are a practical way for this to occur since completion of a DE program does not require relocation.

  Distance education. As DE is growing more quickly than other traditional methods of higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2010) and that growth is expected to continue (Beldarrain, 2006; Leeds et al., 2013). DE was birthed to provide access to education when residential attendance was not possible (Beldarrain, 2006). The wide spread availability of Internet access has allowed for a distance education to spread worldwide (Beldarrain, 2006; McGhee, 2012). There are many definitions for DE programs that include separation of the learner and instructor (King, Young, Drivere-Richmond, & Schrader, 2001; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004) and two-way communication or dialogue that engages students in learning (Keegan, 1986; Moore, 1993; Shearer, 2009). According to Moore (1993), DE is more than teachers and students separated by location; it is a pedagogical concept shaped by a program's structure, the way teachers and students in that structure interact, and the extent of self-direction required of the learner. While the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (2019) defines DE programs as those who deliver the majority of the coursework for their degrees, or 51% of each degree at a distance, for this study, a DE program is defined as a program of study in which at least 80% of the courses are delivered at a distance. This definition is borrowed from Allen and Seaman's (2013) classification of online courses that has been widely accepted since 2002. This excludes programs that are blended (offering only 30-79% of their courses online) or traditional (with less than 29% of their course offerings online; Allen & Seaman, 2010). Limited-residency programs may potentially be classified as DE since a required number of hours on campus has not been widely-established as what constitutes "limited-residency," though Terrell, Lohle, and Kennedy (2016) compare limited-residency programs to blended learning. If the limited-residency

program includes no more than 20% of its components in residence, it meets the requirements of the DE classification for this study as well.

The intersection of doctoral and DE degrees is becoming more common (Evans et al., 2005; Terrell et al., 2012; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004). Evans et al. (2005) noted "distance education has been an important, if implicit, part of doctoral education" (p. 129). For working professionals, DE doctoral degrees provide the opportunity to obtain a doctorate without having to relocate closer to an institution offering their desired degree, thus allowing them to remain in their profession (Kumar et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Terrell et al., 2012). In addition to the convenience DE doctoral programs offer, such programs are also growing in popularity because they are cost effective for institutions (Neely & Tucker, 2010). While research on DE doctoral programs is emerging and is still limited (Chipere, 2015; Evans, 2008), it does show that students are satisfied with "the quality of online instruction" and their programs' application "to their professional practice" (Kumar & Dawson, 2012, p. 4). Additional research focused specifically on DE EdD programs is needed (Evans, 2008; Evans et al., 2005).

While the perception of a DE degree was not as favorable as a traditional one to employers initially (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009), this perception is changing. Employers are now more receptive to candidates with online degrees, with many believing distance education is equal or superior to a traditional degree (Astani & Ready, 2010; Tabatabaei, 2012; Tharpe, 2014). Some employers believe that candidates who received their degree in a blended format have the advantages of online and traditional education: the ability to work and obtain field experience while also completing a degree that requires a face-to-face component (Tharpe, 2014). The perception of online degrees to employers is expected to become even more positive as DE continues to gain popularity (Astani & Ready, 2010; Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009;

Hartman, 2008; Tabatabaei, 2012; Tharpe, 2014). Baker (2014) noted "the medium of delivery method is not the determining factor in educational effectiveness" (p. 11). Instead, individual programs should be evaluated based on quality of instructional design and instructional practices (Baker, 2014; Rovai, 2003b).

Stages of the doctoral journey. Whether first or second generation and residential or online, the EdD requires that students navigate a variety of phases. Tinto (2012b) asserted the importance of studying the characteristics of persistence and how they vary across the stages of the doctoral journey since "the factors that appear significant at one stage of persistence may not be significant later on" (p. 238). In other words, the level and type of support needed by a student changes depending on the phase of the doctoral journey he or she is completing (Tinto, 2012b).

Gardner's (2007) socialization theory for doctoral students identified some of the challenges faced by doctoral students at different stages of the doctoral journey. Gardner's (2009) identity development model expands on these challenges by assigning them to three distinct phases where departure is possible if students do not receive the corresponding support for that stage. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) further defined these phases as the five stages of the doctoral journey. The stages identified by Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) are the entry stage, the knowledge and skill development stage, the consolidation stage, the research and scholarship stage, and the completion stage.

Entry stage. The first stage of the doctoral journey is the entry stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The entry stage involves the student selecting a program, considering his or her preexisting roles professionally and personally, evaluating his or her financial obligations, and adjusting his or her behaviors based on the importance of "proper diet, sleep, and exercise, meditation, and self-regulatory thinking to maximize cognitive functioning and goal directed

behavior" (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, p. 2). Finding a program with goals and expectations that match the goals and expectations of the student results in a sense of "fit" (Bragg, 1976) which is vital for persistence (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 2012b).

While students in the entry stage begin the doctoral journey with a foundation of knowledge from their personal contexts of practice (Olson & Clark, 2009), these contexts can vary greatly for each candidate. There is a disparity of content knowledge during entry in doctoral candidates (Golde, 2005; Leeds et al., 2013) that it is impossible to eliminate (Golde & Walker, 2006; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004). For EdD students, this is especially true for those coming from non-education backgrounds. Many students believe at least some of the responsibility of leveling the field and remedying the disparity of knowledge lies with faculty (Golde, 2005) while faculty may expect self-direction at the doctoral level, assuming doctoral students will seek additional resources to remediate on their own when necessary.

During the entry stage, it is also essential for students to realize and "project" the changes that occur throughout the doctoral journey and as a result of "open communication," he or she must monitor the feelings and needs of his or her family and set "clear boundaries and expectations" for the journey (West, 2014, p. 23). These conversations and a possible shifting of roles are especially important for women entering doctoral programs as increasing academic responsibilities may make balancing existing familial responsibilities difficult (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Sosin, & Spaulding, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding & Lunde, 2017). Hardy (2014) also recommended students organize and manage their time and physical surroundings, access the support offered by their institutions, and integrate with their peer community.

Gardner (2007, 2009) noted that in this early stage of the journey, difficulty with admission to a program, ambiguity of program requirements or expectations, the struggle of

learning to balance external commitments like work and family, a lack of direction, and inadequate peer support can hinder persistence. Like Tinto, Gardner (2009) emphasizes the value of support at this phase that comes through an orientation and the relationships that are initially formed with peers, staff, and faculty. If the challenges of this phase overwhelm the student or if students do not receive adequate support, departure at this phase may occur (Gardner, 2009).

Knowledge and skill development stage. After the entry stage, students enter the knowledge and skill development stage. During this stage, the student's focus shifts to developing his or her "critical thinking skills, writing skills, and knowledge" (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, p. 2) while completing his or her coursework. Although the coursework required for an EdD varies from institution to institution, there are some broad requirements that most programs have in common. Generally, the coursework for the EdD includes a research foundation and a content specialization (e.g., leadership, teaching, curriculum, information technology, etc.; Holder, 2014). The number of hours of coursework, excluding required dissertation hours, typically ranges from 48 to 57 semester hours (Aurora University, 2014; Florida State University, 2012; Liberty University, 2014; Lynchburg College, 2013; Piedmont College, 2012; University of Missouri Statewide Initiative, 2010).

During the knowledge and skill development phase of the program, students develop a variety of research skills, self-regulation skills (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014), resilience strategies (Sosin & Thomas, 2014), technology skills (Walker, 2014), and learn how to balance personal, professional, and educational responsibilities (West, 2014). Students must be able to regulate their emotions and stay focused "to maintain goal-direction action and avoid distraction" (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014, p. 43). It is also important that students develop the skills

and practices needed to avoid burn out at this time as well (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Rovai, 2014).

The institution has a vital role during this stage. Faculty, departments, and institutions that are sensitive to the needs of students and address the challenges that arise as a result of pursuing a doctoral degree may positively influence persistence (de Valero, 2001; Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Spaulding, 2016; West, Gokalp, Edlyn, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011). Faculty mentors and advisors are on the front line of hearing and ministering to the needs of doctoral students. Thus, the relationship between a doctoral student and his or her committee chair (sometimes referred to in research as the advisor or faculty advisor, hereafter referred to as chair) is critical and closely tied to persistence or the decision to leave an institution (Bireda, 2018; de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Groen, So, & Price, 2007; Gardner, 2009; Kumar, Johnson, & Hardmon, 2013; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Wao & Onweugbuzie, 2011; West et al., 2011). According to a study by de Valero (2001) of doctoral students ($N = 1187$), programs without solid advising impeded the completion of doctoral degrees. Furthermore, matching the personality and research interests of students and chairs aids persistence as students navigate the doctoral journey and transition to the consolidation and research stages (de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Chairs provide a unique amalgamation of support as they act as coaches, sponsors, role models, and counselors as they help students network within their field (Bragg, 1976; West et al., 2011).

Furthermore, at the start of the knowledge and skill development stage, institutions can also support students and influence persistence through providing an orientation (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; de Valero, 2001; Lorenzetti, 2006; Pintz

& Posey, 2013; Putre, 2008; Salani et al., 2016), offering a variety of financial support through fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships (de Valero, 2001; Golde, 1998, 2000; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and setting clear expectations regarding what will be required to complete the doctorate (de Valero, 2001; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Leeds et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Integration opportunities are also a valuable form of support provided by institutions, faculty, and departments at this stage (de Valero, 2001; Glogowska, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Rovai, 2003; Shouping, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tinto, 1975; West et al., 2011). Tinto (1975) names two types of integration: academic and social integration. Academic integration is the student's involvement in the academic structure of the university, which is often reflected in intellectual development or grade point average (Tinto, 1975). Social integration is closely tied with academic integration at the doctoral level (Barnett, 2008; Tinto, 2012b) and occurs as students become involved with the social structure of their institutions, through classroom activities and conversations with peers and faculty (Tinto, 1997) as well as through informal interactions with faculty and peers outside of the classroom (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Heuvelman-Hutchinson, & Spaulding, 2014).

Integrating socially and academically into one's institution helps develop community (Tinto, 1997); literature shows this community increases retention of DE students (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kumar et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Olson & Clark, 2009; Rovai, 2002a, 2014; Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Rovai, Wighting, & Liu, 2005; Rovai, Wighting, & Lucking, 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szakpkiw, 2012; Shouping, 2011; Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2012; Tinto, 1997, 2012b; West et al., 2011). As

students integrate into their university during the knowledge and skill development stage, the feeling that they are benefiting from the time spent on their degrees may increase along with a sense of community and belief that they can succeed (Jimenez, 2011; Rovai et al., 2004). Students develop a sense of belonging (Garrison et al., 2000; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rovai, 2002a; Scagnoli, 2001; Tinto, 2017, 2018) and membership occurs (Tinto, 1997, 2018; Wighting, Liu, & Rovai, 2008). This results in a community of shared values that fosters acceptance and trust (Rovai, 2002a; Rovai et al., 2004) that helps students overcome threats to persistence (Joseph, 1995; Mutter, 1992; Picciano, 2002; Rovai, 2014; Tinto, 2012b, 2017, 2018; West et al., 2011; Wolniak, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012).

As students work through completing coursework, Gardner (2009), like Tinto (2012b), highlighted the importance of integration as well as competency development. During this phase, students are challenged to pass all required courses (typically with a minimum grade requirement), prepare for a comprehensive exam or candidacy requirement, and integrate more deeply with peers and faculty (Gardner, 2009). Any of these challenges, if not overcome, may lead to departure during this phase. In summary, the skills, knowledge, and dispositions developed in this stage, along with the development of community membership, integration, and support provided by the institution, drive persistence in the next phase: the consolidation stage.

Consolidation stage. During the consolidation stage, students transition from autonomous to self-directed learners (Gardner, 2007; Ponton, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Self-directed learners are motivated by personal satisfaction rather than earning a good grade (Ponton, 2014). Therefore, Ponton (2014) recommended the following strategies to help students move beyond autonomous to self-directed learners: (a) identify personal rationale for obtaining a doctorate degree; (b) develop learning goals consistent with

life goals; (c) generate personal questions and individually seek to solve problems; (d) develop a personal work schedule; (e) seek unique learning opportunities related to personal learning goals (pp. 101-102). The comprehensive exam is the focus of this stage since it indicates that the student is ready to begin dissertation research (Holder, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). As a result, this stage may produce a lot of stress and anxiety (Earl-Novell, 2006; Gardner, 2009).

Programs that include a comprehensive exam usually require its completion after coursework is finished and before students are permitted to begin the dissertation process (Dingfelder, 2004). Dingfelder (2004) explained that no two schools have identical comprehensive exams and that the format for these tests may vary significantly between universities. Some institutions require oral exams (Dingfelder, 2004; Lynchburg College, 2013), others require written exams (Aurora University, 2014; Dingfelder, 2004), and some schools require a combination of the two formats. Some colleges have a proctored testing environment with a time limit, while other universities have a semester-long process of research-based assignments (Dingfelder, 2004). Additionally, a portfolio-based system is emerging as effective (Holder, 2014). In addition to illustrating candidacy or readiness for the dissertation, comprehensive exams are a way students show they have become self-directed learners, are able to think for themselves, and can solve problems related to their fields (Earl-Novell, 2006).

Research and scholarship stage. The fourth stage of the doctoral journey is the research and scholarship stage. It is during this stage that the work on the dissertation formally begins and at this time, "the doctoral student transitions from student to researcher" (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, p. 3). Working independently at this stage, students finalize a topic for their research, complete a literature review, and then collect and analyze data. While some schools

require as few as nine semester hours of dissertation coursework for the EdD (Peidmont College, 2012), other institutions require as many as 24 semester hours (Florida State University, 2012). Dissertations should contribute to the student's field and are characterized by their independent and original nature (Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992; Krathwohl, 2010). The dissertation is the capstone of the student's program as it illustrates the skills and abilities the student has developed (Isaac et al., 1992; Krathwohl, 2010).

The research and scholarship stage is often difficult for students because "the process seems opaque, its rules unstated, its initiation intense" (Douglas, 2014, p. 140). During their study of online doctoral students ($N = 10$), Kumar and Coe (2017) found that doctoral candidates felt "overwhelmed by the size and length of the dissertation process" (p. 134). The lack of structure during this stage can increase feelings of transactional distance and make persistence more difficult (Moore, 2013; Shearer, 2009). Additionally, feelings of isolation may occur as support lessens and peer and faculty interactions no longer occur on a daily basis (Gardner, 2009). Students are expected to have transitioned from autonomous learning, which is necessary for the entry, knowledge and skill development, and consolidation stages, to self-directed learning, which is necessary to complete a dissertation (Ponton, 2014). Milacci and Kuhne (2014) also echo the idea that the students who often struggle the most at this point are those who have not evolved into self-directed learners. Autonomous learners rely on others to direct their learning and may focus on grade achievement rather than the inherent satisfaction of learning (Ponton, 2014). Self-directed learners seek to understand the concepts of their research "to a degree that is personally satisfying" (Ponton, 2014, p. 100) without relying on the direction of others or the awarding of a grade to verify achievement. Self-directed learners are able to successfully navigate this stage because they are capable of identifying and remedying

deficiencies in their knowledge and skills while also motivating themselves and regulating their progress (Ponton, 2014).

Accessibility and approachability of the committee chair is even more critical in this stage (Bireda, 2018; Earl-Novell, 2006). Some of the challenges faced during this stage by DE students include student/chair fit, understanding and implementing the feedback of chair and committee members, finding time to work on the dissertation proposal and research, a lack of peer support or peer feedback, and working independently to conduct research at a distance (Bireda, 2018; Kumar et al., 2013; West et al., 2011). DE students ($N = 17$) in a study conducted by Terrell et al. (2012) echoed the idea that peer support is important at this stage, concluding that student-to-student communication was important but rare in the dissertation phase. According to West et al. (2011), doctoral programs should also view student isolation in the unstructured dissertation phase as an institutional issue, rather than solely the responsibility of the student. Faculty can potentially reduce isolation and foster peer relationships through the use of collaborative assignments in DE environments, by hosting informal social events outside of the classroom if their program involves on-campus residencies and integrating social-networking opportunities within the DE classroom through different stages of the program (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a). Gardner (2009) also highlighted the value of writing groups. The relationships built through these means may evolve into the peer-to-peer communication and support doctoral students need during this stage. Additionally, Bireda's (2018) study of distance doctoral students ($N = 100$) found that an "increase in connectedness with peers also brings increase connectedness with supervisors" or chairs (p. 10). Communication between peers during this stage, especially those who share a chair, may help students feel better supported during this phase.

In summary, the resurfacing of ambiguity is a potential problem during the research and scholarship stage (Gardner, 2007). Other potential barriers to persistence include expected independence and inadequate faculty support (Gardner, 2007; 2009). Students must also adjust to lessened peer support (Gardner, 2009). The breadth and demands of dissertation completion may be a major challenge to students that potentially leads to late departure during this phase. Therefore, the chair relationship is critical to persistence during this stage.

Completion stage. The completion stage is the final stage in the doctoral journey. At this point, the doctoral degree is complete, and the student emerges "as a doctor- an expert in a field of study with the capability to contribute new knowledge to a chosen discipline" (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014, p. 4). In the completion stage, EdD holders transition from students to more specialized practitioners, faculty members, K-12 administrators, researchers, published authors, etc. as their goals for pursuing the EdD degree are realized. There are a variety of outcomes that result from obtaining an EdD. Holders of this degree are eligible for pay raises, promotions, and positions like principal, superintendent, or tenured professor that often require a terminal degree (Townsend, 2002). The EdD holder has also received a significant foundation in conducting research and applying theory to practice in his or her local context (Buss, Zambo, Zambo, & Williams, 2014; De Lisi, 2013; Storey & Maughan, 2015). As with any college degree, there is a sense of accomplishment and pride that results from graduating with an EdD. Typically, as a result of the student's original research, the student also graduates as an emerging expert in the field of study in which they completed their dissertation.

However, some outcomes for graduates are not quite as positive. One of the catalysts for CPED's push for the second generation EdD is that for some, attaining the EdD results in little more than the title of "doctor" with minimal impact on their professional practice (Perry, 2012).

Some successful graduates of EdD programs fail to integrate scholarship into their everyday lives after degree completion (Wergin, 2011). With only 30-40% of DE EdD students making it to the completion stage (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006) and the struggles encountered by those attaining the degree, additional research is needed to determine how to socialize doctoral candidates to the goal and purpose of the EdD degree early in their programs. An orientation to the research process and applying theory to practice within the candidate's profession may prove beneficial to doctoral student persistence and success across all stages of the journey. Since doctoral persistence is even more difficult in DE programs, as evidenced by lower completion rates (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006), an examination of the nature of DE is important. Furthermore, the consideration of when students leave their program or when different challenges are faced is also important because it gives insight into the idea, as Gardner (2009) noted, that students may need different kinds or levels of support at different times in their doctoral degree pursuit. While the support students need changes throughout the journey, the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed may vary throughout the stages as well. While certain skills, knowledge, or dispositions might be most critical to a single stage, it is likely that students call on many skills, knowledge components, and dispositions throughout multiple stages in the doctoral journey.

Skills. Some of the skills needed by DE doctoral students include critical thinking skills (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014), writing skills (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Salani et al., 2016; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), research skills (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), self-regulation skills (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014), resilience strategies (Sosin & Thomas, 2014), technology skills (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Mathes, 2003; Kelso, 2009; Sahin & Shelley, 2008; Salani et al., 2016;

Stokes, 1999; Walker, 2014; Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), time management and balance (Gomez & Bocarnea, 2009; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Salani et al., 2016; West, 2014), and navigating library resources (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Salani et al., 2016). While research regarding technology skills in the DE environment has been well documented, research regarding many of the other noted skills has not been exhausted as it relates to DE doctoral students. There are potentially additional skills to uncover.

Knowledge. In addition to skills, there is a wide base of knowledge that DE doctoral students must master to persist successfully in their programs. This knowledge is obtained primarily during the knowledge and skill development stage through coursework (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). However, at times, students must personally seek additional resources to develop skills needed for success during the dissertation stage as independent research is conducted (Ponton, 2014). Rovai (2002a) noted that good teaching helps students move towards becoming self-directed learners. While faculty may have a more hands-on role in delivering content knowledge during the knowledge and skill development stage, through good teaching across the stages, self-direction and the ability to seek out additional resources is fully achieved during the consolidation stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Knowledge attainment and mastery is often demonstrated and assessed before candidacy through a comprehensive exam or portfolio during the consolidation stage. The mastery of knowledge and academic content is directly related to time-to-degree completion (Golde, 2005; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

A foundational understanding of what knowledge may be important for DE EdD students can be obtained by examining the standards the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) holds. Regarding content and pedagogical knowledge, CAEP (2013) relies

on the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards (CCSSO, 2011). These standards, or areas of knowledge mastery include understanding learner development, learning differences and environment, discipline-related content, understanding how to apply content through critical thinking and problem solving, an understanding of multiple methods of assessment and monitoring learner progress, planning for instruction, an understanding of a variety of instructional strategies, ongoing professional learning and ethical practice, and an understanding of leadership practices and responsibilities (CCSSO, 2011).

Dispositions. Dispositions are also a critical component related to the persistence and success of DE doctoral students. Dispositions are thoughts, moral commitments and actions toward learning and the educational process (CAEP, 2010; Ritchhart, 2002). According to Hong and Jung (2011), these attitudinal behaviors are especially valuable in DE. For DE doctoral students, necessary dispositions include, but likely are not limited to, self-motivation (Hong & Jung, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007), intrinsic motivation (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), goal commitment (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014; Tinto, 2012b; Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), self-efficacy (Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), being persistent (Ritchhart, 2002), intellectual curiosity (Ritchhart, 2002), the ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014), and avoiding burn-out (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Rovai, 2014). In a study of successful DE students ($N = 197$), Hong and Jung (2011) ranked the dispositions 'motivating oneself consistently to complete tasks' and 'belief in one's ability' as the most important competencies of DE students.

Like Stokes (1999) asserted, DE doctoral students may not possess all of the necessary skills for success throughout the stages upon entry to their programs. Likewise, certain knowledge or dispositions may also be lacking. If these challenges are not mitigated, departure at

a variety of stages is common. For doctoral students in the fields of social science and humanities, such as education, only half of students who eventually depart are gone by the third year (Gravois, 2007). Unlike other disciplines, students will continue to leave their doctoral program years into the process, in some cases, even after pursuing their degree for nine or ten years (Gravois, 2007).

Attrition. Despite the popularity of DE doctoral programs, there are some major obstacles to overcome (Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004). One major issue in online higher education is attrition. Retention rates in online higher education programs are lower than in traditional programs (Carr, 2000; Frankola, 2001). These rates are more exaggerated at the doctoral level. Only about 57% of students obtained their doctoral degree after 10 years according to a study ($N = 9683$) completed by the Council of Graduate Schools (2008), resulting in an attrition rate of 43%. The rate of attrition is typically 10-20% higher in DE programs (Carr, 2000; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Patterson & McFadden, 2009; Terrell, 2005). In his study of DE doctoral students ($N = 51$), Terrell (2005) found that only 49% of students completed their degrees ($n = 25$) in the permitted seven-year time frame, resulting in an attrition rate of 51%. For DE doctoral education programs, the attrition rate may be as high as 60-70% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

The long time to degree completion rates for EdD students is at times due to the decision to "stop-out," or take a break from the degree pursuit with the intention of later re-enrolling (Nettles & Millet, 2006). EdD students have the highest rate of stop-out among doctoral students (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Unfortunately, once the decision to stop-out is made, the decision to drop-out or withdraw sometimes isn't far behind (DesJardins, Ahiburg, & McCall, 2002; Woosely, 2004).

Cost. High attrition rates are unacceptable when considering the cost of attrition for students, institutions, and society (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Malone, Nelson, & Van Nelson, 2004; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Smallwood, 2004; Tinto, 2007). Lovitts and Nelson (2000) noted "there are real institutional costs in time and money each time a student leaves without completing the Ph.D" (p. 50), but the cost incurred to the student is greater. Students may acquire significant debt, loss of confidence, depression, and restrictions to their employment options based on the choice to depart (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Society also loses the much-needed skills and knowledge of highly trained individuals who contribute to all areas of society (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Naturally, the cost of attrition increases the later the attrition occurs in a program (Golde, 2005). Since the EdD has one of the longest time to degree completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Gravois, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006) and departure occurs during and even after candidacy, the cost of attrition for DE EdD students and institutions is potentially very high.

Integration. According to Tinto (1975), a major factor of attrition in higher education is failure to integrate into the institution socially and academically. Tinto (1975) concluded that commitment to an institution increases a student's persistence so that he or she is less likely to withdraw. Students who indicate integration into their doctoral program's academic and social systems are more likely to complete their degree (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Rockison-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tinto, 2012b). The academic system of an institution consists primarily of the formal interactions that occur within the confines of the classroom (Tinto, 2012b). Integrating academically within this system involves maintaining adequate grades, mastering required competencies, and student-faculty and student-student interactions that occur as students ask questions, collaborate on projects, or participate in class

discussions (Tinto, 2012b). In the DE environment, these interactions occur in discussion

forums, via email, through assignment feedback, and in course announcements. The social

system of an institution is often more informal. It includes interactions that occur primarily

outside of the classroom during extra-curricular activities, conversations in the hallway, or in

residence halls (Tinto, 2012b). Again, these interactions can be a challenge in DE since students

are not likely to cross paths "outside of the classroom" because they are not bound by geographic

location. However, these interactions can occur in DE environments through social media,

discussion forums in the classroom focused on community, and conversations that emerge during

collaborative assignments. For this reason, Tinto (1997) emphasizes the interplay of academic

and social integration in the classroom, noting that they do not always occur in isolation from the

other. Tinto (2012a) reiterated that academic and social integration often overlap. Barnett (2008)

noted that this is especially true at the doctoral level.

Tinto's (2012b) longitudinal model of graduate persistence noted that students enter an

academic program with a variety of career and education goals, institutional and goal

commitments, external commitments, and financial resources that influence persistence.

However, as their programs begin, integration plays an important role. Although academic and

social integration are linked, especially at the doctoral level, it is social integration that more

strongly influences persistence during the first stages of the doctoral journey as students

determine the value of membership and assimilate as members of their institution's academic

and social communities (Tinto, 2012b). Terrell et al. (2012) reiterated the idea that development

of community is essential for DE doctoral student persistence because it is how interaction with

other students and faculty primarily occurs. Rovai (2014) echoed this stating "engaging in

socialization and becoming members of strong, supportive communities can assist students in

sustaining volition and successfully completing their doctoral journey" (p. 87). Community

membership helps students overcome the initial hurdles and difficulties that may be experienced

in the early stages of the doctoral journey (Byrd, 2016; Rovai & Wighting, 2005). Community

membership also results in a sense of belonging that can positively influence persistence and

student satisfaction (Garrison et al., 2000; Rovai et al., 2004; Tinto, 2017, 2018).

As students progress in their doctoral journeys to the knowledge and skill development

stage, Tinto's (2012b) persistence model posits that academic integration increases in

importance. As students focus on competency and skill development, interaction within the

academic system of institution increases as students concentrate on passing classes and gaining

mastery (Tinto, 2012b). Tinto (2012b) noted "the development of recognized competencies,

rather than community membership per se, is the critical issue during this period" (p. 236). It is

during this time that specific faculty relationships emerge that impact the student on a personal

level, influencing his or her persistence. These relationships eventually lead to the selection of a

dissertation chair and committee members. As the student then establishes candidacy and begins

the dissertation process, "it is the faculty-mentor relationship that is mostly to shape completion"

(Tinto, 2012b, p. 241). According to Earl-Novell (2006), the chair relationship is the primary

way academic integration occurs within a department or with faculty. In Bireda's (2018) study of

doctoral students in an open distance learning program ($N = 100$), participants indicated

dissatisfaction with the frequency of their chair's feedback. Kumar et al. (2013) found that for

students completing dissertations at a distance, consistent open communication with a chair

through multiple mediums was crucial for student success and persistence.

While Tinto's (1975) work on integration focuses on academic and social integration as

the main types of integration in higher education, more recent research has also identified two

more potentially important varieties of integration. Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, and Wicks (2014c) cited familial integration as a significant component of persistence. Familial integration is defined as "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196). The goal of familial integration is that family and degree pursuit should not feel like isolated compartments of the DE EdD student's life; rather, the family members of doctoral students should be aware of, supportive of, and even invested in the student's degree pursuits.

The other type of integration that has more recently emerged in research is economic integration. It is thought to be a vital part of both persistence and time to degree completion (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 1998, 2000; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Economic integration encompasses the idea that when students feel like their financial needs are met, they have a greater ability to focus on completing their degree, especially during the time-consuming dissertation stage (Onwegbuzie, 2011; Tinto, 2012b). Because scholarships and financial assistance are much more limited at the doctoral level (Golde & Walker, 2006), it is expected that economic integration may emerge as a significant factor related to the persistence of DE EdD students.

In DE doctoral programs, integration is a challenge because students have few opportunities for face-to-face interaction with peers and faculty (Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2013). Establishing social presence can also be difficult in DE (Garrison et al., 2000). Social integration in online learning communities can be even more of a challenge for students who are brand new to the online environment (Shea, 2006). Additionally, familial integration is important because it can result in higher levels of familial support (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c), but true familial integration in DE EdD programs may be difficult. Lastly, without economic integration,

doctoral candidates may not be able to focus on their degree pursuits enough to reach completion (Wao & Onwegbuzie, 2011). Because socialization is difficult in DE doctoral programs and affects attrition, Tinto's (2012b) theory of persistence and theory of integration (1975, 1993) are foundational to understanding persistence in higher education and thus were guiding frameworks for this research. However, as they are primarily based on traditional education models and undergraduate students, their application to DE doctoral students is limited. Thus, empirical literature on DE and doctoral education and the integration concepts from Tinto (1975, 1993), Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014), and Wao and Onwegbuzie (2011) also informed the conceptual framework for this study.

Socialization. One of the main purposes of doctoral education is the socialization of students to the professional and social roles that correspond to the field that they are studying (Weidman & Stein, 2003). According to Gardner (2008), understanding socialization is beneficial when considering doctoral attrition. In EdD programs, socialization is the process by which students gain the "knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits" (Bragg, 1976, p. 1) appropriate for professional educators.

Socialization occurs through a variety of agents, including faculty, peers, and the student's environment (Bragg, 1976). Much like integration, it can happen through formal and informal means (Portnoi, Lima Chlopecki, & Peregrina-Kretz, 2015). However, many of the traditional methods of doctoral student socialization, such as observing students further along in the program (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010b, Portnoi et al., 2015; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), orientations (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010b), the mentorship of a faculty advisor (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010a), and rubbing shoulders with faculty in the hallways (Gardner, 2010a; Gopaul, 2011) are very rare in DE doctoral programs.

Even though the traditional methods of socialization are uncommon in DE, socialization is still an important part of distance education that must be understood (Rovai et al., 2005). Socialization theory reveals the importance of scaffolded support (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Parker, Schneider, & Berson, 2015) that can be accomplished in part by orientation programs that extend past the start of the doctoral journey (Gardner, 2010b). Therefore, this theory was also a valuable contributor to the conceptual framework for this study.

Orientations

One method for increasing student commitment to an institution, facilitating integration, and beginning the process of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for success is a well-designed orientation (Lorenzetti, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). For this research study, *orientation* refers to both the means and process of equipping adults to be successful DE EdD students and the support provided for them throughout their program. In other words, rather than an orientation consisting of a traditional bounded one day seminar or one week course, the orientation includes the methods and materials necessary for orienting DE EdD students to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions required for success in their program, delivered over time to provide the evolving support students need at various stages in the doctoral journey. This is much like Tinto's (2012b) recommendation for undergraduate first year programs that extend beyond the orientation course to deliver all the support a student needs within the first year. This is important because the types and amount of support DE doctoral students need changes throughout the doctoral journey (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2008; Storms, Prada, & Donahue, 2011). Additionally, doctoral candidates' time is limited, and some support may be deliverable at a distance, while other is better conveyed in person (West et al., 2011). A variety of research studies addressed the use of

orientation courses and their effectiveness at the undergraduate (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Perrine & Spain, 2008) and graduate levels (Cho, 2012; Dixon et al., 2012; Pintz & Posey, 2013; Tomei, Hagle, Rineer, Mastrandrea, & Scollon, 2009). At the doctoral level, a pre-immersion course for Doctor of Nursing Practice students was suggested by Salani et al. (2018). Salani et al.'s (2018) nine module online course prepared new doctoral nursing students in traditional and hybrid programs but it did not extend past the start of the program. While literature supports the value of and need for an orientation at the doctoral level, though such a model to a DE doctoral education program does not yet exist (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Kumar & Dawson, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). Clark and Cundiff (2011) cited the potential value of orientation programs for social integration. After the implementation of a mandatory online orientation course, undergraduate student retention in the online program at St. Leo University increased from 50% to 65% (Putre, 2008).

Even students have noted the usefulness of an orientation course as they begin a new program (Perrine & Spain, 2008). Tomei et al. (2009) noted that students, both in DE and traditional programs, expect orientation materials. While the research on orientations for DE programs is still developing, many researchers recommend orientation courses for online programs to teach required technical or academic skills (Diaz, 2002; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). According to Gardner (2009), orientations to graduate programs can launch the integration process as socialization begins between students and departments, faculty, and peers. Bolliger and Halupa (2012) asserted that DE doctoral programs should consider the implementation of an orientation to alleviate student anxiety and thereby increase satisfaction. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014b) also advocated for an orientation to DE doctoral programs as a means of fostering

persistence. Gardner (2010b) recommended that an orientation to such programs include multiple installments of scaffolded support.

In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of orientation courses, researchers have begun to compile suggestions for what to include in orientation courses for online undergraduate programs. Some suggested components include bookstore information, course navigation skills, technical support contact information, self-assessments, practice quizzes, lessons on academic integrity, and syllabi (Biro, 2010; Bozarth et al., 2004; Harmon, 2012; Salani et al., 2018; Tomei et al., 2009). Scagnoli (2001) added that orientations should also include social interactions between students as they begin to acclimate to online collaborative environments. One study also evaluated an orientation course as a method of integrating students ($N = 33$) into a master's level online program (Malikowski, 2004). However, researchers have not determined the necessary components of an orientation to a DE doctoral program. When considering the components for an orientation to DE EdD programs, gathering the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators in those programs is essential (Bozarth et al., 2004).

While researchers have identified some characteristics of successful online undergraduate students regarding their attitude and motivation (Maddux, 2004; Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008) and some characteristics of successful DE doctoral students (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Ivankova & Stick, 2008; Lovitts, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012), research on the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and support necessary for DE EdD student persistence has not been exhausted. After completing a study on factors that contribute to attrition and persistence in higher education by interviewing graduate level blended nursing students who stayed ($n = 30$) and students who left ($n = 19$), Glogowska, Young, and Lockyer (2007) determined "there also needs to be a better provision of core support in areas where students may be vulnerable" (p. 76).

After a similar study of students who withdrew after beginning graduate work ($n = 86$), Perry,
Boman, Care, Edwards, and Park (2008) noted that improved support for students should be
offered from an understanding of contributors to attrition and persistence in higher education.
Students also need to be made aware of the skills that are needed for success in DE programs
(Wilson & Allen, 2011). For doctoral candidates specifically, more support may be needed as
they enter their dissertation phase (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Lovitts, 2008; Storms et
al., 2011). One possible method for addressing retention, student commitment to an institution,
integration, providing support for students, and for beginning the process of equipping students
with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for success is a well-designed orientation
(Lorenzetti, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). However, a model for an orientation to a DE EdD program
does not exist. Evans et al. (2005) noted "there is potential research and development work to be
done that identifies doctoral candidates' orientations and approaches to study, their expertise and
needs, and then develops effective doctoral strategies for distance students" (p. 128). This study
aims to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature by developing an orientation model for
DE EdD programs as a strategy for reducing attrition, increasing persistence, and equipping DE
EdD students to be successful.

Situation to Self

The proposed research study originally interested me as an instructor of online
undergraduate students. As I was teaching students in a DE course, many of which were almost
finished with their entire online degree, I noticed that my expectations for the baseline skills of
students did not match up with the skills that many of them entered my course with. I found a lot
of time and effort had to be spent on teaching what I deemed as basic skills so course objectives
could be met. I began to consider how students could all become equally equipped in the online

environment, which initiated my research into orientations to online programs. The motivation for this research continued to develop as I began completing my own doctoral degree in a DE program. I found that there was a disparity of skills in this environment as well, along with a variety of unique needs for the DE doctoral student. It became clear that there is a gap in the literature regarding the orientation to DE doctoral programs and that a model for such is needed (Gardner, 2009).

Assumptions

My ontological philosophical assumption that there are multiple realities and that reality is subjective guided my decision to include multiple perspectives in this study (Creswell, 2007). The perspectives of everyone involved in a process are important to better understand that process as a whole according to this philosophical assumption. As students, recent graduates, non-persisters, faculty, and administrators in DE doctoral programs experience their program, they have the best view on the supports, skills, knowledge, and dispositions that are necessary in that program. I also hold the methodological assumption that knowledge can be gained through context and immersion in that context is essential (Creswell, 2007). This assumption also supports that students and faculty immersed in the online learning environment for an EdD were the best suppliers of data for this study.

The paradigm that guided this study was constructivism, an approach that allows researchers to understand "the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). The constructivist approach is appropriate for qualitative research and rather than beginning with a theory, the constructivist researcher allows multiple perspectives to be considered and collects multiple levels of data so the participants' voices create or construct the theory in question (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Although this research was grounded in a

conceptual framework of empirical and theoretical literature addressing DE doctoral education, attrition, and persistence, grounded theory design conducted with a constructivist approach allowed for new insights and a new model fostering doctoral persistence through an orientation to emerge and develop. The generated model may be implemented and assessed for effectiveness in a future study.

The final assumption that guided this study was that all participants would respond completely and honestly. By limiting participants to those who completed or left their DE EdD program no more than three years ago, the memories of the participants were considered reliable. Furthermore, because identifying characteristics would not be disclosed and pseudonyms were used, there was no reason for participants to fear consequences for a negative view of their program or accolades for program praise.

Problem Statement

While attrition in doctoral programs is widely accepted to be at about 50% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Gravois, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000), attrition in DE programs is typically 10-20% higher than the rate of attrition in similar traditional programs (Carr, 2000; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Patterson & McFadden, 2009). This attrition rate is considered much too high, especially because of the significant cost to institutions, students, and society (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Malone et al., 2004; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Smallwood, 2004). While distance education is on the rise (Allen & Seaman, 2013), administrators at institutions offering online courses and limited residence programs note that it can be more difficult to retain students in these programs than in traditional programs (Allen & Seaman, 2009).

The high attrition rates of doctoral and distance education naturally result in high attrition rates for DE EdD programs, but one of the highest rates of attrition is present in online EdD programs. In DE EdD programs, the attrition rate is between 50% and 70% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006) and students in EdD programs experience the longest time-to-degree completion rate across disciplines (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Gravois, 2007; National Science Foundation, 2014; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Additionally, EdD students have a higher rate of stop-out than any other doctorate degree (Nettles & Millet, 2006). While many students leave for a time and then re-enroll, stopping out also increases the risk that a student will withdraw from the program completely (DesJardins et al., 2002; Woosely, 2004).

The literature suggests that orientations may be an effective strategy for addressing the needs of students and combatting the challenge of attrition, thereby fostering doctoral persistence (Bragg, 1976; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Gardner, 2007; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b). While research has identified the utility of orientations (Bozarth et al., 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Lorenzetti, 2006; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Putre, 2008), the specific problem this study addressed is that a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs did not exist. While much is understood regarding why students leave their doctoral program (Glogowska et al., 2007; Perry et al., 2008), stakeholders must better understand how students who have stayed in their program have persisted and what students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators in DE EdD programs perceive as essential to student success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and

administrators from regionally accredited universities. These perspectives expand the existing body of literature on orientations. For this study, orientation is defined as both the means and process of acquainting students to and supporting students throughout their programs. This is much like Tinto's (2012b) recommendation for support services that stretch beyond the start of a degree program. For the purpose of this study and the orientation of EdD students, orientation may stretch into and beyond the first year to many different segments of the program (i.e., admissions, coursework, comprehensive exams, the dissertation process). DE EdD programs are defined as EdD degrees that are delivered at a distance for at least 80% of the coursework (Allen & Seaman, 2013). They should consist of five main stages: the entry stage, the knowledge and skill development stage, the consolidation stage, the research and scholarship stage, and the completion stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). While this study created the model for such an orientation, the developed model will be implemented and assessed for effectiveness at a later time.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it builds on an existing set of literature that advocates for orientations to online programs (Biro, 2010; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Bozarth et al., 2004; Cho, 2012; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Diaz, 2002; Gardner, 2010b; Glogowska et al., 2007; Kumar & Dawson, 2012; Lovitts, 2008; Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008; Perrin & Spain, 2008; Perry et al., 2008; Putre, 2008; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b; Scagnoli, 2001; Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Storms et al., 2011; Tomei et al., 2009; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007) and the need for increased student retention in doctoral programs (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Carr, 2000; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Frankola, 2001; Gravois, 2007; Herbert, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Koroghlanian & Brinkerhoff, 2007; Malone et al., 2004; Milligan & Buckenmeyer,

2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Smallwood, 2004). The purpose of this study was to create a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs that can later be implemented and assessed for effectiveness. The components of the orientation model were grounded in the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators. These perspectives are a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature regarding orientations.

Additionally, the perspectives of these stakeholders on the supports, skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to persist in DE EdD programs are invaluable to institutions offering such programs. Finding ways to increase doctoral persistence and retention, or the rate of students who complete the doctoral program (CAEP, 2010), in online courses and programs is essential for higher education institutions for a variety of reasons (Evans et al., 2005; Herbert, 2007; Koroghlanian & Brinkerhoff, 2007). Better retention rates can help attract better students (Lobo, 2011) and increase student morale and feelings of self-efficacy (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Attrition is costly to the university and that cost increases the later the departure occurs (Golde, 2005). Increased retention can lessen these costs and the strain attrition imparts on institutional and faculty resources.

Understanding what is required for students to transition to research scholars who successfully use their gained skills, knowledge, and dispositions to impact their professional context and apply their research to practice will also be particularly valuable as the EdD continues to evolve from first to second generation (CPED, 2018). Furthermore, only through understanding the expectations of faculty in DE doctoral programs and the experiences of students and alumni who have persisted in or departed from DE doctoral programs can the ideal components of such an orientation be identified.

While many researchers have studied why students leave doctoral programs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; DesJardins et al., 2002; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Tinto, 2012b; Wellington & Sikes, 2006; Woosley, 2004) and how other students persist through their program (Burchard & Swerdzewski, 2009; Golladay, Prybutok, & Huff, 2000; Halter, Kleiner, & Hess, 2006; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lovitts, 2008; Maddux, 2004; Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008; Mutter, 1992; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Storms et al., 2011; Varney, 2010; Wighting et al., 2008), this study helps weave those findings together with a model for an orientation that allows these theories to be put into practice.

This study also integrates both distance education and doctoral education, which according to Moore (2013) and Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014b), have not yet thoroughly merged in research. This study helps bridge the gap between doctoral persistence literature (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; de Valero, 2001; Ducette, 1990; Earl-Novell, 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 1998, 2000, 2005; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lovitts, 2001, 2008; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Spaulding & Rockison-Szapkiw, 2012; Storms et al., 2011; West et al., 2011) and distance education persistence literature (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Barnett, 2008; Frankola, 2001; Golladay et al., 2000; Herbert, 2007; Heyman; 2010; Lee et al., 2013; Leeds et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Matheswaran, 2010; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Patterson & McFadden, 2009; Rovai, 2003a), most specifically to the DE EdD program (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b).

Gardner (2009) stated that a comprehensive orientation is an essential component of doctoral education programs. This study addresses a gap in the literature by generating a model for orientations that prepares students for and supports students throughout DE EdD programs.

This orientation may then help improve student retention, instructor and student satisfaction, and perpetuate the cycle of quality education through future EdD awardees. Findings may also help current and future students in DE EdD programs better understand how they can begin their program equipped for success, persist through various stages, and see the journey through to completion.

The theoretical significance of this study is that it extends theory on student persistence (Glogowska et al., 2007; Hicks & Lerer, 2003; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Shouping, 2011; Tinto, 1997, 2012b) and integration (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Jones, 2010; Mutter, 1992; Pascarella & Terezini, 1980; Tinto, 1997, 2012b) through multiple perspectives, rather than only the student's (Ivankova & Stick, 2007) or professor's point of view (Cho, 2012; Pintz & Posey, 2012).

Research Questions

The purpose of the study's research questions was to identify and understand the perspectives of faculty, administrators, students, and alumni regarding persistence in a DE EdD program. The questions sought to identify the necessary components, including process and content, of a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs. The questions were as follows:

Research question one: How do DE EdD students persist at each stage of the doctoral journey?

One purpose of this question was to identify the baseline skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators believe are important throughout the doctoral journey. The persistent student may or may not have been proficient in each of these areas at the start of his or her program; rather, the student may identify areas he or she had to develop to succeed in the program (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Gardner,

2009; Stokes, 1999). This is important in EdD programs because students may come from a variety of disciplines or professional backgrounds (Nettles & Millet, 2006). The non-persister may identify a lack of certain skills, knowledge, or attitudes as variables that influenced their decision to depart.

Regarding skills, it is clear that strong writing, reasoning, reading comprehension, and communication skills are vital in graduate programs (Ivankova & Stick; 2007; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Salani et al., 2018; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), but it is likely that students need additional skills as well that will emerge during data collection, constant comparison, and data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These skills may pertain to technology (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Mathes, 2003; Kelso, 2009; Sahin & Shelley, 2008; Stokes, 1999; Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), critical thinking, time management and balance (Gomez & Bocarnea, 2009; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Salani et al., 2018; West, 2007), self-regulation (Cadle & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014), navigating library resources (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Salani et al., 2018), or any skill persistent EdD students found necessary during their own degree completion.

Concerning knowledge, this question sought to understand if there are competencies students should have, from the perspectives of all stakeholders, when entering a DE EdD program. Additionally, DE EdD students likely need to understand how to navigate the identity transformation that occurs during the doctoral degree (Hall & Burns, 2009; Wellington & Sikes, 2006; West, 2014), that stress and anxiety regarding research, statistics, analysis, and the doctoral journey is normal and if balanced, even beneficial (Lesser, 2014; Sosin & Thomas, 2014), how to develop a support system and strong community (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Rovai,

2014; Terrell et al., 2012), and how to develop and navigate professional relationships from professor to mentor (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014; Tinto, 2012b).

Ritchhart (2002) identified a disposition as a "tendency towards a general type of action" or "a gentle nudging that helps to bring out the behavior" (p. 20). CAEP (2014) added that dispositions are "habits of professional action and moral commitment" (p. 9). Ritchhart (2002) also provided sample educational dispositions like being open-minded, persistent, or intellectually curious. CAEP (2014) looks to the InTASC model core teaching standards (CCSSO, 2011) for key dispositions like the belief that all students are valuable and capable of learning and commitment to best practices. Therefore, dispositions were thought of for the purpose of this research as thoughts, attitudes, and actions towards learning and the educational process. According to Yokselturk and Bulut (2007), some of these dispositions may include possessing intrinsic motivation, goal commitment, self-efficacy, leadership qualities, and self-discipline. Faculty also identify the ability to cope, being proactive, being a self-directed learner, and the ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities with one's education as essential skills and dispositions (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014). In addition to identifying the skills and knowledge linked to persistence for DE EdD students, this research question also determined what dispositions or attitudes toward learning are associated with successful doctoral students.

This research question intended to understand support and services successful students received that contributed to their persistence. Support may need to evolve as students progress through different stages of the doctoral journey (Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 2012b) because without proper support, the challenges of a doctoral degree can be overwhelming (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Gardner, 2009). It can be difficult to foster the same level of support in DE environments that is

experienced at traditional institutions (Baker, 2014; Jimenez, 2011) so proactive intervention of faculty and university support systems is recommended (Jimenez, 2011).

Institutions can support doctoral students through technical, emotional, and writing support (West et al., 2011), financially to facilitate economic integration (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and by creating opportunities to develop a strong sense of community (Rovai, 2002). Because emotional support does not occur automatically in DE (Garrison et al., 2000), it should be intentionally fostered through peers, external communities, instructors, and advisors. Advising not only supports DE doctoral students, it also facilitates integration, especially with one's professors and department (Earl-Novell, 2006). Support through advising services should occur throughout the student's program (Heyman, 2010; Ivankova & Stick, 2007), even before the student's official chair is assigned later in his or her program. The student's chair acts as a mentor (Kumar et al., 2013) and coach (West et al., 2011), influences persistence (de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Lovitts & Nelon, 2000) and provides support that is particularly critical during the dissertation phase (Gardner, 2009).

Peer support can also help students persevere when challenges arise (Gardner, 2009; West et al., 2011) and peers in the later stages of the doctoral journey can serve as role models (Evans, 2008). Familial support is also important (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; Tinto, 2012b), especially because family is typically the only source of practical support (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). In particular, significant others provide a much-needed source of support for students when concerns arise (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009) and play a vital role (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Mutter, 1992; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). This support may have come through a variety of sources but is likely to include sources like institutional support services, faculty, committee members, the

student's chair, peers, family, or other external communities. While literature notes the importance of these sources of support, this research question sought to identify the types of support that are valuable specifically in DE EdD programs.

Research question two: How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities?

According to Tinto's (2012) theory of integration, a student's integration is directly related to their persistence. Therefore, this research question also seeks to explore how students have either directly or indirectly integrated into their institution academically, socially, financially, and how their families have been integrated as well. Conversely, the perspectives of non-persisters may help identify the most difficult aspects of integration in distance doctoral programs. Tinto (1975) noted that academic integration is most distinctly evident in the intellectual development and grade achievement of students. According to Tinto (1975), integration into the social system of an institution manifests in "social communication, friendship support, faculty support, and collective affiliation" (p. 107). Tinto (2012a) indicated that "academic and social involvement, though conceptually distinct, overlap and influence each other" (p. 65). Additionally, Tinto (1997) views academic and social systems as "two nested spheres, where the academic occurs within the broader social system" (p. 619) of an institution and that "the classroom is the crossroads where the social and the academic meet" (p. 599). Especially at the doctoral level, academic and social integration are closely linked (Barnett, 2008; Bireda, 2018).

Familial integration occurs when students and family members feel connected during the student's doctoral journey (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c). Familial support is important for doctoral candidates (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al.,

2018; Tinto, 2012b), but it may be difficult for family members to support the candidate when they feel disconnected or like the student's degree pursuit is impeding their relationship. Because the family's support is important and can contribute to the candidate's motivation and persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, 2015, 2018; West, 2014) as well as time to degree completion (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), researchers recommend that families be well informed of each stage of the doctoral journey and what it entail; they also note that an orientation for family members may be beneficial (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, 2016, 2018).

Economic integration was also a consideration of this research question because like the other forms of integration, it has been linked to persistence and time to degree completion (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 1998, 2000; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Economic integration occurs when the doctoral student's financial needs are met (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Universities can help facilitate economic integration through things like assistantships and fellowships, but opportunities for these are rare in EdD programs (Golde & Walker, 2006). However, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al.'s (2016) study of DE doctoral education candidates ($N =$ 148) explained that economic integration may be easier for DE doctoral students because they do not have to leave their jobs to pursue a traditional doctorate and thus, often remain employed. Economic integration is important because students who struggle to integrate economically may also struggle to focus on the dissertation process to the degree necessary for timely completion (Tinto, 2012b).

It was important to understand if and how integration has occurred for students and their families within the online environment (Barnett, 2008; Ducette, 1990; Joseph, 1995; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Mutter, 1992; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, 2018; Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Rovai et al., 2005; Shouping, 2011; Tinto,

2012b; Wolniak et al., 2012; Woosley, 2004). While this research question explored the actions taken by the student to integrate, it also sought to identify any of the ways the institution or faculty supported the student with integration through services such as mentoring and advising (Council for Graduate Studies, 2009; de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Hardy, 2014), resources available to assist struggling students (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Jiminez, 2011), creating a supportive and cooperative climate (West et al., 2011), economic services (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), services and supports for families (Golde, 2005; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c; Tinto, 2012b; West, 2014), and how the institution helped ease student transition and encourage persistence in the dissertation phase (Gardner, 2007; Lovitts, 2008).

Research question three: What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE EdD programs?

While the previous research question produced the components for a model for an orientation to a DE EdD program, this research question addressed *when* and *how* the components of the orientation should be delivered. It is important to understand not only what support doctoral students need, but also when they need that support (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Lovitts, 2008; Storms et al., 2011) and the most effective delivery method. This study sought to not only determine what the necessary components are, but also if those components should be delivered during the entry stage, the knowledge and skill development stage, the consolidation stage, the research and scholarship stage, or the completion stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spauding, 2014).

Definitions

1. *Academic integration*: Academic integration is the student's involvement in the academic structure of his or her institution. It is directly related to the level of the student's

"acquisition of knowledge and development of skills" (Tinto, 1997, p. 600). It occurs primarily in the classroom and within one's department (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000), even in DE environments, though in DE, it is fostered through instructor presence, teaching practices and care for students (Rovai & Wighting, 2005). It is closely tied to social integration (Barnett, 2008) and it may be difficult for students to focus on academic integration until community membership has occurred (Tinto, 1997).

2. *Adult learner/non-traditional student*: The non-traditional adult student is typically over 24 years old and "often [has] family and work responsibilities that can interfere with successful attainment of educational goals" (Rovai et al., 2005). Though this student may be full or part-time, school is not his/her only, or even main, responsibility (Moore, 2013).

3. *Andragogy*: Andragogy is the theory of adult learning constructed by Malcolm Knowles (1980a, 1980b). The guiding assumptions of this theory are that regarding their learning, adults are self-directed; adults come to the classroom with a wealth of experience that useful as they catalog and retain new concepts and is also beneficial for the education of others; adults are ready to learn and choose to pursue additional education; adults are problem centered and desire to apply what they are learning directly to their life situation; finally, adults are internally motivated to learn (Knowles, 1980a).

4. *Blended*: Blended programs and courses deliver materials through both traditional face-to-face and DE formats. According to Allen and Seaman (2010), to be defined as blended, 30-79% of the material should be delivered at a distance.

5. *Candidacy*: Candidacy is defined as the stage in the doctoral degree process in which the doctoral student has completed his or her coursework and has passed the comprehensive

exam or benchmark requirement. Students who attain candidacy have demonstrated readiness to begin the dissertation (Holder, 2014). The candidate begins developing a proposal, collecting and analyzing data, and then compiles their findings. This stage continues until the doctorate degree is conferred.

6. *Disposition*: For this study, a disposition is an attitude, thought, or action towards learning and the educational process that drives behavior (CAEP, 2014; Ritchhart, 2002).

7. *Distance education*: Distance education (DE) is instruction and learning that is separated by location (King et al., 2001). To be classified as a DE program or course, at least 80% of the content should be delivered at a distance (i.e., online; Allen & Seaman, 2013).

8. *Economic integration:* Economic integration is the "degree to which students' financial needs are met while pursuing the doctorate" (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 117). Students who integrate economically typically have faster rates of degree completion and are more likely to persist (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 1998, 2000; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Students who struggle to finance their education may have higher levels of stress during the doctoral journey (Jiminez, 2011) and may find it difficult to carve out time for completing their dissertation (Tinto, 2012b).

9. *Familial integration:* Familial integration is "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196). Familial support throughout the doctoral journey can influence persistence (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c; West, 2014). The family of the doctoral student should be supportive of and invested in the doctoral student's completion of the degree. Institutions may be able to assist doctoral students and their families by providing an

orientation for family members that helps them understand the commitment, support, and sacrifice that the doctoral journey requires and how they can help (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c).

10. *First generation EdD*: Though this degree program initially split from the PhD to balance research and practice (Townsend, 2002), at many institutions, the requirements for the EdD and PhD in education are almost indistinguishably different (Baez, 2002; Golde & Walker, 2006; Perry, 2012). This EdD program is scholar-focused and typically requires a traditional dissertation as the capstone.

11. *Limited-residency or low-residency program*: Limited or low-residency programs are similar to blended programs that combine online and on-campus instruction (Terrell et al., 2016). These types of programs include residency requirements such as several weekends or a week on campus each semester, allowing students to continue working while completing their degree (Terrell, 2014; Terrell et al., 2016).

12. *Online education*: Online education is a category of distance education. Online education uses an e-learning platform to deliver courses over the Internet. The student and instructor are separated by location (King et al., 2001).

13. *Orientation*: An orientation is the means and process of acquainting students to and supporting students in their program. This is not confined to a single course, but instead can span a student's program or a certain stage of the degree pursuit. Orientations should familiarize students with an institution's format and requirements while also focusing on developing the skills necessary to be a confident and competent student. They may help integrate students academically and socially within their institutions (Rovai, 2003a).

14. *Persistence*: For the purpose of this study, persistence is "a college student's academic continuation behavior that leads to successful program completion" (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 362). While the ultimate goal of persistence is degree completion, persistent students include those who may still be in the process of completing their degrees and are on track for completion. Persistence is a behavior manifested through action.

15. *Second generation EdD*: The second generation EdD was initiated by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) to reclaim and redesign the EdD as a professional practice degree where the workplace and doctoral learning intersect (CPED, 2018). It is practitioner-focused, rather than scholar-focused (Boyce, 2012; Perry, 2012; Santovec, 2008) and the traditional dissertation may be replaced with a capstone project that seeks to solve a problem experienced in the student's professional context (CPED, 2018).

16. *Social integration*: Social integration is the student's involvement in the social structure of his or her institution. Social integration occurs with faculty and peers after class through informal interactions (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a; Tinto, 2012b), with peers through shared experiences and concerns (Gardner, 2009), and can also occur in the classroom (Tinto, 1997) through group work and classroom discussions. It is closely tied to academic integration as they sometimes occur simultaneously (Barnett, 2008).

17. *Socialization*: Socialization in doctoral education is the means by which a student is introduced to their institution, department, and profession's standards of behavior, values, and skills and then adopts those ideals into his or her own identity and practice (Bragg, 1976; Goodfellow, 2014; Weidman et al., 2001).

18. *Traditional (residential) education*: Traditional education courses or programs deliver at least 71% of their components in a face-to-face format (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Traditional education is not separated by time or location.

Summary

The flexibility and convenience of distance education makes it an attractive option for professionals seeking an EdD degree (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Wighting et al., 2008). However, with possible attrition rates of up to 70% and the longest time-to-degree doctoral completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Gravois, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; National Science Foundation, 2014), support through a well-developed orientation may better equip students to persist in the various stages of the doctoral journey (Bozarth et al., 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Lorenzetti, 2006; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Pintz & Posey, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b; Tinto, 2012b). This study sought to develop a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators by understanding the supports, skills, knowledge, dispositions, and integration behaviors necessary for persistence and success at each stage.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

While distance education (DE) is convenient and attractive to many busy adult students, a review of the literature illuminates that not everyone entering DE doctoral education (EdD) programs is doing well. While the purpose this study was to develop a model of an orientation for DE EdD programs, it is important to understand why this model is needed. This chapter provides an overview of DE and doctoral education, an overview of the conceptual framework for this study, and a review of relevant literature regarding doctoral attrition and persistence, student integration, and orientations. The inclusion of the literature review that follows is important in qualitative inquiry to provide a "comprehensive and up-to-date review of the topic" and "to demonstrate that you have a thorough command of the field you are studying" (Galvan, 1999, p. 15).

Methods and Components of Distance Education

Distance education is continuing to gain popularity. While growth in the online environment was initially explosive, online education is not a passing trend and growth continues despite a decrease in traditional enrollments (Seaman et al., 2018). Moore (2013) noted "online study now assumes a major role in doctoral education worldwide" (p. 662). Approximately 63%-70% of all degree granting institutions offer distance education (National Science Foundation, 2014; Seaman et al., 2018) and at the graduate level in 2016, almost 36% of students were enrolled in at least some distance education courses as part of their programs (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018). As students at all levels utilize DE, it is clear that higher education must recognize the need for quality DE programs. What constitutes quality programs and experiences in DE, especially at the doctoral level, may not yet be fully understood. While seeking to provide

such programs, faculty and administration must be prepared to address the implications and struggles that come along with distance education.

It is important to note that although many treat the terms *distance education* and *online education* as synonymous, online education is a category of distance education. King et al. (2001) found that it was difficult to identify a broadly accepted definition for distance education. As a result, the researchers formed the following definition of distance education: "distance education is formalized instructional learning where the time/geographic situation constrains learning by not affording in-person contact between student and instructor" (King et al., 2001, p. 10). The majority of distance education is currently delivered in the online format, but distance education is not limited to online learning; online learning is merely a type of distance education (Moore, 2013).

There are five different models or generations of distance education, all of which are still active, though the fifth generation is the most prevalently used today (Taylor, 2001b). These generations include (a) *correspondence*, (b) *multi-media* (e.g., print, audio, video, computer disk), (c) *telelearning*, (d) the *flexible learning model*, and (e) the *intelligent flexible learning model* (Taylor, 2001b). While the fourth and fifth generations involved online learning, the fifth and current generation of the intelligent flexible learning model includes the addition of automated response systems and campus portals (Taylor, 2001b). Allen and Seaman (2010) noted that for a course to be considered online (the current delivery method of most DE courses), at least 80% of the coursework must be delivered in the online format.

For the purpose of this research study, DE doctoral programs are defined as programs that offer at least 80% of their coursework at a distance (likely online; Allen & Seaman, 2013). Therefore, if a program requires 60 total credit hours, up to 12 hours or 20% of those hours can

be required face-to-face courses. This may also include limited-residency programs that require no more than 20% of courses be completed on campus.

Synchronous and asynchronous. There are two main types of online learning: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning interactions occur without a time delay (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). In synchronous environments, students and professors are online simultaneously, interacting and learning together. Communication is instantaneous and, in this way, synchronous interactions are similar to the traditional classroom, though they do not always provide face-to-face interaction since they may occur through text, audio, or video chats. The second main type of online learning is through the asynchronous environment where "students and learning is not synchronized in time or space" (Johnson, 2006, p. 46). While students and professors interact, communication is delayed as students and professors are online and involved in the classroom at different times (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

In higher education, asynchronous online learning is much more common than synchronous online learning (Murphy, Rodríguez-Marnzanares, & Barbour, 2011). While synchronous and asynchronous learning environments are unique, they are both effective (Johnson, 2006). While some researchers note that students prefer asynchronous learning (Murphy et al., 2011), the preference seems to be based mostly on personality (Johnson, 2006). Rather than deeming synchronous or asynchronous learning as better, research instead suggests using both forms of discussion in online learning for the most advantageous affect (Kumar & Coe, 2017). According to Johnson (2006), "Individuals who used both synchronous and asynchronous forms of online discussion were the most likely to complete required course activities. Apparently, combined synchronous and asynchronous online discussion maximized personal engagement in learning" (p. 50).

The interactions between students and between students and faculty impact learning (Offir, Lev, & Bezalel, 2007). Offir et al. (2007) reported that when that interaction is synchronous, it may more effectively decrease transactional distance. It also encourages deeper interactions and richer learning. Yamagata-Lynch (2014) echoed that the interaction that occurs in synchronous environments may be more meaningful as the conversation has the opportunity to spontaneously deviate from the topic and include personal non-course related matters. Palloff and Pratt (2007) cited the idea of the wandering topic of discussion in synchronous environments as a negative factor, but it actually may result in greater social integration of students as they experience community. Palloff and Pratt (2007) also cite the possible unbalanced nature of synchronous discussions in regard to participation. The researchers recommend the use of technology that allows a visual representation such as a raising a hand or flag of who should speak next.

While synchronous chats may be more relational, asynchronous discussions allow learners to access the classroom at their own convenience and to take time interacting with the material before having to publish their own responses (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). This is particularly beneficial when students are spread out internationally and setting up a time to participate together synchronously may be difficult. Like Johnson (2006), Yamagata-Lynch (2014) recommended a blended approach to synchronous and asynchronous online learning, noting when the two types of activities were linked, the highest levels of student engagement were reported.

Although there are strengths and weaknesses of both synchronous and asynchronous online learning, the type of online learning and communication present in the doctoral programs used by universities was not a factor in their eligibility to participate in this study. It is likely that

the programs will use both techniques to an extent, just as they may include some face-to-face courses in their predominately online degree. Instead, whether the program consists of primarily synchronous or asynchronous courses is noted in the description of participating universities along with any significant factors that emerge regarding the program's format.

Transactional distance and community in DE. As According to Moore (2013), DE is significantly different than the traditional classroom. Moore's (1993, 2013) theory of transactional distance explains that dialogue, structure, and autonomy can impact the transactional distance perceived by the student. In a study of DE doctoral students ($N = 17$) by Terrell et al. (2012), participants verified the idea that dialogue, or communication, was crucial for persistence during the dissertation phase. Participants identified a desire for both student-to-student and student-to-faculty communication, but this communication is often limited (Terrell et al., 2012). For DE students of all levels, literature demonstrates the importance of community and its impact on retention (Byrd, 2016; Garrison et al., 2000; Golde, 2005; Kumar et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Olson & Clark, 2009: Rovai, 2002a, 2014; Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Rovai et al., 2004, 2005; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Shouping, 2011; Terrell et al., 2012; Tinto, 1997, 2012b; West et al., 2011). When community is experienced, students develop a sense of belonging (Garrison et al., 2000; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rovai, 2002a; Scagnoli, 2001; Tinto, 2017, 2018) and membership occurs (Tinto, 1997, 2017, 2018; Wighting et al., 2008). This sense of belonging and membership fosters acceptance and trust (Rovai, 2002a; Rovai et al., 2004) that helps students overcome barriers to persistence (Joseph, 1995; Mutter, 1992; Picciano, 2002; Rovai, 2014; Tinto, 2012b, 2017, 2018; West et al., 2011; Wolniak et al., 2012).

One factor influencing the perceived sense of community in DE is the social presence of the instructor (Rovai, 2002a). However, establishing this presence can be difficult in DE (Garrison et al., 2000). One way social presence occurs in DE courses is through discussion boards (Picciano, 2002). Social presence helps foster open communication and emotional connections that can lead to group assimilation (Garrison et al., 2000). For DE doctoral students, the social presence of faculty is often limited to the chair relationship during the dissertation phase. Many doctoral graduates cite the chair relationship as crucial for their success (Gardner, 2009; Kumar et al., 2013). Difficulty selecting a chair or poor student-chair match may impede degree completion (Earl-Novell, 2006), while programs with quality advising and clearly communicated expectations typically have the lowest attrition rates (de Valero, 2001; Ehrenberg et al., 2007).

Based on the adult learning and persistence models of Knowles (1980a) and Tinto (1975, 2012b) and in regard to the unique skills, knowledge, and dispositions required for DE doctoral students, personal and institutional reasons for attrition, the factors contributing to persistence, the necessary types of support for doctoral students, a background of orientations, and other concepts are further discussed in the literature review that follows. These concepts informed the research and interview questions and reflection on these topics was necessary as I sought to develop a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is an integral component of one's research design. The researcher constructs the conceptual framework using the "concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39) that support and inform the research. According to Leshem and Trafford (2007), "the conceptual framework is a bridge between paradigms which

explain the research issue and the practice of investigating that issue" (p. 99). Generally, for qualitative designs like grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2015) advise against a predefined framework as it may provide too much structure and cause the researcher to disregard concepts that do not align with the framework guiding the study. However, Corbin and Strauss (2015) do acknowledge that theoretical and conceptual frameworks may be beneficial if the research uncovers relevant theories that the new study may extend or verify. Above all, it is important that no matter the framework, grounded theory researchers remain open, allowing the derived conclusions to be grounded in the data, rather than grounded in the previously determined theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). With this in mind, the guiding frameworks for this study are Knowles' (1980a) *theory of andragogy*, Tinto's (2012b) *persistence theory,* and *socialization theory* (Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001).

Andragogy

One theory informing this study is Malcolm Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy. While Knowles did not coin the term andragogy, he did define it. Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy is based on five main assumptions. First, the adult learner's self-concept drives him or her to be naturally independent. Unlike the dependent nature of younger students, adult learners desire to have a role in directing their learning and to be treated as capable and competent. The independence of adult learners means they are not only able to learn on their own, but desire to. Adults do require some direction from professors, but they should be allowed some freedom in their learning (Knowles, 1980b). Knowles' (1980a) assertions reveal that adults are capable of becoming self-directed in their learning; however, self-directedness is not something that adults are necessarily equipped with at the start of the doctoral journey. Evolving from an autonomous

learner to a self-directed learner is especially necessary for successful completion of the dissertation stage of the doctoral degree (Holder, 2014; Milacci & Kuhne, 2014; Ponton, 2014).

A second assumption about adult learners is that they possess a wealth of life experience. Not only have they learned from these experiences, but others can learn from these experiences as well. This is especially true for doctoral students. Due to typical program requirements, doctoral students have completed at least two other higher education degrees. They likely have been working in their field for several years and have adult experiences that the majority of undergraduates do not. Allowing adult students to share their experiences and learn from each other can be very valuable for adult learners (Knowles, 1980a).

The third assumption of andragogy is that adults are ready to learn. Since postsecondary education is optional, adults come to the classroom ready to learn by choice, unlike children who are forced to be in the classroom (Knowles, 1980a). This readiness to learn is a result of the life situation of the adult. There are many factors that might influence the adult's readiness to learn including one's career, social circle, or financial obligations, but the decision to learn is often to improve the situation he or she is currently facing (Knowles, 1980a). Intrinsic factors such as a sense of accomplishment, a love of learning, and the desire to give back or make a difference can also contribute to readiness to learn (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c). It can be assumed that doctoral students are especially ready to learn since they are undertaking an advanced degree by choice.

The fourth assumption of andragogy is that adults are problem-centered and learn best when their learning relates to life situations (Knowles, 1980a). Adults want to understand why they are learning what they are, why it is important, and how it can be applied. When adults understand these things, they are more likely to approach learning with a positive attitude and a

willingness to learn. DE doctoral students typically remain employed as they complete their degree (Nettles & Millet, 2006). They are actively working in their field of study and are particularly interested in learning concepts and techniques that improve their current situation. Typically, they are ready to put their study into practice.

The final assumption of andragogy is that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors (Knowles, 1980a). Although external motivators may be effective for some adults, the strongest motivation comes from an internal drive. Motivators like a sense of accomplishment or pride are most powerful for adult students (Knowles, 1980a). In a study of EdD students ($N = 29$), Wellington and Sikes (2006) found that "personal satisfaction, the quest for knowledge and intellectual challenge" and "professional curiosity" (p. 727) were intrinsic motivators for students. According to Lovitts (2008), "when intrinsic motivation is high, people will spend more time and energy exploring different aspects of a problem and acquiring more knowledge and information that may be relevant to it" (p. 314). Intrinsic motivation may help EdD students remain persistent in the face of challenges. Lovitts (2008) noted that for doctoral students, a passion for their field and research topic is one of their most powerful internal motivators.

The assumptions of Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy informed and guided the research as they provided insight into what may drive the adult students in this study to doctoral education, including their personal experiences and current professional contexts. They also gave an idea of what keeps them motivated and more likely to persist. The assumptions remind educators that while students are naturally driven to be independent, they must be guided to self-directedness for success in the latter stages of the doctoral journey. Remembering the adult student's desire for learning that can be put into practice to solve problems they face in their professional contexts may also help understand how opportunities to facilitate that through the

research executed throughout the degree and dissertation journey. It was hypothesized that the themes of these assumptions would be represented in the responses of persistent EdD students as they reflected on their journeys and what it took for them to be successful.

Tinto's Persistence Theory

Vincent Tinto is highly renowned for his studies on student departure and persistence. In fact, it is Tinto's understanding of departure that validates his understanding of student persistence. According to Tinto (2012b), the two main links between students and their departure or persistence are "intention and commitment" (p. 37). Intentions, per Tinto, could also be considered goals. Regarding intentions, Tinto (2012b) noted "the stronger the links between the goal of college completion and other valued goals, the greater the likelihood that the former goal will be attained" (p. 38). In other words, if a student's goals – personal, occupational, or otherwise – are linked to their goal of college completion, they are more likely to persist and less likely to depart. The good news for educators of EdD students is that their goal of completing a doctoral degree is typically linked to other goals. Many seek out a doctoral degree because of their personal sense of accomplishment (Knowles, 1980a; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Others are trying to reach occupational goals that require a doctorate (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Linking these goals to their goal of degree completion will increase the likelihood that their goals will be reached (Tinto, 2012b).

The second main link between students and their persistence or departure is commitment. The two main types of commitment are goal commitment and institutional commitment (Tinto, 2012b). Both goal and institutional commitment are important for students. In her study of 766 college students, Mutter (1992) found that the students who persisted were confident of their decision to attend their institution and were very determined to graduate from that school. Goal

commitments can help a student persist when difficulties arise. Reminding EdD students of their aforementioned goals, both personal and professional, may help them persist. However, if students are not committed to their institution, they may persist by actually leaving their current university. Because of this, institutional commitment is especially important from the perspective of university administration.

Some EdD students enter their program with high institutional commitment. Just as there are stringent acceptance requirements for students entering EdD programs, students seeking out the right program also typically have stringent requirements for the institution. Students may seek out an institution because of the school's institutional or EdD program accreditation, the cost, the reputation, or other inherent characteristics. Other EdD students may have lower institutional commitment upon enrollment. They might have enrolled in that particular institution because it was the only program that would accept them or because the cost, format, or location better suited their needs. If there was a strong desire to attend elsewhere, low institutional commitment could be present. Tinto (2012b) noted that institutional commitment is sometimes strong prior to a student's enrollment, but even if it is not, it can be strengthened through integration. Although students often begin their educational career with intentions and commitments, "what happens following entry is, in most cases, more important to the process of student departure than what has previously occurred" (Tinto, 2012b, p. 45). Mutter (1992) found that persisting students with high levels of institutional commitment were encouraged by significant people in their lives to attend their institution. It is important that EdD students have the support of their family and friends as they pursue their degree and that their family and friends value not only the student's degree pursuit, but also the institution the student is enrolled at as well.

Integration. Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence indicates, "it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his [or her] continuance in that college" (p. 96). According to this theory, students who integrate socially and academically in their university have the lowest risk of attrition. While Tinto (2000) acknowledged that the classroom is a learning community, he also noted that for full integration, engagement must occur inside and outside of the classroom. While there are many reasons students leave an institution, Tinto (1975) posited that "other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion" (p. 96). In her study, Ducette (1990) found this to be true among PhD and EdD students ($N = 206$). Social and academic integration were strong influencers on students' commitment to their goal of completing their degree and thus contributed to student persistence (Ducette, 1990). Likewise, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) found "academic integration, combined with program structures that foster social integration with faculty" (p. 111) important for online doctoral persistence specifically.

Academic integration. The first type of integration is academic integration (Tinto, 2012b). Lovitts and Nelson (2000) echoed Tinto noting "broadly speaking, it is a lack of integration into the departmental community that contributes most heavily to the departure of graduate students" (p. 49). For doctoral students, integration into their specific department is necessary. Lovitts and Nelson (2000) credited programs that require significant intellectual and social interaction between students and faculty with the lowest attrition rates. For DE EdD programs, it can be difficult to integrate within one's department. Anastas (2012) found that some barriers to integration include "geographic distance from campus, competing roles (e.g.,

parenting, full-time employment), and a sense of difference from fellow students" (p. 108). Each of these things also contributed to feelings of isolation (Anastas, 2012). Any or all of these barriers can be present for DE EdD students, so it is important to understand how they can be overcome and how integration can occur.

Academic integration is largely a responsibility of faculty. According to Tinto (2012b), "the faculty, more than any other group, represents the primary intellectual orientations of the institution" (p. 53). Faculty must "go beyond delivering Web-based instruction" and "integrate online students into the day-to-day life of the school" (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 372). Rovai and Wighting (2005) noted "online faculty members serve a key role in fostering a strong sense of community through their teaching styles and attitude of caring about their students" (p. 107). Tinto also found that faculty influence academic integration both inside and outside of the classroom. Students must learn to value their department's mission and the coursework's objectives. It is important for faculty to link their course material to the student's life personally or for doctoral students, to his or her professional practice; a clear application and relevance to the student's personal life will help the student commit to learning and academic integration (Knowles, 1980a).

Social integration. Social integration is the involvement of students with the social structure of their institutions through classroom activities and conversations with peers and faculty (Tinto, 1997) as well as through informal interaction with faculty and peers outside of the classroom (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a). Academic integration alone is not enough; students must also integrate socially, and faculty have an important role in their students' social integration (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Tinto, 2012b). According to Tinto (2012b), "involvement in the classroom leads students to seek out contact with faculty and

their classmates after class" (p. 132). Thus, academic integration can lead students to seek out social integration. While Tinto's comment refers to the traditional classroom, this concept is corroborated in the online classroom as well. Interest sparked through classroom interaction in discussion boards or faculty comments in announcements and on assignments can lead to interest in building personal relationships.

Again, social integration into their specific department is also necessary for students. When students are integrated, the likelihood of dropout dramatically decreases (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Lovitts and Nelson (2000) revealed that the lowest attrition rates are in disciplines that require a lot of collaboration and community. Disciplines like the sciences, law, and medicine where students are likely working daily alongside other students and professors see lower attrition rates. These disciplines are also more likely to be completed in traditional residence format rather than through distance education or limited residence programs. On the contrary, the highest attrition rates are seen in the humanities where research is "individualized and isolated" (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000, p. 49).

While doctoral students must integrate with faculty, relationships with other students are also a key part of social integration. Integration with peers may be initially more important because faculty may intimidate students (Gardner, 2009). There are many factors that influence social integration with peers (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Students may initially connect through their shared experiences, stressors, and concerns (Byrd, 2016; Gardner, 2009). Students must have the opportunity to easily connect with other students of various races and background for social integration to occur. Once relationships are built, students must have the opportunity to interact with students informally outside of the classroom through school sponsored programs or events and study groups (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a). In DE

programs, these types of interaction are very limited. They are often only accomplished through assignments that require group work or peer review. Research indicates that social integration and connectedness increases with the use of technology outside of the classroom (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a). Studying connectedness in doctoral candidates ($N = 132$), Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014a) found that the greatest levels of perceived peer-to-peer connectedness were experienced by students who interacted with their peers via social networking technologies like Facebook and Skype. A better understanding of how social integration occurs for doctoral students can help further research on doctoral persistence (Tinto, 2012b).

According to Nettles and Millet (2006), social integration can be a key influencer of why a student persists or drops out of a degree program. Social integration can affect a student's "performance, satisfaction, and success in doctoral programs" (Nettles & Millet, 2006, p. 89). Nettles and Millet (2006), like Tinto, noted that socialization affects the "attitudes, beliefs, values, and skills of students" (p. 89). Social integration reaches much further than simply building relationships.

As a result of their study of professional educators ($N = 76$) who persisted through a doctoral degree in education, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) concluded that if students were academically and socially integrated in their institutions, they were more likely to persist and "conversely, when students fail to become integrated into their university's academic and social communities, they are more likely to withdraw" (p. 200). Lovitts and Nelson's (2000) survey of doctoral students noted "high correlation between integration into a department's social and professional life (becoming part of the community) and successful completion of the PhD" (p. 47). Students who are successful in doctoral programs typically integrate socially and academically in their university. In a study conducted by Phelps (1996) of doctoral students ($N =$

205), students who reported low levels of social integration into their university tended to take longer to complete their degree than their peers that had more fully integrated into the institution. Tinto (2012b) indicated that a lack of social integration leads to isolation and "isolation, through common, need not occur" (p. 50).

For DE doctoral programs, social integration is particularly difficult. Since face-to-face interaction is limited or non-existent, feelings of social isolation may occur (Ali & Leeds, 2009). Because limited social integration is typical in online programs, there is a tendency for online students to feel like 'faceless names' (Glogowska, 2007). Shouping (2011) warned that high academic engagement is not enough. Without social engagement, students who were highly engaged academically were more disposed to dropout; Shouping (2011) found that "a higher level of social engagement was related to an increased probability of persisting" (p. 97). In the academic sense, students who fail to integrate socially are not altogether different from persistent students (Lovitts, 2008; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Tinto, 2012b). They have the ability to persist, but without social integration, they are less likely to do so. Research is also clear that the presence of the facilitator and even other students in the online classroom must be perceivable for community and social presence to be built (Garrison et al., 2000; Kop, 2011).

One solution for fostering social integration in distance education is simply increasing the student's understanding of and ability to use DE tools efficiently for "learning, communicating, and sharing" (Wilson & Allen, 2008, p. 220); Wilson and Allen concluded that this may result in increased social engagement. When students feel inept in the distance-learning environment, they may struggle with tools that foster community in the classroom, thus keeping them from socially integrating. Alleviating the struggle with the environment and online classroom tools early on may help. Faculty can also use tools students may already be familiar with to increase

social integration and connectedness, such as social-networking technologies (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a). Other researchers note that orientations for new students can build community and social integration, especially if a component like service learning is involved (Stavrianopoulos, 2008). Requiring the orientation experience for students can "help integrate them into the academic and social life of the school" (Rovai, 2003a, p. 13).

When social integration does occur and community is experienced, membership in the learning community occurs (Wighting et al., 2008). This means the student feels a sense of community, acceptance, belonging, and shared values with other students at their institution. This membership leads to a sense of trust and the realization that all parties in the community have responsibilities and obligations for each other and for the institution (Wighting et al., 2008). Community membership also allows students to express themselves and deal with disappointments and difficulties (Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Tinto, 2017, 2018). Wighting et al. (2008) concluded that these members then adopt "a shared faith that their educational needs will be met interdependently through their commitment to shared goals" (p. 286). Without a sense of community, students "tend to feel isolated and are at-risk of withdrawing" (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 363). Rovai (2014) found that "a strong sense of community acts as a buffer against threats, provides a place in which individuals are free to express their identities, and helps them deal with changes and difficulties" (p. 87). Participants in Byrd's (2016) study of doctoral students in an online program ($N = 12$) indicated that experiencing "challenges and adverse situations together" as part of a community actually strengthened their bonds and their sense of community (p. 122). It can be comforting to students when they know they are not the only one struggling or unsure of the next step (Tinto, 2018). Through integration, a partnership is built that results in commitment to one's goals and one's institution.

It is important to note that social integration at the doctoral level is closely tied with academic integration. Barnett (2008) discovered that persistent doctoral students ($n = 15$) in his study integrated socially with their peers through academic activities and assignments. Academic integration is extremely important in non-residential institutions since opportunities for social integration are limited (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983) and students and faculty interact primarily within the confines of the classroom (Tinto, 1997). According to Tinto (1997), students may struggle to focus on academic involvement until membership occurs; once students integrate socially, their attention shifts to academic integration through those relationships. Mutter (1992) determined that academic integration through work in the classroom or interactions with faculty did indeed contribute to persistence. Social and academic integration into one's institution often leads to institutional commitment; these factors are essential for doctoral student persistence to degree completion (Joseph, 1995; Tinto, 2012b; Wolniak et al., 2012).

Familial integration. Studying EdD students from a background of poverty ($N = 12$), Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c) uncovered the phenomenon of *familial integration* as it relates to doctoral persistence. Familial integration is "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196). The researchers emphasized the importance of institutional and program fit with family structure and their findings reiterate the family's role in supporting the doctoral student throughout the degree. Many other researchers have also indicated the imperative nature of familial support noting that it contributes to motivation and persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, 2015; West, 2014), may lessen time to degree completion (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and provide practical forms of support such as childcare, financial assistance, and emotional support (Davidson et al., 2009; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; West, 2014).

However, many families are not sure how to provide the support their family member needs as a doctoral student (West, 2014). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c) suggest the inclusion of an orientation for family members of doctoral students to integrate the family and help them understand the commitment, support, and sacrifice that will be necessary during the doctoral journey. Family orientations can provide a safe place for "candid conversations about responsibilities and roles" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018, p. 510) which may be especially important for female students navigating a new role in academia with their role as a wife and mother (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). It is particularly important that families are well informed and thoroughly understand each stage of the doctoral journey since individual stages present unique challenges and needs (Golde, 2005).

Economic integration. Economic integration was also a consideration for this study as it has been linked to time to degree completion and persistence (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 1998, 2000; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Economic integration reflects the "degree to which students' financial needs are met while pursuing the doctorate" (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 117). Many times, students who are not economically integrated have lower levels of academic and social integration because they are not entirely free to focus on the pursuit of their degree (Earl-Novell, 2006).

This does not mean that all forms of financing for school are equal. Students who receive financial assistance from their university through assistantships and fellowships that did not have to seek additional employment found persistence and faster degree completion more possible (Earl-Novell, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Unfortunately, opportunities for fellowships and assistantships in doctoral education are not as common as many other fields, so EdD students are primarily self-financed (Golde & Walker, 2006). Earl-Novell (2006) noted that students who

finance their own education may struggle to integrate socially and academically as they balance the responsibility of school with full-time employment and other personal obligations. They may also struggle with the dissertation process because a concentrated focus of effort is necessary for completion (Tinto, 2012b).

Socialization Theory

Gardner (2008) asserted that doctoral attrition and persistence could be better understood through the lens of socialization. The socialization of the student to the professional and social roles appropriate for the profession they are studying is one of the main intents of doctoral education (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Thus, socialization is the second theory informing this study. Socialization "is the process by which an individual achieves his[/her] identity within the group" (Bragg, 1976, p. 6). It is through this process that the EdD student "acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought" (Bragg, 1976, p. 1) appropriate for EdD students and professional educators. Students at all levels of education (i.e., undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, graduate) are socialized, but typically they are socialized to their roles as students and to the school's culture (Goodfellow, 2014). However, doctoral students undergo this type of socialization while they are at the same time socialized "to the professional role as a productive member in an academic setting" (Goodfellow, 2014, p. 595). Throughout their programs, EdD students will undergo identity transformation (Hall & Burns, 2009; Wellington & Sikes, 2006; West, 2014) and this occurs in large part due to the socialization process (Bragg, 1976). Bragg (1976) indicated identity transformation is "the end product of the socialization process" as the student incorporates his/her program's "values and norms into the individual's self-image" (p. 6).

There are a variety of theories regarding how socialization occurs. In education, socialization occurs through learning, faculty, peers, and integration into the environment (i.e., the institution and department; Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001). According to Weidman et al. (2001), the stages of socialization to graduate programs are the anticipatory stage, formal stage, informal stage, and personal stage. Weidman et al.'s (2001) anticipatory stage is where behavioral and emotional norms are established as students acclimate to the culture of the institution and department and knowledge is transferred from professor to student. The formal stage is a time of observation where new students observe older students to "learn about normative role expectations and how they are carried out" (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 13). Bragg (1976) calls this the observation stage. In other words, this is when students see what they learned during the anticipatory stage at work in and through others while also shaping who they want to be themselves within the professional culture they are expected to conform to. The informal stage is where students engage the professional culture of the department themselves and hopefully put what they observed in the earlier stages into practice (Weidman et al., 2001). Bragg (1976) labeled this the imitation stage. Lastly, "the role is internalized" during the personal stage as students reconcile the "incongruity between their previous self-image and their new professional image as they assume their new role" (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 14). Bragg (1976) refers to this as the internalization stage.

It is interesting to note that Bragg (1976) addressed two additional stages before internalization or Weidman et al.'s (2001) personal stage. Bragg branded these the feedback and modification stages. During these stages, students practice what is learned through socialization and receive feedback from mentors; they then modify their behavior until it aligns with what is expected (Bragg, 1976). Because of the importance of this feedback, Bragg (1976) posited that

before socialization can really begin, students must identify a "significant other" to replicate (p. 7). This may be a faculty member, an external professional, the student's own idea of the ideal professional educator, or a composite of multiple people or ideals (Bragg, 1976). This role model helps the student gauge his or her progress. The role model becomes a socializing agent who influences "values, attitudes, and behavior" (Bragg, 1976, p. 20).

Also important in the socialization process is the faculty advisor or mentor (Bragg, 1976). This person may be the student's role model, but this may not be the case; either way, they are also a socializing agent. Bragg's (1976) mentor or coach role requires trust and a balance between dependence and independence. The mentor helps establish the student's prescribed routine and deadlines or milestones. The mentor encourages but also corrects through feedback when the student is not on track or modeling appropriate professional behavior (Bragg, 1976). According to Gardner (2010a), much of a doctoral student's socialization comes through one-on-one advising, but this occurs less in DE and limited residency programs than it does in traditional programs.

The mentor is also likely to be a key influencer of whether or not the student feels like a colleague or not in their department, which can impact a student's sense of belonging or fit (Bragg, 1976). This sense of belonging is one of Weidman and Stein's (2003) mechanisms of socialization. Bragg (1976) termed this "collegiality" and related it to both socialization and the level of satisfaction a student has with his/her program. According to Bragg, this collegiality traditionally occurs through formal interactions with faculty (i.e., sitting in on faculty meetings, co-writing a paper with faculty, observing faculty's professional behavior as they teach or interact in their departments) and informal interactions (i.e., interaction in the hallways, social events, in the library). However, these interactions are rarely observed by students in DE because

of the nature of the transactional distance (Moore, 1993, 2013) between students and their peers and professors. The department itself can contribute to successful or unsuccessful collegiality, thus the department and its culture are important in the socialization process (Bragg, 1976).

According to Gardner (2010b), socialization in doctoral programs occurs through the support received by faculty, peers, and external sources, self-direction, a feeling of ambiguity regarding program expectations, competency exams, and the dissertation experience, and the transitions that occur from stage to stage in the journey. Of the support received, Gardner (2010a, 2010b) noted that peer support is especially valuable in doctoral education because students are transitioning through the stages and experiencing ambiguity together; therefore, they can relate to each other and encourage one another during this time (Gardner, 2010a, 2010b; Parker et al., 2015). Also particularly important to socialization is old students showing new students the ropes as they model appropriate behavior and give advice regarding professors, courses, and dissertation topics (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010b; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015).

The theory of socialization and its process has primarily been understood through the lens of traditional (residential) education. Goodfellow (2014) asserted, "whether professional socialization can occur in PhD programs offered at a distance has not yet been established" (p. 595). This is because many of the key elements of socialization are rare or lacking in DE. For instance, Gardner (2010a) and Gopaul (2011) explained that rubbing shoulders with faculty in the halls is an important component of socialization, especially in the formal (Weidman et al., 2001) or observation (Bragg, 1976) stages. Peer-to-peer interaction is also important in socialization (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010a, 2010b; Juedes, 2010; Parker et al., 2015) and students further along in the program can aid in the orienting of newer students (Juedes, 2010). But these types of interaction are also limited in DE. Additionally, Portnoi et al. (2015) indicated

that socialization occurs through curricular and extracurricular experiences and by collaborating on research projects, but DE often lacks these opportunities.

In traditional doctoral programs, socialization occurs through formal and informal mentorship. This happens faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer (Bragg, 1976; Miller & Deggs, 2012), and especially through the faculty advisor relationship (Bragg, 1976; Portnoi et al., 2015) as the advisor works very closely with the student through the doctoral journey and often becomes their dissertation chair. This faculty advisor relationship does not always exist early on in DE programs. Gopaul (2011) noted that doctoral programs favor full-time, published, and externally funded students, who are rare in traditional programs and are even scarcer in DE doctoral programs. In fact, the number of part-time doctoral students in education tends to be higher than other disciplines (Weidman & Stein, 2003).

While some educators are focusing on socialization less in DE (Miller & Deggs, 2012), it is unlikely that this is the correct response. Instead, educators must "recognize that socialization is as important as instruction in online learning environments" (Rovai et al., 2005, p. 372). When discussing non-traditional institutions, such as commuter schools or external degree programs, Bragg (1976) prescribed orientation programs for students and their families to aid in socialization. DE EdD programs would likely benefit from this recommendation as a non-traditional program. While offering all of the information in a single session orientation at the beginning of a program could be overwhelming, Gardner (2010b) recommended the use of structured orientation sessions that continue throughout the doctoral journey to aid students in socialization and to support them in their various needs during those stages.

According to Portnoi et al. (2015), "doctoral student socialization is the process through which emerging scholars are inducted into their academic disciplines and the academic

profession" (p. 5). While acculturating doctoral students to their programs and the profession, Parker et al. (2015) also found that scaffolding support is beneficial. An orientation that extends through multiple sessions may be a vehicle to deliver this support (Bragg, 1976). Understanding the theory of socialization helps one also understand the necessity of discovering the ideal components of an orientation to DE EdD programs; therefore, socialization theory is an important framework for this study.

Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy, Tinto's (1975) persistence theory, the concepts of social, academic, familial, and economic integration, and socialization theory (Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001) provided the framework for this study by laying a foundation that helped clarify the problem and how to execute further research (Leshem & Trafford, 2007). My study aimed to link these theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs that puts these concepts, if supported by the data collected, and the other components identified by participants, into practice.

Review of the Literature

The rate of departure in DE EdD programs is between 50% and 70% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006) and is much higher than the rate of attrition in traditional programs (Carr, 2000; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Frankola, 2001; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Departure is costly for students, institutions and communities (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Malone et al., 2004; Smallwood, 2004) so this problem needs to be addressed. While preparing students with effective methods of persistence through an orientation to their DE EdD program may be helpful (Bozarth et al., 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Lorenzetti, 2006; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Pintz & Posey, 2013; Putre, 2008), a model for an orientation to DE EdD

programs does not exist. The purpose of this review was to identify the relevant components according to literature that provided an initial structure for my research questions and data collection procedures.

Doctoral Attrition

Attrition is one of the main concerns of all institutions, but it is not well understood at the doctoral level (Golde, 2005; Stallone, 2011). Attrition refers to the number of students who leave a course or program. According to Ali and Leeds (2009), attrition "is often used interchangeably with drop-rate" (p. 2). For online institutions, attrition rates are particularly high. Retention rates, or the number of students who persist term to term in online higher education programs, are lower than in traditional programs (Carr, 2000; Frankola, 2001). Although some educators and institutions do not acknowledge the higher attrition risk in the online environment versus the traditional one, Allen and Seaman (2010) found that the most experienced institutions with "extensive online offerings," strongly agreed "that retaining students is a greater problem for online than it is for face-to-face courses" (p. 14). Generally, across all levels of post-secondary education, "at least half of all students enrolled in online courses are not course completers" (Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008, p. 449). According to Ali and Leeds (2009), "retention rates are 20% lower in online courses than in traditional face-to-face courses" (p. 1). The consensus is that many students are not prepared for the rigor and difficulty of DE courses prior to enrollment (Wilson & Allen, 2011).

While attrition rates are generally high in postsecondary education, especially in the DE environment, attrition is also a problem on the doctoral level. Only about 57% of students obtained their doctoral degree after 10 years according to a study of all disciplines ($N = 9683$) completed by the Council of Graduate Schools (2008), resulting in an attrition rate of 43%. As a

result of forty years of study, it is generally accepted that the attrition rate in doctoral programs is 50% (Council of Graduate Studies, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). In other words, of every two students who decide to pursue a doctoral degree, statistically, one will not finish. However, DE doctoral program attrition rates are typically 10-20% higher than comparable traditional programs (Carr, 2000; Frankola, 2001; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Patterson & McFadden, 2009; Rovai, 2002b; Terrell, 2005; Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009).

For DE EdD programs specifically, the attrition rate may be as high as 60-70% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006). It is clear that "a key issue for postsecondary institutions is that of trying to find ways in which student retention in online courses can be improved" (Hebert, 2007, para. 2) and that attention should be given to improving DE and doctoral attrition rates (Golde, 2005; Hebert, 2007; Lewis, 2010; West et al., 2011), especially as the use of DE for doctoral education becomes more common (Evans et al., 2005; Terrell et al., 2012; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004).

Stop-out. In addition to the students who do not complete their degree, some students take breaks from their degree pursuit, referred to as stopping-out of their program (Nettles & Millet, 2006). These students withdraw for a time, but later reenroll and continue their degree pursuit (Tinto, 1993). EdD students have a higher rate of stop-out than any other doctoral degree program (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Many EdD students stop-out for a job, finances, heath issues, or family commitments, but others stop-out because of academic struggles or lack of social integration (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Woosley, 2004). Students who stop-out typically have a lower grade point average (GPA) than graduates who persist without stopping-out (DesJardins et al., 2002). While students in this category technically do complete their degree, it is likely that many non-completers only intended to take a break rather than drop-out completely. While some

students who withdraw intend to merely stop-out, at times those same students do not return to complete their degree (Woosley, 2004). In a study completed by DesJardins et al. (2002), 70% (*n* = 419) of stop-out students had a second stop-out period. The students who stopped out more than once were "virtually assured of not graduating" (DesJardins et al., 2002, p. 565).

Time-to-degree completion. It can be very difficult to return to a degree pursuit after taking a break. Additionally, breaks can lead to a longer time-to-degree completion, making the commitment to completing a doctorate even more of an undertaking. EdD students have the longest time-to-degree completion compared to doctoral students in other fields (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Women and minority students are most likely to be late completers, taking longer to finish their degree than white males (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). Minority students are also the most likely to stop-out (DesJardins et al., 2002) and are underrepresented as holders of terminal degrees (Nettles & Millet, 2006), though the highest percentage of minorities and second highest percentage of women holding terminal degree are found in the field of education (Golde & Walker, 2006).

Educators distinctly realize that understanding how students learn and are successful is important. Likewise, understanding the influencers on retention and attrition are important as well (Koroghlanian & Brinkerhoff, 2007). Understanding the factors that guide a person's decision to stop-out or drop-out could be helpful for educators and institutions (Perry et al., 2008). However, why students leave is not always clear. Lovitts and Nelson (2000) noted, "most [students] leave silently; they simply disappear, without communicating any reservations about the program to faculty or administrators. Exit interviews or follow-up contacts with departing students are rare" (p. 49).

Attrition factors. There are many reasons students decide to leave their doctoral program and understanding these reasons is important in the study of persistence. Sometimes students begin the program and then change directions in their career. Other times, the student's or a parent or child's health might begin to decline. Factors like this are outside the control of the institution and cannot be prevented. However, some factors can be attributed to or even caused by the institution. Thus, it is important to address the personal and institutional reasons for attrition at the doctoral level.

Personal reasons. As previously noted, some personal reasons are beyond the control of the institution. However, others can be addressed early in a program so that skills are developed, and contingency plans are made before they are needed (Rovai & Wighting, 2005).

External communities. While students are integrating socially into their institution, they are already part of a number of communities outside of the institution. These external communities are highly influential in the lives of EdD students. At times, their degree pursuit is halted because of family situations or the influence of their external communities (Rovai et al., 2005; Tinto, 2012b; Willging & Johnson, 2009). While Tinto (2012b) noted that the influence of external communities could be positive or negative to their persistence, Nettles and Millet (2006) illuminated a potential problem for EdD students. According to Nettles and Millet (2006), EdD students come from families with parents who have the weakest educational backgrounds. This can be motivating for these students, as they seek to be the first in their family to excel in their education, but it can also make it difficult for their families to relate to them since a culture that values education may not be present (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c).

Just like any student, EdD students need the support of their family, friends, and even co-workers. When difficult moments arise in their degree pursuit, it is important for students to have

an external community to encourage and push them forward in their degree pursuit. Without this type of community, persistence may prove difficult for the EdD student. Although these communities may be present, they can be challenged over time, producing conflict in the life of the doctoral student. During doctoral studies, Wellington and Sikes (2006) noted, "family and personal relationships are sometimes strained and can even break down as a result of a student's involvement in their studies" (p. 731). Identity transformation occurs during the doctoral journey as the student transitions from autonomous to self-directed learner, and then to researcher (West, 2014). Tension can occur as the student's thinking transforms and his or her values may not align with his or her family's values (West, 2014). Additional tension may develop because of the shift in roles and responsibilities that can occur as the student needs to lessen familial responsibilities and another family member has to take on more (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; West, 2014). This type of conflict in external communities can lead to attrition from the degree.

Ability. In addition to the influence of external communities, a lack of pre-requisite skills can lead to attrition from the EdD program. Some students fail to adjust to the rigor of the educational journey they are on or they fail to "apply previously acquired intellectual skills to new situations" (Tinto, 2012b, p. 47). This may be especially true for DE EdD students who are new to the online environment and have difficulty applying strategies from their experience with traditional education to the online environment. Furthermore, students who have undergraduate and graduate degrees in the same field of study are more likely to be successful since they are better prepared in their content area (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Nettles and Millet (2006) noted that only 22% of EdD students received their bachelor's degree in education. The nature of the field of education, especially for advanced degree holders, is that educators may have a variety of expertise in various fields. Because of this, they may be less prepared for their degree

requirements and fail to persist (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Students who fail to do well or perceive that they are incompetent develop amotivation and are also less likely to persist (Wighting et al., 2008).

While a discrepancy in ability may be present, it is important to note that it is not a lack of intelligence that leads to departure or unsuccessful doctoral students. Rather, there are specific types of intelligence and ability that doctoral students must possess (Lovitts, 2008). One of the most important types of intelligence for doctoral students according to Lovitts is *practical intelligence*. Two examples of lack of practical intelligence are (a) students who "have a very grand concept of what they want to do but no notion of how to implement it" and (b) students "who become absolutely immersed in the data but cannot get anything out of them" (Lovitts, 2008, p. 304). Without practical intelligence, students may find it difficult to problem solve, determine how to progress to the next stage of their dissertation, or become independent researchers.

Closely linked to practical intelligence is *creative intelligence*. Creative intelligence is essential in doctoral education as students transition to independence (Lovitts, 2008) from autonomous to self-directed learners (Ponton, 2014). Students with creative intelligence seek and accept criticism and can navigate the next steps when their research hits a dead end (Lovitts, 2008). The ability to move from dependent students in the beginning of their program to self-directed learners and independent researchers at the dissertation phase through practical and creative intelligence is essential for EdD students (Ponton, 2014); without it, the decision to depart may seem like the only viable option.

Finances and time. According to Golde (1998, 2000), stress, lack of financial resources, and lack of time can also be main contributors to a decision to leave. Doctoral degrees can be

expensive and the long time-to-degree completion can lead to an exhaustion of financial resources and the inability to continue a degree. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) cited economic integration as essential, illuminating a link between work, financial support, and time to degree completion. Students who are able to work on campus or have a fellowship typically finish the doctoral degree more quickly than students with outside employment (Wao & Ogwuegbuzie, 2011). However, most EdD students maintain full time employment in the field of education so they rarely take or are offered these types of opportunities (Anastas, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006). A doctoral degree is a significant commitment and it is often done "at a time of life when many people face practical, emotional and financial demands from children and parents" (Wellington & Sikes, 2006, p. 731). In addition to the strain this puts on finances, it also results in some students becoming simply overwhelmed by the number of years their degree is scheduled to take to complete or with the fact that they are not progressing through their program at the pace they hoped; as a result, they are not willing to commit to such a vast undertaking (Lovitts, 2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Willging & Johnson, 2009). The delayed gratification of long-term rewards like promotions or financial incentives may lose out over more immediate opportunities because of this extended time-to-degree completion. Students must be able to delay gratification since the independent nature of the dissertation does not allow for much recognition or positive reinforcement and the dissertation may take several years to complete (Lovitts, 2008). Inability to delay gratification can lead to stop-out or attrition from the program because of increased responsibility, a loss of interest, or an opportunity for short-term gratification such as a job opportunity.

Self-discipline. Many students entering a DE program do so because they believe it may be easier than a traditional program (Golladay et al., 2000). This belief can lead to a passive

attitude towards learning and a lack of self-discipline, which may lead to poor student performance early on. DE EdD students must realize the need for self-discipline and that it is one of the most critical success factors for online students (Golladay et al., 2000). Part of self-discipline is adopting "patience, willingness to work hard, initiative, persistence, and intellectual curiosity" (Lovitts, 2008, p. 309); these are traits that students who persisted in their doctoral program found as invaluable. Students must also realize their responsibility of assuming an active or proactive role in their learning, becoming self-directed and self-regulated, not merely autonomous (Burchard & Swerdzwski, 2009; Halter et al., 2006; Ponton, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014; Rovai, 2014). Failure to develop these skills can lead to frustration and voluntary or involuntary attrition from the doctoral program.

Institutional reasons for departure. While some students do indeed leave for personal reasons, others leave due to institution or program related factors. According to Lovitts and Nelson (2000), "the real problem is with the character of graduate programs rather than with the character of their students. Yet most faculty assume that the best students finish their degrees and the less talented and qualified depart" (p. 49). Institutions should not overlook the fact that at least part of their attrition is a result of the institution itself. Students who perceive a poor social or intellectual experience within the institution may choose to leave that school (Tinto, 2012b; Willging, 2009). Attrition rates do not entirely reflect student inability to complete a program for personal reasons or educational ability. The ability and qualifications of students who stay and students who leave are generally equal (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Instead, factors like a lack of support, a poorly structured program, or a program that lacks rigor may drive a decision to leave that is based on the character of the institution or program.

Unclear expectations. One institutional characteristic that contributes to attrition is unclear expectations (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lewis, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Students enter DE EdD programs with certain expectations and when they are not clearly and intentionally debunked by the institution, students may depart. As noted earlier, long degree completion times can exceed the initial expectations EdD students had upon enrollment (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Many students fail to realize how long the dissertation process takes and how time-consuming course completion can be since courses are more difficult than their master's degree workload. Student expectations upon enrollment may not line up with the extensive degree requirements, leading to frustration and a feeling that the degree is not pertinent or personally necessary (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). The institution itself contributes to these unrealistic and unclear expectations by not making expectations clear up front. Institutions may also contribute by creating requirements that sometimes conflict with those that were previously delineated (e.g., the independent and unstructured nature of the dissertation process). The frustration of the unclear requirements of an institution and the expectations of incoming students can easily lead to departure from the institution. Thus, departments should take a more active role in helping students transition to doctoral studies and understand the expectations of the program (Golde, 2005).

Support levels. While students require the support of external communities, internal support from the institution is essential (Tinto, 2012a). However, establishing a community of support and fostering interaction are known challenges in the online environment (Baker, 2014). Institutions that fail to support their students contribute to student departure (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). While doctoral degrees require independent research, not all stages of the program should be entirely hands-off. Many programs only provide periodic or sporadic support (Ehrenberg et

al., 2007). If this support is not provided at the right time or is not scaffolded from more supportive to less supportive throughout the program, attrition may be a result. Students who feel under-supported during the process of pursuing their doctoral degree are more likely to withdraw from their program (Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Programs with quality advising and clearly communicated expectations have been found to have lower attrition rates (de Valero, 2001; Ehrenberg et al., 2007). A student's relationship with his or her committee chair may highly influence a decision to stay or leave an institution (de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Many students need the support and encouragement of their chair to help them overcome feelings of self-doubt (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Students also need to be supported when their program does not live up to their expectations. However, students are often discouraged from speaking up when they have a complaint or are not happy with their program (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Speaking up may have costly consequences including losing financial support, a teaching position, or letters of recommendation (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Persistence

In addition to understanding why students leave doctoral programs, just as much if not more can be learned from students who persist through their program (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b). It is essential for stakeholders to understand the characteristics and skills successful graduates of doctoral programs possess. According to Storms et al. (2011), "learning from the experience of successful doctoral graduates and advisors could be especially helpful to programs seeking to improve the graduation rate of EdD programs" (p. 86).

While literature does not exhaust the topic of the persistence factors of EdD students specifically, several studies highlight important characteristics of successful doctoral program graduates. After reviewing 76 interviews with educators holding a doctoral degree, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found that the interviewees attributed the fact that they "were both personally and professionally motivated to begin the degree, had compelling reasons to persist, developed an array of resilience mechanisms, and generated strategies for dissertation completion" (p. 212) to their ability to persist through the doctoral degree and dissertation process.

Academic experience. One reason students are compelled to persist is satisfaction with their academic experiences. In a mixed methods study ($N = 207$), Ivankova and Stick (2007) examined factors that led to student persistence in a Doctor of Educational Leadership program and found that "quality of the program and other related academic experiences" (p. 121) were essential for student persistence. While a number of factors were identified, the characteristic with the most significant effect on student persistence was quality academic experience (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). As previously noted, the actual program carries a lot of influence on the doctoral student and if their experiences are positive, they are more likely to persist, even through difficult stages of the process (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Doctoral students are looking for a solid program that provides significant challenge and rigor; this helps them know that they are not wasting their time with their degree pursuit and that all of the hard work will be worth it.

A quality program is not enough for EdD students. A program can be of the utmost quality, but if the goals of the program do no match the goals of the student, the program is not useful (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 2012b); Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) labeled this

phenomenon *academic mismatch*. For example, if the goal of a program's curriculum is to generate excellent educators or K-12 practitioners, but a student's primary goal is to become a researcher, a lack of enthusiasm may result, making persistence a struggle. Serious instances of academic mismatch result in a student's consideration of leaving his or her doctoral program (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Online environment. For some students, "the very nature of the online learning environment" (Ivankova & Stick, 2007, p. 112) contributes significantly to their persistence. Online learning is incredibly convenient and flexible and as a result, it "maximizes students' freedom and autonomy" (Wighting et al., 2008, p. 292). As previously noted, many doctoral students come to the program with a family, a career, and other responsibilities. The flexibility of distance education is not just convenient - it is necessary. DE allows students to plan around upcoming family and career obligations. The nature of DE EdD programs may allow students to persist when it otherwise may not have been possible in a traditional program.

Motivation. Student self-motivation is another important factor leading to persistence (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). According to Lovitts (2008), motivation "can spell the difference between doctoral degree completion and noncompletion" (p. 313). It is important that faculty members consider motivation and incorporate opportunities to develop it in their curriculum (Wighting et al., 2008). There are a variety of motivators that lead to pursuit of a doctoral degree. These include job security, financial incentives, a search for identity, a renewed passion or professional motivation, a desire for deeper theoretical knowledge, and personal satisfaction (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Wellington & Sikes, 2006). While these motivators may be present for any student pursuing a doctoral degree, students entering a DE program may possess a higher sense of intrinsic motivation and love of learning than those entering a

traditional program (Wighting et al., 2008). Motivation to learn can lead to increased commitment and the decision to persist. Motivation is particularly important as doctoral students move to the independent research stage of the dissertation. Motivation during this stage "is an important determinant of whether they will actually finish their research, their dissertations and of the nature and quality of the contribution they make (Lovitts, 2008, p. 313).

Support. There is no question that one of the most important factors leading to student persistence in EdD programs is support from a variety of sources (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Doctoral students need an assortment of support, including institutional, familial, social, and workplace support.

Institutional. At times, students drop out for institutional reasons and one of these reasons is a lack of student support. Even if the student does not cite leaving for this reason, a lack of student support can result in attrition due to the student doing poorly academically and thus being ejected from the university. Institutional support is two-sided; institutions must offer quality support services, such as quality advising, research tutorials, or emotional support, and students must take advantage of that support. Early identification of at-risk learners and support of those learners may help institutions improve retention rates (Gilmore & Lyons, 2012). Many times, there are remedial services or recommendations that can be made available to students but if students are not well supported, they may not even be aware of these services.

Many departments have an unrealistic view of their program completion and attrition rates, estimating they are better than the rates of other institutions and assume that the fault for attrition lies on students, rather than on the institution or department (Golde, 2005; McAlpine & Norton, 2006). Since doctoral programs are highly competitive, this positive view of one's own program or department is projected loudly and can lead to overlooking the actual responsibility

of the department regarding attrition and retention, limiting the interventions implemented in individual departments. Tracking realistic attrition and time-to-degree completion rates can be detrimental to the enrollment of students in doctoral programs and individual departments, and without a realistic view, realistic interventions cannot be put in place (McAlpine & Norton, 2006). Realistic rates are also important because high rates of attrition may indicate a problem within a department or institution that needs to be investigated (Golde, 2005).

Advising. Quality mentoring and advising is important for DE EdD students (Council for Graduate Studies, 2009; de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Hardy, 2014). Heyman (2010) found that most residential programs have extensive services and support for students. For instance, traditional programs have financial aid officers, advisors, tutoring services, counseling, and other support. Increased student support needs to be integrated within online programs (Heyman, 2010); this support may reduce attrition. However, this support may also need to change over time. Completers of a doctoral degree note that access to their chairs was important, with that access actually increasing as they progressed from the coursework stage, through comprehensive exams, and to the dissertation stage (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). In addition to the chair, committee members and professors are major contributors to the success and persistence of doctoral students, particularly when completing the dissertation (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Quality support during the independent research stage eases the transition for students and results in better dissertations (Lovitts, 2008).

Academic supports. Institutions can also offer support to doctoral students through the provision of resources that foster a deeper understanding or mastery of concepts and processes that may be difficult for many doctoral students (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). One area that is often difficult for DE students is library navigation (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). In DE, access to the

institution's library resources is typically done online and many students may struggle with navigating the online library or with conducting productive searches to filter through resources. Since research is highly integrated in each stage of the doctoral journey, library navigation skills are essential for all doctoral students.

Another element of research that many doctoral students struggle with is statistics (Lesser, 2014). Most EdD programs require courses or course content in statistics and this may cause anxiety or even lead to drop out among struggling students. In a study of online doctoral students ($N = 84$), students indicated satisfaction with their doctoral program would have increased if additional resources and tutorials had been provided in the area of statistics (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). Providing tutoring and additional support in this area may lessen learner anxiety and foster a deeper understanding of the required material.

For doctoral students, understanding statistics and mastering library navigation is only part of the battle. Students must also have strong writing skills to succeed in DE EdD programs and all institutions should support doctoral students in this area (Salani et al., 2016; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). West et al. (2011) found that supporting DE students in the area of writing actually assisted students' progress through their programs. In addition to providing resources on grammar, mechanics, and revision services through an online writing center, support may come in this area through writing groups, often comprised of mostly students (Gardner, 2009; West et al., 2011). Members of these groups help the other members as they progress through the dissertation process together, providing recommendations, feedback, and a listening ear during prospectus, proposal, and dissertation development. Some institutions have involved faculty in these groups to create leader-scholar communities that support doctoral students in many areas, including writing feedback (Olson & Clark, 2009).

Emotional supports. While academic supports are necessary in doctoral programs, doctoral students may also benefit from emotional support services as well (West et al., 2011). Institutions may provide support for students in this area through counseling services and mentorship opportunities that provide someone to listen that can empathize with the student's struggles (West, 2011). Garrison et al. (2000) noted that "socio-emotional interaction and support are important and sometimes essential in realizing meaningful and worthwhile educational outcomes" (p. 95), but this type of support does not always occur in DE programs. There are times in a person's life that their emotional needs must be met before they can move forward in other areas. Doctoral programs that understand this and can provide that support may help their students persist (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016).

Financial support. Sometimes emotional support and counseling uncovers areas of difficulty that are causing anxiety. For many doctoral students, financial burdens may cause anxiety or inhibit progress (Jimenez, 2011). Institutions may be able to support doctoral students by providing financial support services (Earl-Novell, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). At times, support can be provided through fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships (de Valero, 2001; Golde, 1998, 2000; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), but students who are not given these opportunities may still need resources on budgeting, financial awareness, and creating a realistic plan to finance their education. Finances are particularly important in the dissertation phase as they allow students the ability to focus on research while limited finances may lengthen time-to-degree completion (Tinto, 2012b).

Familial. As mentioned, support from external communities like one's family is very important (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tinto, 2012b) and influences persistence as doctoral students "face familial challenges of childbearing, raising children, caring for aging parents and being the

primary breadwinner while attempting to complete a degree" (West, 2014, p. 20). The support of spouses is especially important (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Mutter, 1992; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). The majority of students cite support from family as a major influence that helped them complete their degree (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Despite the importance of this support, many families are not sure how to offer support to family members completing a doctoral degree and need to be informed of "ways to provide emotional, cognitive, and physical support" (West, 2014, p. 21). An orientation for family members is even suggested by some researchers (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, 2018). While emotional support can be provided through a variety of means, practical support (e.g., "gifts, financial support, and taking care of chores for someone else" [Jairam & Kahl, 2012, p. 319]), is primarily given by family. In a study by Jairam and Kahl (2012), persistent doctoral students ($N = 31$) indicated that this practical support from family resulted in the time they needed to complete their degree.

Social. Social support from members outside of one's family can also be important for the doctoral student. Social support can reduce stress and lessen the negative effect of potential setbacks that occur during the doctoral journey (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Jairam and Kahl (2012) found that aside from family, academic friends (i.e., fellow graduate students) and doctoral advisers (i.e., committee members, professors, and advisers) made up doctoral students' social support system. The social support group provides emotional and professional support for the student. In Jairam and Kahl's (2012) study of doctoral support, "participants discussed the support of their academic friends more than any other group" (p. 317) noting that they provided the empathy, encouragement, and enjoyment that was vital to persisting through the doctoral journey while also assisting with time management and research and writing skills. Participants ($N = 109$) in a study by Martinsuo and Turkulainen (2011) also cited the importance of peer

support, attributing this support as the most significant to success in courses and research. A strong peer network and peer support leads to resilience and perseverance despite challenges and is necessary for doctoral success (Kumar et al., 2013; West et al., 2011).

Workplace. Hardy (2014) noted, "there is a need to balance competing activities such as academics, parenting, and employment" (p. 32). Support from one's workplace is also vitally important for the doctoral student (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). Both the employers and co-workers of doctoral students give this support; employers provide flexibility and co-workers provide trust and confidence that they are competent and able to pick up the slack when necessary (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012). Without this support, DE students are more likely to drop out (Matheswaran, 2010). This is a particularly important source of support for part-time doctoral students who are completing their studies while they continue to work (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012). If workplace support is not present, a heavy workload can be overwhelming to the DE student and make persistence difficult (Matheswaran, 2010).

Self-efficacy. According to Tinto, (2017), "self-efficacy is the foundation on which student persistence is built" (p. 257). Self-efficacy, or the belief that one can be successful (Bandura, 1997), is usually developed when students have positive effective experiences (Baltes, Hoffman-Kipp, Lynn, & Weltzer-Ward, 2010). Self-efficacy is a very important component of student success, particularly for doctoral students because of the challenges and long completion time of the degree. Ivankova and Stick (2007) asserted "students who had a 'never give up'" (p. 127) attitude, or had positive views of themselves, were more likely to complete the doctorate. Students with high self-efficacy are also more likely to progress more quickly on their dissertation than students with lower self-efficacy (Varney, 2010). Doctoral students are

encouraged to practice positive self-talk to further reinforce their motivation, beliefs, and attitudes while guarding against harmful thinking that impedes progress (Collins, 2014).

   Self-directedness. According to Stewart (1993), creating autonomous learners is one of the primary goals of higher education. While autonomous learners are self-motivated, resourceful, and persistent (Ponton & Rhea, 2006), successful doctoral students must transition beyond autonomous learning to self-directed learning (Ponton, 2014; Rovai, 2014). Autonomous and self-directed learning are not synonymous and self-directed learners are not necessarily byproducts of autonomous learning (Ponton, 2014). Ponton (2014) stated that "autonomous learning is an agentive process" (p. 98) or choosing to "originate and direct actions for given purposes" (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006, p. 45). Self-directed learners are driven in part by intellectual curiosity, which is the driving force behind the transition to independent researcher (Lovitts, 2008). While autonomous learners understand how to learn from required assignments and learning activities, self-directed learners exercise agency by creating learning activities (Ponton, 2014). It is through the learning activities self-directed learners create that they identify and strengthen their weaknesses (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014). The transition to self-directed learner ideally occurs during the consolidation stage so that students are equipped to complete the dissertation (Holder, 2014; Milacci & Kuhne, 2014; Ponton, 2014) and to have a positive experience and relationship with their chair (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014); however, Holder (2014) explained that in a doctoral program, "each course is a piece of a larger program designed to prepare students for a successful transformation from autonomous learners to self-directed learners to scholars in their field" (p. 117).

Orientations

As previously noted, orientations are intended to socialize students to their new learning environment. Much of the research refers to orientation courses; however, it is important to note that orientation should be thought of as the *process* of orienting and socializing, even if it requires more than a single course or even no course at all. Tinto (2012b) communicated the importance of the entire first year of college as an orientation experience that integrates new undergraduate students academically and socially into higher education. Tomei et al. (2009) determined that orientations "are an expectation of students whether they are taking courses online or in a traditional face-to-face classroom" (p. 77). Because of the importance of early student experiences on social and academic integration, Tinto (2012b) concluded that institutions can actually prevent future problems by anticipating and meeting student needs as early as possible.

While orientations are standard in many traditional programs, they are less common in online programs and are practically non-existent at the doctoral level (Mullen, 2012; Scagnoli, 2001). However, research supports the inclusion of an orientation for DE doctoral programs. According to Kelso (2009), online programs should consider including a mandatory orientation for new students. Kumar and Dawson (2012) echoed the idea of a mandatory orientation but apply it specifically to EdD programs based on their experience implementing a new online doctorate degree program noting that incorporating the orientation at the beginning of the degree may reduce "student isolation and student apprehension" (p. 4). Reviewing orientation materials prior to starting online courses may also help smooth the start of classes (Biro, 2010).

An orientation for a DE program is similar to those for traditional programs. It should serve the same purpose "in the sense that it can facilitate academic and social interactions,

increase student involvement, enhance the sense of belonging to a virtual learning community, and help retention" (Scagnoli, 2001, p. 19). Orientations can help students integrate socially into their institution right at the start of their program (Tinto, 2012b). Matheswaran (2010) cited the lack of an orientation as a factor associated with students dropping out of DE programs.

An additional benefit of orientations provided before completing a DE program is that they help students determine what skills they need to strengthen. According to Stokes (1999), preparing students through an orientation course allows students to identify weaknesses and "subsequently develop skills for using electronic communication, the World Wide Web, and related activities through an online course designed to prepare them for success in taking subsequent online courses" (p. 161). Orientations also provide an opportunity to focus on the characteristics needed for the dissertation/independent research stage so that students can work hard at developing these skills during coursework (Lovitts, 2008). In addition to giving students a better understanding of their program expectations and their own weaknesses, orientations allow students to "reflect on motivational issues, support from family and friends, and personal responsibilities that could potentially cause them to fail or drop out" (Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008, p. 454). Thoroughly considering these factors also contributes to increased potential student success in an educational program.

Effectiveness. Research is mixed regarding the efficacy of orientation courses. According to some, orientations "can be an effective strategy for increasing the success and development of students during their first year of college" (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009. p. 443). However, others disagree with the effectiveness of orientations because despite good intentions, there are many things in orientations that are not being done well (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Malikowski, 2004; Perrine & Spain, 2008). Negative reports regarding orientations noted that

there was a disparity between what the stakeholders who developed the course saw as necessary for the course and what the teachers teaching the course found valuable, resulting in little motivation on behalf of faculty to teach the course (Malikowski, 2004). Other negative reports came from institutions with programs developed without the perspectives of students or the actual institution's faculty and where students weren't required to participate in the orientation course (Clark & Cundiff, 2011). Limited effectiveness was reported from a program that focused more on social integration than academic integration in the institution's new student orientation (Perrine & Spain, 2008). Additional research is needed "into how to make orientation courses more effective" (Lorenzetti, 2006, p. 6). Perry et al. (2008) concluded that due to the popularity of online learning, and since it may not be the best fit for everyone who opts for it over traditional learning, "it might be appropriate to seek ways to provide additional orientation to online learning before students begin the program" (p. 13). Despite the fact there is not a clear link between orientations and retention, the "good-will factor" that results from orientations may lead to increased retention (Perrine & Spain, 2008, p. 167). Still, some institutions have experienced an increase in retention after introducing a required orientation course for new online undergraduate students (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Putre, 2008).

Regardless of the effect on retention, orientations are "one of the most effective tools yet found to ensure that incoming students understand what is entailed" (Kelso, 2009, p. 4) in their online program. Additionally, students who elected to complete orientations to DE programs indicated through their feedback that they value the orientation and even believe it should be mandatory for other students (Cho, 2012; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Pintz & Posey, 2013).

Components. It is important to consider what should be included in an orientation to a DE doctoral program. Combe (2005) asserted, "a well-targeted curriculum is a vital part of

developing a successful online course, especially at the advanced level where students do not wish to waste time on revisiting previously gained knowledge" (p. 121). This certainly applies to an orientation as well. When developing an orientation to a DE program, determining the program objectives is essential for students and faculty (Bozarth et al., 2004). While the suggested components for orientations to DE doctoral programs have not been researched yet, one can learn from the research that has been completed on orientations for DE undergraduate and master's programs. However, even this research is limited; Harmon (2012) found "very little research focuses on what online components should be incorporated into an online orientation course specifically designed to prepare learners for online learning environments" (p. 81).

   Technology assessment. It is clear that computer skills are essential for online learning. Walker (2014) found that "technology can assist doctoral students in managing time more effectively, organizing research and references, retrieving pertinent information, collaborating easily, building community, networking, and reaching larger audiences" (p. 77). Yet, many faculty in the online environment express frustration with their students' inability to complete even basic computer functions such as navigating the internet, utilizing word processing programs, and completing computer scored assessments (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). Without basic computer skills, students who undertake a DE program may become frustrated and discouraged (Sahin & Shelley, 2008). Because of this, it is wise for orientations to online programs to acknowledge this skill. However, since many of the students entering a DE program will already possess the needed technology skills, including instruction in these skills during the orientation may make students feel like they are wasting their time. Instead, orientations should include an assessment test of students' technology and computer skills to make sure they are ready for the online environment (Kelso, 2009). Students who do not do well on the test can then

be recommended to additional services to build their technology and computer skills prior to beginning their online courses.

Institutional information. In addition to addressing computer skills, researchers agree that orientations should include information about the institution like contact information for student services and the school's attendance and drop policies (Bozarth et al., 2004; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Harmon, 2012; Tinto, 2012b; Tomei et al., 2009; Yerk-Zwickl, 2004). Another important component is the institution's honor code or plagiarism policy and perhaps resources that educate students about citations and formatting (Dixon et al., 2012; Putre, 2008). Finally, orientations should also include components that help students become self-directed regarding institutional services, so they can identify answers to questions they may have on their own, without the support of others (Bozarth et al., 2004; Harmon, 2012).

Student skill development. Orientations should also focus on making students aware of the skills necessary for success in the institution's EdD program. These skills include the ability to navigate library resources and manage time effectively. Academic writing and proper formatting are also skills doctoral students are likely to need and may need to sharpen. Orientations should help students improve these skills and also point them to resources for future development in the areas they may need to develop.

Effective research training environments. To develop a valuing of research in students and the skills and research self-efficacy to become independent researchers, doctoral programs need to cultivate an effective research-training environment (RTE). Effective RTEs positively frame the doctoral student's perspective on research while also increasing his or her self-efficacy in the research process so that they are ultimately more likely to integrate research in personal and professional contexts after graduation (Gelso, Baumann, Chui, & Savela, 2013; Kahn &

Scholosser, 2010). RTE in a doctoral program is everything in the program that influences one's attitude towards research, which can include other students, faculty, courses, the department, support staff, etc. (Gelso et al., 2013).

There are 10 components of an effective RTE (Gelso et al., 2013). These include (a) faculty modeling appropriate scientific behavior; (b) positively reinforcing scientific activity; (c) involving students in research early in their program; (d) creating an environment that emphasizes the social-interpersonal nature of science; (e) explaining that no research study is perfect and that any study is limited and may have flaws; (f) instructing students in multiple approaches to research; (g) coaching students to look inward for research interests when they are ready; (h) modeling the link between science and practice; (i) teaching the relevance of statistics to applied research while emphasizing the logic of research design; (j) during the late stages of the program, teaching students how to apply research to practice (Gelso et al., 2013, p. 141). While these 10 components should be integrated throughout the doctoral degree, the orientation may be the first opportunity to incorporate them and to begin to socialize students to the value and role of research in their discipline.

Integration opportunities. Not all of the components of an orientation should be academic in nature. Orientations are also an opportunity to build community between students and faculty. According to Wighting et al. (2008), "A sense of community is important for all learners, whether they be online or face-to-face students" (p. 286). Clark and Cundiff (2011) recommended including components that allow students to interact with peers and faculty such as assignments, interviews with faculty, and attending campus events. Ali and Leeds (2009) found that the relationships built during an orientation lay a foundation for the rest of the student's degree program. Gardner (2009) recommended orientations include "informal

components that allow students to meet one another and to interact with the faculty members who will teach their courses and may serve as dissertation chairs or committee members" (p. 93).

According to Tinto (2012b), there are five categories of support institutions can offer within an orientation or first year. The first type of support is transition assistance to help students adjust to the changes required and the stress induced by beginning a new degree or at a new institution. Next, early contact and community building helps students integrate socially with other students and faculty while also becoming acquainted with the institution's support services. Third, academic involvement and encouragement to connect students to academic support and possibly offer remediation where skills still need to be developed is recommended. Next, monitoring is necessary and an early warning system is recommended. This type of system can help identify students who may require extra support or remediation before a problem arises. The final category of support identified by Tinto is counseling and advising to help keep students on track and committed to their goals. Quality orientations integrate all five of these components to help their students have the best opportunity to persist through their degree (Tinto, 2012b).

It may be beneficial for orientations to include opportunities for familial integration as well (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b, 2018). Including families in an orientation to DE EdD programs may help family members understand ways they can provide support to the doctoral student and the cost they will incur personally as a result of the student's doctoral pursuit (Rockinson-Szapkiew et al., 2014b, 2018; West, 2014). It is important for families to be oriented to the different stages of the program so that each transition is understood (i.e., comprehensive exams, dissertation; Golde, 2006). This may also help prepare the family for the identity transformation and role conflict that occurs in doctoral students during degree pursuit (West, 2014). As the doctoral student evolves, tension may arise in his or her family, as the student can

no longer fulfill the same roles and responsibilities he or she previously held (West, 2014) and differentiation begins (Bowen, 1976). Occasions of marital conflict are common during doctoral studies (Golde, 2006; West, 2014), especially if there is inconsistency in each partner's beliefs regarding marital and parental roles (Golde, 2006). For husbands married to female doctoral students, conflict may arise as a result of the husband's expectations of his wife to continue duties that are traditionally the responsibility of the wife (e.g., cleaning, cooking; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). For the wives married to male doctoral students, similar frustrations can occur over traditional male responsibilities (e.g., trash, yard work, repairs). This conflict is especially prevalent when the children and related responsibilities (e.g., childcare, homework help, packing school lunches) are in the picture (Golde, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). As the balance shifts in the household and the non-student partner assumes additional responsibilities as well as a more supportive role, this non-traditional role-reversal can cause strife and even weaken the marriage relationship. However, doctoral students with strong marriage relationships may be more likely to persist throughout the doctoral journey (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015). Protecting the marriage relationship and developing high levels of differentiation are important for doctoral students.

People with high degrees of differentiation think for themselves and distinguish between emotions and intellect, to make decisions objectively, rather than subjectively (Bowen, 1976). This is particularly imperative in the doctoral journey since the process can be stressful, especially as multiple roles and responsibilities are balanced between work, family, and school. Differentiation helps people cope with and recover from stressful situations (Bowen, 1976). Students with low levels of differentiation may struggle to persist through the doctoral journey, especially during the more difficult phases as school stress or family tension increases. However,

as the student differentiates, the family's thinking may not evolve with the student's, creating

tension and often resulting in the use of guilt by family members to "regain a sense of control"

(West, 2014, p. 21). Bowen (1976) asserted that the healthiest couples are able to alternate who

holds the dominant and adaptive roles. The adaptive person gives and bends a little more in the

relationship. While degree responsibilities are high, the non-student family members may need to

become more adaptive, giving more time to the household when the doctoral student cannot

(West, 2014). For instance, if the doctoral student is a wife and mother, the husband may need to

play a more supportive role, helping with childcare, dinner preparation, household cleaning, and

other responsibilities for a season. Older children may also be able to pitch in by completing

additional household chores or helping younger siblings with homework. An orientation to DE

EdD programs that includes familial integration, particularly at various pertinent stages, may

help families better understand what each stage entails and how their support may aid in the

student's persistence.

Sequence and delivery. While the deliberation of what components should be included

in an orientation is important, *when* and *how* orientation components are delivered is also an

important consideration. Students at the beginning of a program require different support than

students who have completed a year of their degree, those preparing for comprehensive exams,

or those who are beginning the dissertation process. While students require both social and

academic support, the balance of that support and the type of support needed changes throughout

a student's program (Tinto, 2012b). Gardner (2009, 2010b) recommended that not everything be

introduced at the initial orientation so students are not overwhelmed; instead additional support

items can be given at later stages. Di Pierro (2007) noted the need for "ongoing orientations for

doctoral students that coincide with each phase of doctoral study" (p. 374) as a means of

delivering the appropriate support at the appropriate time. While support is necessary at all stages of the doctoral journey, early stages like the knowledge and skill development stage require support that clarifies program expectations and processes (de Valero, 2001; Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Leeds et al., 2013; Lewis, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009). As the student continues to the consolidation stage, materials that help alleviate the stress and anxiety related to the comprehensive exam and dissertation process may be beneficial (Earl-Novell, 2006; Gardner, 2009). Though absent in many doctoral programs, support is especially necessary in the research and scholarship stage as students tend to feel isolated (Gardner, 2009) and the process is less structured (Douglas, 2014). Support at this stage may provide ways to connect with peers for encouragement or dissertation related feedback through writing groups (Gardner, 2009).

It is important to consider how the orientation components are delivered. While some elements may be appropriate to deliver virtually, some elements of support may need to be delivered in person. It is possible that it may be appropriate for many of the components of the orientation to a DE EdD program to be delivered online. Because DE students have limited time available for face-to-face program components, it is important to consider which components of an orientation may be appropriate for online delivery (West et al., 2011). For instance, West et al. (2011) found it beneficial to allow students to complete certain training modules online through online learning platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, Edmodo), while providing the opportunity for real time interaction with an advisor or support staff for any questions. This online delivery could be beneficial as expectations are communicated for each stage of the journey. A component like a technology assessment is also appropriate for online delivery, though students who are particularly apprehensive may prefer an option to complete the

assessment in person. While some integration and collaboration opportunities are well suited for in-person delivery, students can be encouraged to integrate with their peers through internet-based technologies and social media (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a).

While much of the research on orientation components has come from the trial and error of actually implementing an orientation course or reviewing an orientation that already exists, some researchers have approached orientations from a different angle. Dixon et al. (2012) advocated for the perspective of students to be included in the design of an orientation; by incorporating the perspective of students who actually persisted through a program, the most meaningful orientations can be created. The perspectives of successful students can help new students "avoid common pitfalls during the degree program, answer common questions, and ensure students graduate on time" (Dixon et al., 2012, p. 48). Di Pierro (2007) reiterated the importance of the persistent student's perspective, but also encouraged providing an open forum for faculty to communicate their perspectives and any issues they may have observed. It was important to consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders so that the most needed and effective components can be identified.

Summary

In summary, doctoral attrition rates are alarmingly high, especially in online programs and particularly in the discipline of education (Carr, 2000; Gravois, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Rovai, 2003a). While students leave their program for a variety of institutional and personal reasons (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000), research suggests that academic and social integration into the university (Glogowska, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Rovai, 2003a; Shouping, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tinto, 1975), along with developing students who are well supported (Gilmore & Lyons, 2012;

Heyman, 2010), self-directed (Burchard & Swerdzewski, 2009; Golladay et al., 2000; Halter et al., 2006), and have healthy levels of self-efficacy (Baltes et al., 2010; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Varney, 2010) could help foster persistence. One way to integrate students into their university and build their self-efficacy is through the implementation of an orientation program that provides intentionally scaffolded support at various stages (Gardner, 2010b; Kumar & Dawson, 2012; Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008; Portnoi et al., 2015; Scagnoli, 2001; Tomei et al., 2009) and socializes them to their discipline and program (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010b). There are a number of suggested components for orientations, but it is not yet clear what an orientation to a DE EdD program should look like from the perspective of the stakeholders most invested – students, faculty, and administrators. The perspectives of persistent DE EdD students, non-persisters, experienced faculty, administrators, as well as recent alumni, may help generate a model for an orientation to a DE EdD program.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

With attrition rates between 50% and 70% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006), limited residence and distance education (DE) Doctor of Education (EdD) programs require additional attention from researchers. Understanding the factors stakeholders identify as contributing to the persistence of successful DE EdD students may help current and future students be successful. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators, as well as the perspectives of others as the data reveals their relevance (i.e., family, employers, university staff). Chapter three details the chosen design, participants, programs, procedures, data collection and analysis methods, strategies for trustworthiness, and ethical considerations of this study.

Design

Qualitative inquiry was the appropriate design for this study as I explored the phenomena of doctoral attrition/persistence in DE EdD programs (Carr, 2000; Gravois, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Rovai, 2003a) from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders observed in their natural settings (Creswell, 2007). The use of qualitative inquiry allowed me to address the gap in the literature by developing a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs grounded in the voices of the participants and the data collected (Creswell, 2007).

The appropriate design for this qualitative study was grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) because I was investigating existing theories and linking those theories to a model (Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For this study, relevant theories included Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy, Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence, socialization theory (Bragg,

1976; Weidman et al., 2001), and research on orientations; these concepts were linked to the data collected to generate a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs. Grounded theory was also appropriate because the goal of this study was to understand how DE EdD students persist in the face of challenges that thwarted the degree completion of so many other students (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Corbin and Strauss (1990) indicated that grounded theory helps determine how participants "respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions" (p. 5). This design can be used to help uncover the responses and actions that helped persistent students be successful as well as critical influencers of the non-persister's decision to leave.

Grounded theory was also appropriate because it allowed the voice of the participant to guide the model that was developed (Elliot & Higgins, 2012). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "researchers are translators in the form of concepts of other persons' words and actions" (p. 66). Grounded theory allowed the voices of persistent EdD students (current candidates and alumni), non-persisters, and experienced faculty and administrators to guide this study as they reflected on persistence in DE doctoral education programs.

A systematic grounded theory approach was used for this study because it allowed for data collection and analysis in a well-defined, step-by-step process that more clearly identified when saturation occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). To remain consistent with systematic grounded theory, I collected data through multiple methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. As data was collected, constant comparison was used to refine interview questions, developing concepts, and look for saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Hallberg (2006), constant comparison is a key characteristic of grounded theory because it requires that all

elements of the data be "constantly compared with all other parts of the data to explore variations, similarities, and differences in the data" (p. 143).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do DE EdD students persist at each stage of the doctoral journey?

2. How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities?

3. What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE EdD programs?

Setting

Participants from two DE EdD programs in the United States were selected for this study. As the EdD is transitioning between the first-generation (scholar-focused) program and the second-generation (practitioner-focused) program (Boyce, 2012; Perry, 2012; Santovec, 2008), it was permissible for the participating EdD programs to be first or second-generation EdD programs, or first-generation programs with second-generation characteristics (CPED, 2018). The participating institutions needed to meet a variety of criteria, including being accredited by an organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). For an institution's EdD program to be considered a DE program, at least 80% of the coursework had to be delivered at a distance (likely online). The program had to include a comprehensive exam or an equivalent benchmark requirement that demonstrated candidacy, and the degree had to require a dissertation or a capstone project (Boyce, 2012; CPED, 2018; Storey & Maughan, 2015).

The two chosen institutions have DE EdD programs that meet the aforementioned criteria, including accreditation, ratio of online to residential courses, a comprehensive exam or

benchmark requirement, and a dissertation or capstone project. Students, non-persisters, alumni, and faculty were selected from each site. The dean of each institution's School of Education (SOE) was invited to participate as well. The majority of the interviews took place over the phone, while others were conducted via videoconference or in person.

Institution A

Institution A is a non-profit private, faith-based liberal arts institution located in the eastern United States (Institution A, 2018). It is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2018) and has over 100,000 students enrolled. Its education programs are also accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Institution A offers two main tracks for the EdD: Community Care and Counseling and Education (Institution A, 2018). Each track offers multiple specialties, including marriage and family counseling, curriculum and instruction, leadership, and educational law. At the time of this study, participants were recruited from the two main EdD tracks: Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership. These two degrees required 60 total credit hours; twelve of these credits were required dissertation courses (Institution A, 2018). At the time of this study, nine credit hours were required on-campus intensives (Institution A, 2018). This program meets the requirement of being at least 80% online since 85% of the courses in this program are delivered in a DE format. In addition to the required courses, both of these degree tracks require students to meet a benchmark requirement that demonstrates the student's readiness to progress to candidacy (Institution A, 2018).

Institution B

Institution B is a public, research university located in the southeastern United States with over 20,000 students (Institution B, 2018) and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (Institution B, 2018). Institution B offers three different online EdD degrees. Each DE EdD at Institution B is 54 hours, which includes nine hours of dissertation courses (Institution B, 2018). Institution B's EdD in Instructional Design and Technology is offered completely online and the EdD in Instruction & Curriculum Leadership and the EdD in Higher & Adult Education degrees require one week on campus each summer. The Higher & Adult Education EdD offers two different concentrations: higher education or adult education. All three EdD tracks include a comprehensive exam with both oral and written components and follow a cohort format (Institution B, 2018). One major distinction of Institution B compared to Institution A is that it follows a cohort model. Students enter the program as a cohort of approximately 6-12 students and progress through an assigned set of courses with their cohort for the remainder of the degree.

Participants

The participants for this study were DE EdD students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators from the two participating universities. Because this study focused on students who demonstrated persistence in a DE doctoral program, to participate in this study, students had to have achieved doctoral candidacy, meaning they had all their coursework completed and had passed their comprehensive exam/benchmark requirement. This also means alumni were eligible to participate, but time passed from graduation was limited to no more than three years to protect the integrity of the study and memory of the alumnus. Non-persisters were also included in the

study; these participants could have departed at any stage of the program, though time passed from departure was also limited to no more than three years.

Theoretical discriminant sampling was used to ensure that participants selected for the study could contribute to the theoretical orientation model (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After receiving IRB approval from my institution (see Appendix A) and the required approvals from participating institutions, the institutions' School/College of Education and/or DE EdD faculty contacted potential participants. The department or faculty forwarded an invitation to participate (see Appendix B), to students who had demonstrated candidacy (per their enrollment in post-candidacy research courses) and to graduates from the program from the last three years. Institution A was also able to invite known non-persisters from the previous three years (see Appendix C). This resulted in 55 responses to the study's Integration and Engagement Survey (see Appendix D).

Of the 55 responses to the Integration Survey, four were incomplete and two people completed the survey twice, resulting in only 49 usable submissions. Of the 49 participants, 15 were male (31%) and 34 were female (69%). Fourteen contributors were between the ages of 30 and 39 (29%), 19 were between 40 and 50 (39%), and 16 were over 50 years old (33%). Thirty-eight participants identified as White/Caucasian (78%), eight as Black/African American (16%), one as Asian (2%), one as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2%), and one preferred not to answer (1%). Regarding their stage in the doctoral journey, 27 indicated they were in the proposal development/pre-proposal defense stage (55%), 13 were in the research execution/data collection stage (27%), and nine were alumni or EdD holders that had graduate within the last three years (18%). Thirty-nine of the Integration Survey participants were from Institution A and 10 were from Institution B.

According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), "in grounded theory, representativeness of concepts, not of persons is crucial" (p. 9), so individuals who could provide data informing the central concepts necessary for generating theory on the topic were purposefully selected. Of the 49 participants, the first five potential participants from Institution A were contacted with a follow up email requesting an interview (see Appendix E). These participants were selected because they included a variation in age, ethnicity, and stage in the program and indicated a willingness to participate in a follow up interview. After each interview was completed, it was transcribed and coded so that it could be compared the new data that came in with subsequent interviews. This process of constant comparison is an essential component of grounded theory research that allows the incoming data to shape the data collection process throughout the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This permitted perpetual assessing of new data against existing data for themes and patterns (Hallberg, 2006) and a clear marker for saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

This study sought to understand the concepts participants attributed to doctoral persistence, rather than the participants themselves. Theoretical discriminant sampling allowed sampling to become "more specific with time because the purpose [was] to fill in gaps in properties of concepts and add variation" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 137). This means that as concepts surfaced, this sampling method allowed me to find further support or to reject the concept based on a lack of support.

Because the private nature of departure made it difficult to identify non-persisters, snowball or chain-referral sampling was used to help identify potential non-persisters who were eligible to participate (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Each person interviewed was asked if they knew of any non-persisters who fit the criteria for the study and might be willing to participate.

Faculty also assisted in inviting non-persisters by reaching out to non-persisters they had previously chaired post-candidacy. This ensured that participants were recruited by the "respondents rather than by researchers" (Heckathorn, 2002, p. 13) to mitigate potential ethical concerns regarding disclosing private information about potential participants. Identifying and eliciting the participation of non-persisters proved to be very difficult throughout this study.

Over time, additional potential participants were contacted with a request for an interview, resulting in a total of eight interviews with current students, alumni, and non-persisters at Institution A and six interviews with current students and alumni at Institution B (See Table 1). Half (50%) of the participants interviewed were male and the other half were female. Forty-three percent of participants were between 30-39 years old, 28.5% were between 40 and 50 years old, and 28.5% were over 50. Regarding ethnicity, 57% of interviewees identified as White/Caucasian, 21% as Black/African American, 7% as Asian, 7% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 7% as prefer not to answer. At the time of their interview, 14% were in the proposal development stage (pre-proposal defense), 50% were in the data collection/research execution stage, 21% were graduates from the previous three years, and 14% were non-persisters. Interviews were requested until data analysis made it clear that saturation had occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Saturation is complete when new meaning ceases to emerge from the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Swezey, 2014). This means that once the analysis of data collected is only confirming prior information collected, no new data is needed.

Table 1

Student, Alumni, and Non-Persister Participant Summary

Pseudonym	Institution	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Stage

Candace	A	Female	Over 50	Prefer Not to Answer	Data Collection
Chuck	A	Male	Over 50	Caucasian	Alumnus
Tonya	A	Female	30-39	Caucasian	Alumna
Burt	A	Male	40-50	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Proposal Development
Doug	A	Male	Over 50	Asian	Data Collection
Jake	A	Male	30-39	Caucasian	Non-Persister
Courtney	A	Female	40-50	African American	Data Collection
Timothy	A	Male	30-39	Caucasian	Non-Persister
Julia	B	Female	Over 50	Caucasian	Proposal Development
Keith	B	Male	40-50	Caucasian	Data Collection
Jackie	B	Female	30-39	African American	Alumna
Amy	B	Female	30-39	Caucasian	Data Collection
Jillian	B	Female	30-39	Caucasian	Data Collection
Jonathan	B	Male	40-50	African American	Data Collection

In addition to student, alumni, and non-persisters, faculty were also valuable participants in this study. The faculty who participated were instructors in the two DE EdD programs. Rather than doing individual interviews with each faculty member, focus groups were the preferred method of engagement. Smaller sized groups allowed quality interaction to occur without stifling the voice of any one participant (Morgan, 1997). After the initial focus groups occurred at both institutions, it was clear that the perspective of an additional faculty member would be helpful to ensure saturation so an individual interview was conducted with that faculty member. Each faculty member had at least one year of experience teaching in a DE EdD program, though most possessed far more than the one-year minimum. Several of the faculty members taught residential courses as well as online courses, but DE EdD students were the primary population in all of their doctoral level courses, even the courses they taught residentially. Since the faculty were working with the population of students completing the online degree, they were all able to

inform the topic of this study. The faculty chosen to participate were also varied based on the

courses they instructed to elicit information from a variety of types of courses (i.e., foundation,

research, specialization, and dissertation) and phases of the doctoral journey to provide a quality

picture of the different skills, knowledge, and dispositions required. Faculty who chair

dissertations were purposefully included so they could speak to student readiness for self-

directed learning and the skills and knowledge needed for dissertation completion. These

stipulations resulted in a focus group of three faculty members and one individual faculty

member interview at Institution A and a focus group of two faculty members at Institution B (see

Table 2). It is relevant to note that Institution B's online program was much smaller than

Institution A's, so while only two faculty members were included in the focus group, the focus

group included most of the faculty from that program.

Table 2

Faculty Participant Summary

Pseudonym	Institution	Gender	Ethnicity	Stage(s) Instructed
Dr. Longfellow	A	F	Caucasian	All
Dr. Johnson	A	M	Caucasian	All
Dr. Fox	A	M	Caucasian	All
Dr. Valentine	A	F	African American	Coursework & Dissertation
Dr. Armstrong	B	F	Caucasian	All
Dr. Anderson	B	M	Middle Eastern	Coursework & Dissertation

The administrators invited to participate in this study were deans, chairs, or program

directors of the DE EdD programs at the participating institutions. This population was invited to

participate in the delivery survey regarding when and how different support should be delivered

within the program. Only one dean from Institution A elected to participate in the delivery

survey. The survey elicited 35 responses, though one submission was incomplete, leaving 34

valid submissions. In addition to the one dean, the delivery survey participants included six faculty members, 13 current EdD students, and 14 alumni. Thirty-one of the participants were Caucasian and 3 were African American.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval from my institution, I reached out to the Deans of the Schools/Colleges of Education and other relevant stakeholders at institutions offering a DE EdD to request permission to use their program/site and affirm their participation. This led to two sites that met the study's criteria and had the resources to participate. After IRB and other relevant approvals were received and sites were secured, I recruited participants by following the guidelines set by the individual institutions and through providing an informed consent and survey email (see Appendix G). This was delivered through the School/College of Education or appointed faculty/staff member to doctoral students who met the selection criteria. An invitation to participate through the survey link was posted in the courses students enroll in after passing their comprehensive exam or benchmark requirement (dissertation proposal, dissertation research, and dissertation defense courses). When students consented to participate in the study, they completed the initial integration and engagement survey (see Appendix D).

The Researcher's Role

I served as the human instrument in this study (Creswell, 2007). I collected and analyzed the data but aimed to limit my influence on the data as much as possible. My influence on the research could only be reduced once my own "assumptions, beliefs, and biases" were disclosed (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). One of the methods Creswell and Miller (2000) recommend to define the experience of the grounded theory researcher is to use the process of bracketing as it originated in phenomenological research. According to Fischer (2009), bracketing is the

"investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study's data" (p. 583). Through reflection and writing memos, I bracketed out my experience as a DE instructor and as a student in a DE EdD program both before research began (see Appendix F) and through memos as data collection occurred (Creswell, 2007). As Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggested, I practiced self-reflection and reviewed memos written during interviews and focus groups to be sure I was not influencing the data. To be sure my opinions and ideas did not taint the data, I avoided asking leading questions or suggesting responses. During focus groups, I refocused the conversation only when it evolved too far off topic and I did not participate in the discussion. During data analysis, I required evidence of a concept's relevance through repetition and constant comparison; I disregarded it if this evidence was not found so that my own interest in a concept did not guide the study or create bias (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Additionally, I compared the data collected with the empirical and theoretical literature rather than my own experiences. Lastly, I utilized expert review of the generated model to ensure validity and that I did not manipulate the data.

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

Integration & Engagement Survey

The first method of data collection was the integration and engagement survey. The survey also requested general demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity) to ensure sampling with maximum variation. The survey included questions regarding the student's peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, perceived faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitments. The survey was developed in light of Tinto's (1975, 2012) integration model and adapted from

similar surveys created by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) and the National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE; Hicks & Lerer, 2003; Kuh et al., n.d.). While the NSSE and Pascarella and

Terenzini's integration survey measure integration and engagement, they are not geared to the

doctoral level, so they were adjusted to fit the context of DE EdD students.

The integration and engagement survey identified the degree to which persistent DE

doctoral students were integrating academically and socially within their institution. The survey

addressed different behaviors of social and academic integration with five possible responses to

the integration behavior (e.g., strongly agree, strongly disagree). Academic and social integration

are important because according to Tinto (2012b), students who are highly integrated in their

university are less likely to depart. Educators must also understand how students integrate to

more fully understand doctoral attrition and completion (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009).

The integration process for DE doctoral students is not well understood (Golde, 2005), so it was

hypothesized that understanding the integration behaviors of persistent doctoral students would

illuminate necessary orientation components and recommendations for future students.

Pascarella and Terenzini's integration survey. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980)

integration survey is a widely accepted and validated survey measuring academic and social

integration of undergraduate college students. The survey is based on Tinto's (1975; 2012b)

theory of persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The survey utilizes a five-point Likert scale

ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* to "assess the various dimensions of social and

academic integration, and goal and institutional commitment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p.

62). The results of the 34-question survey are consistent with Tinto's theory and able to correctly

identify 81.4% of persistent students and 75.8% of students who dropped out (Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1980).

The questions on the survey are broken down in five scales (Kord, 2008). The first scale consists of seven questions and measures social integration through student interaction with their peers. The second scale also pertains to social integration and utilizes five questions that measure student interaction and relationships with faculty members. The third scale consists of five additional questions regarding faculty, but these seek to measure "students' perceptions of faculty genuineness, expertise, and commitment" (Kord, 2008, p. 62). The fourth scale measures academic integration through seven questions regarding the student's satisfactions regarding the academic breadth at their institution. Finally, the fifth scale consists of six questions that measure the institutional and goal commitment of the student (Kord, 2008).

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE was created for institutions to determine how often students participated in engagement and integration behaviors. The survey measures engagement through in-class participation activities, course-related activities, interaction with faculty, and interaction with peers (Kuh et al., n.d.). In a study regarding integration and retention, Hicks and Lerer (2003) noted, "many of the questions about engagement are concerned with various aspects of students' integration" (p. 2). Some of the questions adapted by Hicks and Lerer from the NSSE to measure social and academic integration were used in my study. Hicks and Lerer utilized seven questions from the NSSE to measure social integration and eight questions from the NSSE to measure academic integration.

Although a validated measure of integration does exist in Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) survey, the survey alone is not sufficient for this study because it is geared to the undergraduate level in traditional settings. Likewise, the NSSE (Hicks & Lerer, 2003) integration items are not sufficient on their own for the same reason. There have been efforts to create a validated tool for measuring integration in online students, such as Davidson and Beck's (2016)

career integration scale, but a validated measure for gauging academic and social integration specifically at the doctoral level for online students did not exist when data was collected for this study. For this reason, the aforementioned surveys have guided the development of the integration and engagement survey used for this study, but some questions have been adapted to reflect the online setting and the doctoral level by adjusting wording, context, and adding questions regarding different doctoral components such as the comprehensive exam and dissertation.

Individual Interviews

Upon completion of the integration and engagement survey, students and alumni were asked to provide their name and email address if they were willing to participate in a personal interview. After that, interviews were set up with some of those who elected to participate. Interviews were then completed with recording and transcription. The interview questions were constructed to elicit information about the students and graduates' perspectives on the supports, skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed for success in DE EdD programs. Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions that composed an interview guide (Patton, 1987; see Appendix H). According to Kvale (1983), an interview guide "is neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire" that does not include "exact questions" but instead "focuses on certain themes" (p. 174). Patton (1987) explained that when using an interview guide, the researcher chooses topics before the interview occurs, but the "sequence and wording of questions" is decided during the interview (p. 116). Patton noted that the interview guide provides a checklist of what needs to be covered during the interview. The guide ensures that the required topics and questions are covered for each participant while giving the interviewer flexibility about how and when to discuss each item (Patton, 1987). Questions were developed

based on the initial literature review regarding doctoral persistence and integration and were refined with the data collected from the integration and engagement survey. The initial set of interview questions underwent expert review and was then piloted with a participant who met the study criteria, but their data was not incorporated in the study. It was important that the interview questions were not too structured so that the voice of the participant was able to come through and so that I, as the researcher, kept an open mind (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Additionally, the interview questions were continually reviewed and reshaped as data collection occurred per appropriate grounded theory process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis with the permission of the interviewee.

Table 3

Open-Ended Interview Guide Questions

Questions
Opening questions
1. What stage of your online EdD program are you currently in?
2. Describe for me your entry into your doctoral program. What was the driving motivation to pursue a doctoral degree?
3. As you pursued your degree, what were your greatest challenges? Describe them or provide an example for me.
Persistence in each stage of the doctoral journey (RQ1)
4. When you began your online EdD program, what skills had you already developed that proved to be critical to your success in your doctoral program?
5. Looking back, as your EdD program progressed, would you have benefitted from having certain skills better developed? If so, which ones?
6. Along those same lines, what helpful knowledge did you already possess before beginning your degree or what knowledge did you have to learn along the way to be successful?
7. Dispositions are qualities or attitudes towards learning and the educational process. What dispositions do you think describe you as a person?
8. *If needed-* What dispositions towards learning do you possess that you attribute to your persistence through your EdD program?
9. What skills, knowledge, or dispositions were vital post-candidacy or comp exams- for persisting through the dissertation process specifically?
Integration & Support in the DE EdD Program (RQ2)
10. Would you describe yourself as connected to your university? Why or why not?
11. How did you connect academically to your institution or your institution's School/College of Education?

12. How did you build relationships with faculty members throughout your degree program?

13. In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with faculty throughout your degree? How did this affect your feeling of connectivity or integration?

14. How did you build relationships with your peers throughout your degree program?

15. In what ways do you think institutions could make it easier for online students to integrate (or connect) socially and/or academically?

16. Do you feel like your family understood what was required for and committed to your success at each stage of your journey? Why or why not?

17. What types of support did your institution provide for your family members during your doctoral journey? In what ways do you think your institution could have better integrated your family into your doctoral program?

18. What types of financial support did you receive to allow you to integrate economically during your degree?

19. Do you feel like you achieved economic integration, or the meeting of your financial needs, so that you could focus on your educational goals? Why or why not?

20. What types of support did you receive from your institution and how did this support influence your persistence or success?

21. Were there any areas where you felt you could have been better supported by your institution? If so, what were they?

22. How did you experience peer support during your doctoral journey and how did this influence your persistence?

23. *Institution B only*: What role, if any, did being part of a cohort play in your persistence or timely completion of the EdD? How has it impacted you in the dissertation stage?

24. Were there any ways you could have been better supported by your peers *(or cohort)* during your doctoral journey, and if so, how?

25. What types of support did you receive from family during your doctoral degree and how did this support influence your persistence?

26. Were there any ways your family could have better supported you through your EdD and if so, how?

Components & Delivery Method (RQ3)

27. The EdD has these natural stages, where at first, you're dealing with admissions and entering the program, then you're doing your coursework, you establish candidacy through things like your comp exams and then of course proposal development and so on with the dissertation. At what stages or times during the degree did you need the most support, no matter who that came from? When did you need the most support and what support was needed at that time?

28. How do you think an orientation program for new online EdD students would be beneficial to their development of the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and integration items you have noted today?

29. In your opinion, at what time or times do you think it would be best to offer such a program and those types of supports?

30. In your opinion, what would be the best delivery method of this orientation?

Closing Question

31. Is there anything else we haven't covered today that you think is important that you would tell someone that is just starting out in the program you completed, to help them persist to the end? And if so, what?

During my interview with "Chuck" from Institution A, I could sense he had more to say that perhaps did not fit in with the discussion that had preceded the final question in our interview. Because of this, I decided to add a new final question to his and all subsequent interviews. The question stated, "Is there anything else we haven't covered today, that you think is important, that you would tell someone who is just starting out in the program you completed, to help him or her to persist to the end? And if so, what is that?" This question allowed the interviewee to really boil down the key(s) to their success and persistence. It was especially informative, as the participant had already spent the previous 30-45 minutes reflecting on his degree experience.

After thinking back on Chuck's interview and Candace's interview before his, I decided an additional question that narrowed in on the dissertation process might be beneficial after the initial questions regarding skills, knowledge, and dispositions. As a result, I added the question, "what skills, knowledge, or dispositions were vital post-candidacy, or after you comp exams— for persisting through the dissertation process specifically?" This allowed additional insight on skills, knowledge, and dispositions and the way participants adapted in those areas throughout the process.

These changes to my interview questions were already in place when I began the interviews with participants from Institution B. However, after my third Institution B interview, which was with Jackie, it became clear that an additional question that specifically addressed the cohort model could be beneficial. Therefore, the question, "what role, if any, did being part of a cohort play in your persistence or timely completion of the EdD?" was added. An additional follow up question- "How has it (being part of a cohort) impacted you in the dissertation stage?" was added as well.

Individual interviews were also conducted with non-persisters. The first non-persister was someone I knew personally who lives in my geographical region. Because of his proximity, I was able to complete his interview in person. Despite many efforts to identify and recruit additional non-persisters, only one additional non-persister agreed to participate in the study. The participant was invited to participate by one of his former committee members and he graciously accepted. His interview was conducted by phone. Both non-persisters were asked a modified version of the interview questions current students and alumni responded to. They were also asked to discuss what led to their decision to ultimately leave their programs.

Table 4

Open-Ended Interview Guide Questions for Non-persisters

Questions
1. How long ago did you leave your doctoral program?
2. How many credit hours did you complete or what milestones did you achieve?
3. Tell me a little about your entry into your program; what was your main motivation for pursuing your degree?
4. Why did you ultimately decide to leave the program?
5. What challenges did you encounter as you pursued the degree?
6. Were you ever challenged by a lack of skills or knowledge? If so, in what ways? (RQ1)
7. Dispositions are characteristics or attitudes towards learning and the educational process. What dispositions do you think describe you as a person? (RQ1)
8. During your program, how did you build relationships with faculty? (RQ2)
9. During the program, how did you build relationships with faculty? (RQ2)
10. What types of support did you receive from faculty or the institution? (RQ2)
11. Are there any ways you feel like you could have been better supported by your institution, and if so, how? (RQ2)
12. During your program, how did you build relationships with your peers? (RQ2)
13. What types of support did you receive from your peers? (RQ2)
14. Are there any ways you feel like you could have been better supported by your peers during the program, and if so, how? (RQ2)
15. Do you feel like your family understood what was required for your success in your doctoral program? Why or why not? (RQ2)
16. What types of support did you receive from your family or how could they have better supported you during your program? (RQ2)
17. What types of support did your institution provide for your family members during your program? Or how do you think your institution could have better integrated your family into your program? (RQ2)

18. What types of financial support did you receive for your program? (RQ2)
19. Do you feel like you achieved economic integration, or the meeting of your financial needs so that you could focus on your educational goals? Why or why not? (RQ2)
20. In what ways do you think institutions could make it easier for online students to integrate (or connect) socially and/or academically? (RQ2)
21. How do you think an orientation program for new online EdD students could be beneficial to their development of skills, knowledge, dispositions, or the integration items we discussed today? (RQ3)
22. In your opinion, what would be the best time to offer such an orientation and how should it be delivered? (RQ3)
23. Is there anything else we haven't covered today that you would want to tell someone who is just starting out in the program you left, to help them persist to the end? And if so, what?

While the majority of faculty participated through focus groups, one faculty participant received an individual interview. A focus group of three faculty members had already occurred on campus at her institution and at Institution B. After data collection and analysis of the individual sites and across sites, I wanted to verify that the themes and theories generated were indeed saturated, even among the faculty population. As "Dr. Valentine" was asked the faculty focus group questions, her responses revealed the same orientation and support components that were identified by previous participants. As she mentioned the topics herself, additional follow up questions could be asked about related topics, such as communication, institutional remediation services, and synchronous contact.

Focus Groups

Additional data were collected through focus group interviews with faculty. The value of the focus groups was that they allowed participants to build off of the comments and responses of others, thus creating even deeper and more meaningful data in a shorter period of time (Creswell, 2007). Since faculty had limited availability and came to the interview ready to contribute with a developed vocabulary and perspective, the focus group was a good fit. The two separate focus groups consisted of three faculty members from Institution A and two faculty members from Institution B who met the participation criteria. Faculty were invited to participate

through an appointed faculty contact at each institution. The focus group at Institution A was

conducted in a face-to-face setting on campus while the focus group at Institution B occurred via

a video conferencing program. The groups responded to and discussed open-ended questions

(see Appendix I) that addressed the skills, knowledge, and dispositions DE EdD students should

possess at various stages of their program to be successful. The questions also identified the

supports faculty felt were helpful for DE EdD student persistence. The focus group interviews

were recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants.

Table 5

Open-Ended Interview Guide Questions for Faculty Focus Groups and Interviews

Questions
1. Can you begin by describing the typical online student in your distance education EdD programs?
2. What are the positive aspects of pursuing an EdD degree at a distance?
3. What are the negative aspects or challenges of pursuing an EdD degree at a distance?
4. As online EdD students enter the program, what knowledge do you think they should possess to be best equipped to successfully persist through their program? (RQ1)
5. Ideally, to be successful, what skills should students have as they begin their EdD? (RQ1)
6. Reflecting on students who persist through your program, what dispositions or attitudes do these persistent online EdD students possess? (RQ1)
7. Are there any other characteristics or factors that persistent students possess that make them good candidates for DE EdD programs, and if so, what are they? (RQ1)
8. What types of support and/or services do you think are important for the DE EdD students at your institutions? (RQ2)
9. How do students integrate academically and grow intellectually at your institution? (RQ2)
10. How do persistent online EdD students connect or integrate socially with their peers at your institution? (RQ2)
11. How do persistent online EdD student connect or integrate socially with their faculty during your program? Does your School/College of Education reach out to them specifically in any way? (RQ2)
12. What types of opportunities, if any, exist for the families of your EdD students to facilitate familial integration during your program? (RQ2)
13. What are some ways DE EdD students at your institution integrate economically during their doctoral journey? (RQ2)
14. How can academic institutions better promote persistence in an online EdD program? (RQ3)
15. The EdD has these natural stages of admissions and entering the program, then coursework, establishing candidacy, and then of course proposal development and so on with the

dissertation. At what points during the online EdD program do you think students need the most support? And what types of support are needed at those various times? (RQ3)

16. What would be the best delivery method for these supports? (RQ3)

Delivery Survey

Finally, additional data were collected through the use of a survey that contained the main themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected through the integration and engagement surveys, interviews, and focus groups (see Appendix J). The survey's purpose was to determine when and how each component should be delivered. It provided a variety of timeframes for the delivery of the components that were identified by earlier data collection and analysis. The participants selected the appropriate time for that component to be delivered within the degree (e.g., prior to first course, during research courses, before or after comprehensive exam, dissertation courses). The survey also asked participants to identify the ideal delivery method for each component (e.g., online, face-to-face). The delivery survey was administered electronically through a survey generator. A link to the survey was delivered through an email (see Appendix K) to the constituents who previously completed an interview or focus group. The deans of each participating SOE were invited to complete the delivery survey as well.

Data Analysis

Data collected during this study were analyzed using the grounded theory data analysis methods outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2015). In grounded theory, analysis begins concurrently with collection because on-going analysis directs subsequent data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I began analysis with the integration and engagement survey and the interviews once the first interview was completed and transcribed. The transcription of the first and all subsequent interviews were completed word-for-word to ensure the accuracy of the participant's voice and to allow for member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The data were immediately analyzed using

a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2007). Treating both sites as individual bounded cases (Stake, 1994), initial and axial coding were completed on each institution's data separately. Those themes were compared through cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Theoretical coding across the sites unveiled a diagram (Creswell, 2007) that visually represented the orientation model that socialized students to DE EdD programs throughout the doctoral degree.

Integration & Engagement Survey Analysis

The initial integration and engagement survey was analyzed to determine how persistent DE EdD students are integrating into their universities. While the individual respondent's integration score was considered as participants were selected, the survey data was used to look at the degree to which persistent DE EdD students as a whole had or had not integrated in a variety of areas. To determine this information, the responses were analyzed according to participant responses to a five-point Likert scale regarding integration behaviors (e.g., strongly agree, strongly disagree). The percentages of students responding strongly agree, agree, etc. were examined to determine the importance of each integration behavior and to identify what integration behaviors, if any, appeared critical for DE EdD students (see Appendix L). These behaviors were considered as the interview guide was refined and were compared to the data collected from the student interviews and focus groups as themes emerged and when data analysis for individual programs occurred.

Initial (Open) Coding

Keeping in mind constant comparative analysis, the next step of data analysis was to analyze interview and focus group transcriptions from one site using initial coding or as it was previously termed- *open coding* (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). It was

important that initial coding be approached as open-ended without preconceptions regarding the direction the data will take (Saldaña, 2013).

The first transcript and subsequent transcripts were analyzed line by line to determine a preliminary set of codes. In grounded theory, "concepts are the basic units of analysis" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), "events/actions/interactions" are "given conceptual labels" (p. 12). These concepts should be represented across the data and additional interviews completed if these initial themes are not clear or well supported (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Concepts that are repeated significantly in the initial data were used to shape the next stages of data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As I coded, the identified codes were transformed into themes (Saldaña, 2013). One strategy for turning codes into themes is to "add the verbs 'is' and 'means' after the phenomenon under investigation" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 205). Saldaña (2013) explained that the code "negotiating" is turned into a theme when it becomes "negotiating is . . . and negotiating means" (p. 205). These themes are developed by Saldaña (2013) as an example into more substantial ideas like "negotiating is the path of least resistance" and "negotiating means manipulating others" (p. 206). The codes were defined by the participants' words so that everything remained grounded in the data.

In vivo coding. During initial coding, *in vivo coding* was used. In vivo coding is the process of coding the data with the participants' actual words (Saldaña, 2013). These codes are placed in quotation marks around phrases or words that stand out (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo coding is a "safe and secure method" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 95) for researchers because it focuses on the participants' voices and guards against researcher bias; however, I was careful as I compared in vivo codes from multiple participants to be sure I related similar concepts, even if the

participants' words were not identical. Conversely, I determined if participants used identical words, but were describing difference concepts.

Process coding. In addition to in vivo codes, *process coding* is an important component of the grounded theory approach. Another term for process coding is *action coding* because researchers analyze data for concepts that they then label with gerunds or action words (Saldaña, 2013). Process coding occurred during initial and axial coding as "a search for consequences of action/interaction" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). Process coding helped identify critical incidents that occurred in the lives of the participants that may be pertinent to the research. Process coding was also used to help identify a sequence of actions that can help the researcher better understand a phenomenon (Saldaña, 2013).

Theoretical memos. As soon as coding began, so did the recording of *theoretical memos*. These memos "should begin with the first coding sessions" and continue "to the end of the research" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 10). Theoretical memos are the recorded reflection of the researcher on his or her thought and reasoning process throughout coding. They explain the researcher's conclusions and "provide a firm base for reporting on the research and its implications" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 10). As codes were created and concepts connected, *theoretical memoing* (see Appendix M) took place to record my thoughts and the reasons certain phrases stood out or how codes linked to others (Saldaña, 2013). Memoing during theoretical coding is perhaps the most important because the steps and reasoning that led to the production of a theory must be recorded (Saldaña, 2013).

Throughout initial coding, I looked for similarities between codes to see which codes could be related. I also looked for codes that were repeated often between participants. Initial coding for the data collected at Institution A resulted in a list of 341 codes (see Appendix N).

The list of initial codes from Institution B included 207 codes (see Appendix O). I used

ATLAS.ti, a data analysis software, to link and organize codes.

Axial Coding

The next step was *axial coding*. It is important to note that axial coding occurs

simultaneously with open coding as data collection progresses (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Concepts that were repeated significantly in the initial data were transformed into themes

(Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2013). Codes that were similar or related were "clustered

together" or organized around categories to identify their relationships (Saldaña, 2013, p. 213;

see Appendix P and Appendix Q). This process helped limit the number of initial codes, focus

codes, and organize the data (Saldaña, 2013). During axial coding, the relationship between

concepts and categories was merely theoretical until it was confirmed "repeatedly against

incoming data" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 13). Axial coding also allowed weakly supported

concepts to be identified and either strengthened through additional data collection or

disregarded because they did not represent the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The goal of axial

coding was "to achieve saturation" so that new information no longer surfaced during coding

(Saldaña, 2013, p. 222).

Case-Analysis

Once it was suspected that saturation was achieved (Saldaña, 2013) and no new

information was surfacing, the individual site's information was treated as a case so that program

specific information could be identified and eliminated, if appropriate, in the analysis. This

meant that open and axial coding were done individually for each site's interviews, focus group,

and surveys. The purpose of this was to compare the data collected from the stakeholders from

each individual institution, so that any information that only reflects an individual institution's

policies or characteristics (e.g., first or second generation EdD; specializations) could be better identified and/or eliminated in the analysis. For example, Institution A required intensives while Institution B employed a cohort model. After the data from the two programs were reviewed individually, the data were analyzed as a whole. To do this, data analysis procedures were borrowed from the case-study design approach.

Cross-Case Analysis

After the programs' data were analyzed independently as bounded cases (Stake, 1994), the themes and categories that emerged at the two institutions were compared to each other for similarities and differences during cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). The boundary of an individual institution as a case was important because data could only be understood when it was analyzed according to the system it was a part of. Because of this, when it was time for the data from each site to be analyzed as a whole, I borrowed from case study design and utilized a cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis looked at the themes identified from each individual site and compared them for similarities and differences (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003) across the pre-defined categories (Alberti, Sciascia, & Tripodi, 2009). Themes that were evident across the programs were used to develop assertions and generalizations (Creswell, 2007).

Saturation

While saturation was suspected before cross-case analysis, to confirm saturation and the findings from cross-case analysis, the final interviews with Courtney and Dr. Valentine from Institution A and Jonathan from Institution B were completed. Like previous interviews, each interview was transcribed and analyzed line-by-line. This data further confirmed saturation as no

new meaningful data emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Swezey, 2014) and the previously identified orientation components were further supported.

Delivery Survey Analysis

A clear set of generalized themes, or components, emerged from both sites. These components were used to create a delivery survey. The delivery survey asked participants to indicate *when* and *how* each orientation component should be delivered. The percentages for each response regarding *when* (i.e., entry, coursework, candidacy, other) and *how* (i.e., online, blended, in person, other) were calculated.

Theoretical Coding

This allowed *theoretical coding* (previously termed selective coding) to take place. Theoretical coding was used to connect the categories (Creswell, 2007) and organize them around core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2013), which in the case of this study, where the stages of the doctoral journey. During this step, I considered how each theme and category uncovered from initial and axial coding related (Creswell, 2007) and used the data from the delivery survey to link the previously developed categories. As categories were related, the ideal components of an orientation that socializes students to DE EdD programs became clear (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As the researcher, I mediated the data to make a judgment to link qualitative literature and the survey data so that a model could emerge (Creswell, 2008; Saldaña, 2013; see Appendix R).

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness

</div>

Trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative research. It ensures the credibility of the research and parallels the reliability and validity factors of quantitative research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1996). The criteria for trustworthiness are credibility,

dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). This study employed measures to address each of these components.

Credibility

According to Tracy (2010), "credibility refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings" (p. 842). Tracy (2010) goes on to say that credibility is what makes the reader trust the research findings enough to act and implement the practices him/herself. The first method to increase credibility that was used in this study is triangulation. Triangulation is the use of more than two data sources to ensure that a clear and valid picture of the phenomenon is represented (Mathison, 1988). For this study, data were collected from student, non-persister, alumni, and faculty interviews, focus groups with faculty, and two surveys. This also aligned with Tracy's (2010) credibility practice of multivocality, or the inclusion of multiple voices or perspectives in data collection. Additionally, the survey and interview questions underwent expert review by my committee members as another method of credibility.

<center>**Dependability and Confirmability**</center>

Two components of trustworthiness are dependability and confirmability. These components are safeguards that help ensure that if replicated, a study should produce similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). To increase dependability and confirmability, detailed logs were created and maintained to develop an audit trail to document what was done, where it was done, and when it was done (Shento, 2004; see Appendix S). An audit trail allows other researchers to repeat this study with similar participants to yield similar results to further demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research. Grounded theory studies are verifiable rather than reproducible

because it is unlikely that all conditions in a new study will exactly match the conditions of the previous one (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Transferability

The final component of trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability ensures that the findings from a study can be applied to others who meet the criteria set forth in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). The methods of transferability employed for this study were the use of thick, rich, descriptions of the data so that other researchers can determine if the study's findings may be transferrable to their own research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and sampling with maximum variation (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). Additionally, collecting data from multiple groups of stakeholders from two different institutions increased the transferability of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

For this study, a variety of ethical considerations were addressed. First, confidentiality was important for this study (Creswell, 2007). Since it was possible that stakeholders could voice complaints about their program, their identity was not to be revealed. Pseudonyms were used to replace names and programs. Second, informed consent was received from all participants and participating institutions prior to conducting interviews or collecting data (Creswell, 2007). Third, data collected were stored securely with electronic data being password protected and paper data kept in a locked drawer (Creswell, 2007). Finally, I worked to gain the trust of all participants to ensure accurate information and data were collected. I carefully worked to make sure the research was not presented in a way to judge or compare the quality of programs even though it is possible that the populations studied are students at competitor schools. Instead, my research sought to understand the phenomenon of doctoral persistence and the components of an orientation course that may foster this persistence in DE EdD programs.

Summary

This qualitative grounded theory study intended to understand the ideal components and delivery of an orientation to DE EdD programs. The participants for this study were students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators from two institutions that offer DE EdD programs. After gaining IRB and site approval and participant consent, data collection occurred through an integration and engagement survey ($n = 47$), focus group interviews with faculty ($n = 6$), and interviews with current students ($n = 9$), alumni ($n = 3$), non-persisters ($n = 2$), and a dean ($n =1$). Constant comparison was used to refine and develop concepts and to signal when theoretical saturation had occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2015). Data from each institution was analyzed through initial and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2015; Saldaña, 2013). Once themes emerged, cross case analysis was used to compare the themes across the sites and theoretical coding allowed the ideal orientation components to emerge (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). A delivery survey ($n = 34$) was distributed to determine when and how the identified components should be delivered.

To protect the trustworthiness of the study, methods of credibility including triangulation and expert review were employed (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1996). To increase transferability, thick, rich descriptions of the data were used along with sampling with maximum variation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1996). A detailed log and an audit trail were kept so that the study can be verified and to certify dependability and confirmability (Shento, 2004). The ethics of this study are extremely important; anonymity was accomplished through the use of pseudonyms for programs and participant names (Creswell, 2007). IRB and/or related approvals and informed consent were necessary from sites and participants before data were collected and the data that collected were stored securely. The initial goal of this study was to create an

orientation model to DE EdD programs from the ideal components and delivery methods that emerge by understanding how DE EdD students are socialized to the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and integration behaviors required for persistence and the supports they need through the lens of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators from regionally accredited universities. This chapter begins with a narrative portrait of each participant. It continues with a description of the themes generated and an overview of the model developed. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the three original research questions that guided this study.

There were 55 responses for the integration and engagement survey; however, on closer examination of the data, there were only 47 valid submissions; five submissions were incomplete, and three people completed the survey twice. As a result, those responses were excluded from analysis. Of the 47 included participants, 38 were from Institution A and nine were from Institution B. Fourteen participants were male and 33 were female. Fourteen were ages 30-39, 18 were ages 40-50, and 15 were over 50 years old.

After the initial components for an orientation were identified, an email was sent to all study participants inviting them to participate in the delivery survey. The request resulted in 35 responses for the delivery survey; however, one submission was incomplete, resulting in 34 valid responses. Of these submissions, one participant was a dean of a participating institution, six were faculty members, 13 were current EdD students, and 14 were alumni. Demographically, three participants were African American and 32 were Caucasian.

Of the 47 integration and engagement survey participants, 44 indicated willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Potential participants were contacted via email to set up a time for an interview. Not all emails were returned, but as participants were selected (over time

due to constant comparison), several factors were considered to determine the best candidates.

Demographic data (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and each participant's stage in the doctoral

program were considered to ensure sampling with maximum variation (Lincoln & Guba, 1996).

Each participant's integration and engagement survey score was considered as well. Overall, the

mean integration and engagement survey score of all interview participants was very close to the

overall mean score of all survey participants at each institution, to ensure proper representation

of the population. The portraits of the interview participants follow.

Table 6

Integration & Engagement Survey Mean Scores

Overall Mean Score	Interview Participant Mean Score
3.92	3.93

Participants

Participants for this study were primarily selected through theoretical sampling (Corbin

& Strauss, 2015). First, an invitation to participate in the integration survey was distributed to

eligible DE EdD students at both institutions. Then, students who could potentially contribute to

the study's theoretical model were contacted for a follow up interview. When necessary,

snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) was also utilized to help identify additional

participants, particularly non-persisters. Upon the conclusion of each interview, participants were

asked if they would be willing to forward an invitation to participate to other eligible

participants, particularly anyone they knew who had left their program. Additionally, faculty

members at each institution were asked to forward an invitation to participate to potential non-

persister participants. To conclude, participants for the delivery survey were those who had

previously completed the integration survey, an interview, or focus group. Additionally, the

deans, associate deans, and/or administrators were also personally invited to participate in the delivery survey.

Candace

Candace is a female over 50 years old who preferred not to disclose her ethnicity. She is a military member and in the data collection stage at Institution A. In addition to having to take several prerequisites because of her non-education master's degree, Candace shared to be accepted to her doctoral program, she had to get a waiver because of her low graduate degree GPA. Candace's greatest challenges during her doctoral journey were a professor who did not give prompt or positive feedback, inconsistent grading expectations in some courses, and overcoming multiple manuscript revisions to get to proposal defense. Candace indicated her biggest supporter was her spouse, who completed the EdD program at Institution A several years before she entered the program. Candace also experienced significant peer support from four of her peers from her statistics course. They "shared assignments, proofread them for each other," assisted each other with content knowledge, APA, and grammar, and encouraged one other through their shared experiences, even after statistics ended. Candace's integration and engagement survey score was 3.71 out of five (see Appendix T) and like her interview, her survey responses indicated the lowest levels of integration with faculty and highest with her peers.

Chuck

Chuck is a recent Caucasian male alumnus of Institution A who is over 50 years old. Professionally, he spent time as a classroom teacher, a central office administrator, and in special education. He credits his experience with his success in his EdD program. While he reflected, it was clear that Chuck felt a very deep sense of connection to his institution and faculty from the

doctoral program. He fostered this by asking questions, sharing research references, and continuing conversations even after a course ended. Chuck also leaned heavily on a "self-designed cohort" that included himself and four of his peers who he met in his intensives. As they progressed through the program, they would email, Skype, call, and text to encourage each other or even cry with one another when needed. The group celebrated milestones together, including graduation. Chuck indicated a desire for clearer expectations and knowledge of certain supports sooner. Chuck's integration and engagement score was 4.42 out of five and much like his interview illuminated, he scored as well integrated in all areas (with a score of four or five for each individual question).

Tonya

Tonya is a female Caucasian history teacher that is in her thirties. She completed her DE EdD degree at Institution A one year before we spoke. While she started her program eight years earlier, she took about four years off because continuing at that time would have been too difficult on her family emotionally and financially. In addition to the financial burden, the balance between education and family was difficult at certain stages of the program for Tonya. As she reflected on her own experience in her DE program, Tonya shared that she wished she had heard more from the completers before her. She also desired the ability to connect regionally with people from her program that happened to live nearby so that a "peer committee" could be formed. Tonya's biggest sources of support were her family and her chair; she indicated that she needed the most support during the dissertation process. Tonya's integration and engagement score was 3.67 and reflected low levels of faculty engagement and high levels of institutional & goal commitment. Despite not being well integrated socially with her peers and faculty, not

completing was never an option to Tonya. Once she returned to her program after a period of stop-out (Nettles & Millet, 2006), she was determined to complete.

Burt

Burt is a male military member between 40 and 50 years old who began his DE EdD program at Institution A while deployed in Iraq. His wife is also a graduate student at Institution A. He is Native Hawaiian and is currently in the proposal development stage of his doctoral degree. While Burt lacked a background in education, he felt his experience training soldiers as well as the organization and planning skills he gained in the military influenced his success. While Burt's feelings of connection to the institution were mixed, he aimed to connect academically by "trying to link past military experiences with the program." He also made a concerted effort to get to know professors beyond the classroom content. Despite his effort, Burt felt more connected to his peers than his professors using social media as a way to connect and to gauge his progress in the program. Another challenge for Burt surfaced when he reached candidacy and was expected to have a dissertation topic picked out. Because of his lack of experience in education, Burt struggled to choose a topic and once he did, he felt like he had fallen a bit behind his peers who had an idea of their research interest at the start of their program. Burt's integration and engagement score was 3.67 and reflected fairly high marks in most areas, but very low scores (of one or two) in the area of faculty concern.

Doug

Doug is an Asian male military student over 50 years old in the data collection stage at Institution A. Because of his experience with English Language Learners and education, Doug was afforded the opportunity to collaborate a bit with faculty members at Institution A. He also made an effort to connect with meaningful faculty while he was on campus for intensives

throughout his program. Despite his connection to several faculty members, Doug struggled a little to find a chair and felt like he needed some additional support navigating the process after achieving candidacy. Doug is connected to several of his peers through self-initiated social media and email groups but advocated several times during our discussion for a late stage cohort. Doug had the highest integration and engagement score of all participants at 4.78.

Jake

Jake is a Caucasian male in his thirties who was a student at Institution A. After two years in the program, he made the decision to leave his doctoral program only two months prior to our meeting. Because Jake's background was in religious studies and seminary, he struggled with some course content. There were other elements of his program, like the focus on K-12 pedagogy, a few outdated course materials, and an inability to apply his learning to practice that were frustrating to Jake. He also struggled to integrate or feel connected to his program, crediting the lack of an immediate support system as the source of this frustration. Jake desired additional opportunities for peer support and more immediate feedback from professors. Ultimately, Jake decided to leave his program because of the time it took away from his family- his wife and young son, and from ministry. Reflecting on his decision to leave his program, he noted, "this is the first thing I've ever quit- in the entirety of my life . . . I've always finished things through, finished things out."

Courtney

Courtney is an African American, female student at Institution A who is between 40 and 50 years old. She has been in the program for seven years and recently defended her dissertation proposal. While Courtney experienced a variety of personal changes during her program, the most significant challenge for her was a change to her research consultant, or an expert on her

proposed design who would help ensure she was ready for defense milestones, without her knowledge. The difficulties that arose from that single change left Courtney "devastated" and considering leaving the program. Courtney described her institution's program as "too long" and at one point, after looking at other schools, discussed the possibility of leaving with her peers. Courtney has a strong network of support from classmates she met in on campus intensives; they stayed in contact with one another even after their course together was finished and now all share the same dissertation chair. Courtney's overall integration and engagement score was 3.92 and her individual responses, like her interview, reflected low levels of institutional commitment.

Timothy

Timothy is a Caucasian male in his thirties from Institution A. While Timothy is still connected to Institution A professionally, he recently reached the seven-year maximum allowed for his degree, prompting the decision to leave the EdD program. However, according to Timothy, he stopped working on the degree about two years earlier after passing comprehensive exams and beginning proposal development. During our time together, Timothy reflected on the difficulty he had transitioning from his prospectus development course to proposal development courses, feeling ill equipped and under supported. Timothy noted that he really wished he had the ability to benchmark against his peers earlier in the process so he could have known if and when he was getting off track. Despite indicating his family and friends were supportive of his doctoral pursuit, reflecting on their support, he described a "tipping point" "where [he] knew that [he] was behind" and his friends and family could detect the "shame" he felt when discussing his progress. The topic of his dissertation became "taboo" and he no longer had encouragement to finish, only guilt from his inability to complete.

Julia

Julia is a Caucasian female over 50 years old in the proposal development stage at Institution B. Because she was pursuing her EdD at a distance, Julia recounted facing challenges like not understanding the doctoral degree process, her institution's structure, where to find information, and who to contact when she had questions. Julia shared that the distance between her and her peers was a challenge as well, not because she felt isolated, but by "not having a lot of access to other students so [she] could kind of gauge where [her] progress was with everybody else." Julia also faced a very unique challenge as she pursued her EdD at Institution B because she worked in a position where her job was to evaluate college courses. Julia felt like her "critical eye . . . sort of hindered [her] a bit." These factors coupled with several advisor changes and Julia not knowing her dissertation topic early on in her degree left her feeling like she was disconnected, floundering, and wasting time with "no one there to really help guide [her] in that." Julia's integration and engagement score was 3.42 and reflected the lowest scores in the area of faculty interaction.

Keith

Keith is a Caucasian male between 40 and 50 years old in the data collection stage at Institution B. When we spoke, Keith had finished data collection and analysis and was writing the final chapter of his dissertation. Pursuing a doctoral degree was actually a job requirement for Keith as he is currently employed in higher education and has extensive experience in his content area. The thirteen years that had passed between his master's degree and his doctoral program presented several challenges as he acclimated to online courses and balanced full-time teaching, three young children, and his degree program. Despite attending a conference on campus and utilizing the social media tools at Institution B, Keith indicated that he would have liked more

informal interactions, especially with peers. To Keith, communication was closely tied to his persistence. According to Keith, "the thing that really helped [him] along the way [was] having clear communication and expectations on what to do." Keith's integration and engagement score was 3.97, with his lowest scores in the areas of informal interactions with faculty and peers.

Jackie

Jackie is an African American female in her 30s who graduated from Institution B about a year before we spoke. Jackie had over a decade of experience in education and several degrees in education before pursuing her EdD. Despite her foundational knowledge and skills, there were times Jackie felt like her professors assumed she knew things about her content area that she did not. This required her autonomy as she spent a lot of time reading and researching. Time management and balance were a challenge to Jackie as a working mom and at times, she felt very overwhelmed. Even with these feelings and the need for autonomous learning, Jackie felt very connected to her institution and faculty. Because of her proximity to Institution B, she spent a lot of time of campus and made getting to know her professors a priority. Jackie's integration and engagement score was 3.92 and reflected the lowest scores in the areas of informal interaction with peers and faculty.

Amy

Amy is a Caucasian female in her 30s who is in the data collection stage at Institution B. Before deciding to pursue her EdD, Amy found herself discontent as a classroom teacher. As she progressed through the degree, balancing the time it took to complete her coursework with her role as a high school teacher and an adjunct professor required Amy maintain a challenging pace. Her applied statistics class challenged her early on in her program, but she was able to rely on her parents, who are both educators, for support. Because Amy did her master's degree online

through Institution B while living close to the school, she was able to connect deeply to her department through a graduate assistantship on campus. While she later moved out of the area, the feeling of connection persisted. She also had the opportunity to meet locally in her new hometown with one of her cohort members, so for Amy, a healthy level of social integration had occurred despite her pursuit of a DE degree. Amy's academic integration was challenged early on by high rates of turnover in her department, but she feels very connected to a faculty member who started part way through her program. Amy's integration and engagement score was 3.75 and lowest in the area of peer integration.

Jillian

Jillian is a Caucasian female at Institution B in her thirties. She is currently in the data collection stage of her degree. Jillian already held a clinical doctoral degree, but to pursue a tenured position at her university, she needed a terminal degree. Although Jillian began the program without any prior education knowledge, she did not struggle with her education coursework. According to Jillian, she felt connected to her institution because of the emails and phone calls she received and her periodic visits to campus. Jillian visits Institution B about five times per year. At this point in her degree, Jillian desires structure that is absent in this stage of the journey. Because of this lack of structure, Jillian often second guesses herself and wishes there was someone she could receive feedback and advice from regarding her research choices. Despite her independent nature, to Jillian, her cohort was a vital part of her persistence as they were able to answer questions, understand her stress, and offer support. Jillian's integration and engagement score was 3.61 and reflected low levels of faculty integration despite her feelings of connection to her institution.

Jonathan

Jonathan is a tech-savvy African American male between 40 and 50 years old in the data collection stage at Institution B. Several of Jonathan's family members hold terminal degrees. Although he was rejected for admission at his first choice university, Jonathan's 21 years of teaching experience and prior degrees in the same content area made much of his degree very easy for him. The most significant hurdles in Jonathan's degree pursuit, after admissions, were personal in nature. Unfortunately, he had two very close family members pass away during his studies. Jonathan explained that his chair was very understanding and worked with him to help him take a semester off and then get right back on track. Jonathan shared several experiences he had collaborating with faculty and expressed appreciation for the familiarity of his cohort. For Jonathan, the biggest challenges have come in his late stage degree pursuit as he's struggled to narrow a dissertation topic and once he did, to receive site approval for his research. Jonathan's integration and engagement score was 4.33 and the highest of the Institution B participants. His score reflected high institutional commitment, academic integration and a strong connection to his peers. However, Jonathan gave the lowest marks of Institution B participants to questions about informal interactions with faculty, despite the personal support he received early on in his degree.

Results

Obtaining an EdD degree, whether residentially or at a distance, is a journey (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). While the doctoral journey is personal to each participant, the journey to EdD does follow a prescribed set of stages that each student must progress through (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Each stage is accompanied by its own set of challenges and for students navigating that journey through distance education, an additional set

of challenges is likely to emerge. The participants in this study were those who could speak to

the skills, knowledge, dispositions, integration, and supports needed to successfully navigate the

journey with those challenges in mind. Based on an analysis of the responses of those

participants, a model for an orientation to a DE EdD program was generated (see Figure 1) that

scaffolded, or delivered over time, the supports DE EdD students need throughout their doctoral

journey.
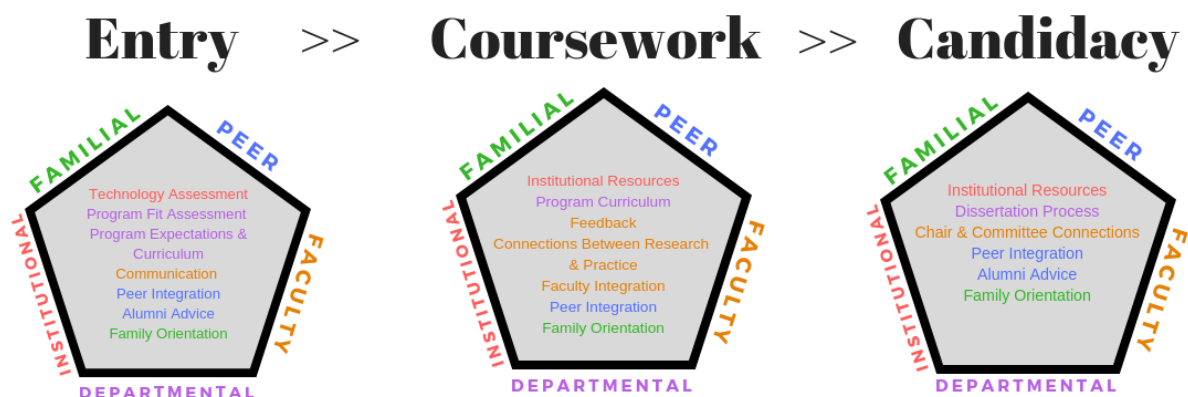
Figure 1. Scaffolded Orientation for DE EdD Programs Model

The model pictured in Figure 1 illustrates a three-stage orientation for DE EdD programs.

Each pentagon represents a different stage of the journey, beginning with program entry,

continuing with the coursework stage, and concluding with the candidacy stage. Each stage

includes five sources of support as indicated on the outside of each pentagon. Inside, there are

specific supports and interventions colored to match the color of that support's source. All

familial support items are green, peer support items are blue, faculty support items are orange,

institutional support items are red, and departmental support items are purple. Notably, each

stage includes all five sources of support.

While not all participants recommended three separate orientations, each participant

shared a variety of times throughout their program that different elements of support or

information were needed. While some struggled at program entry, others struggled a little further into the program while completing some of the coursework, especially statistics and introductory research courses. Lastly, most shared that they struggled in some way during the dissertation stage.

When asked when an orientation to an EdD program might be helpful, many said something similar to Tonya, who said, "twice . . . I think you need to offer, at least at some level before anyone ever gets in, or like, they've been accepted- 'this is what you're going to go through.' But also, I think they need a reminder in that [candidacy] course about what the last year means." Dr. Longfellow suggested "tiered orientations," or something that delivers the unique information a student needs at each stage of the doctoral journey. Jake, a non-persister, indicated the importance of a long-term plan for integration and that an orientation just cannot do that all up-front. Instead, he recommended, "don't waste your time on trying to get them integrated or feeling like they belong in a day, because it's not going to happen. Put stuff long term in place . . . it's not something that you can just do once. It's something that has to be done repetitively."

Entry Stage

Five of the seven student participants at Institution A and four of the six student participants at Institution B discussed the importance of an orientation or support at the start of the doctoral program. According to Kevin, "you need a lot of support in the initial stages. There's just a lot of, you know, the paperwork, the process of entering and getting started and knowing what the expectations are for the whole program." Amy noted that she's a planner so for her, "it would have been great to know at the beginning . . . what's coming and everything." Candace shared that she thought an entry orientation element would be most important for the

student who has been "in the working world for a while" and perhaps has not recently taken courses. Burt recommended admissions as a critical time for support because that is when he experienced the most anxiety. An early orientation element may have reduced anxiety for him at the start of his program. Overall, there were seven orientation elements identified as crucial to the entry stage.

Technology assessment. The first orientation component revealed by the data collected in this study was an institutional technology assessment. Many participants identified technology as a critical skill for DE EdD students. For some contributors, like Candace and Doug, a lack of technological skills made the beginning of their program difficult. They struggled to navigate the program's learning management system (LMS) and university's webpage. Reflecting Doug said, "it would have been more helpful to have an overview- a practice class . . . about navigation through the system . . . there were a lot of clicks to get to the class, so to speak."

Many other students identified technological skills as a key element that contributed to their persistence. Julia identified herself as "technically savvy." Jackie explained that because of her technology skills, she did not struggle with the LMS and was comfortable with what was required of her as an online student. Jillian found that the foundation of technology and social media skills she had before her program helped her learn the new technologies for her program "rather quickly" and "independently." Jonathan listed technological skills such as email, social media, "storing information, transferring information," and "video presentations" as skills he possessed before beginning his program that were crucial to his success throughout.

While reflecting on the skills DE EdD students need for persistence, Dr. Armstrong explained, "we take for granted that our students are tech savvy and sometimes they're not. Sometimes they don't know how to use track changes in Word. Sometimes they don't know how

to use Word styles." She identified "word processing" and "email" as important technological

skills in DE EdD programs that are sometimes overlooked.

Because distance education programs are completed almost entirely through technology,

technological skills are critical to student success and integration (Wilson & Allen, 2008). At

program entry, assessing each EdD student's technological skills would inform students where

their deficiencies lie and help them navigate university resources that strengthen that skill

(Hardy, 2014). Individual EdD programs could tailor the assessment to the skills uniquely

required for success in their program, giving new students an idea of what technologically will

be required throughout their degree.

Program fit assessment. The second orientation element for the entry stage that emerged

from the data was a program fit assessment. Fit refers to the matching of the student, the

student's values, and their goals to their institution and their program's outcomes (Bragg, 1976;

Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 2012b). A correct fit can result in a sense of program

belonging (Bragg, 1976). For Doug, the similarities between his beliefs and his institution's

values contributed to his sense of fit or belonging at Institution A. Candace shared this

experience initially, but during her time at her institution, she felt like she witnessed some

changes that resulted in a gap between her beliefs and her institution's values. It was at that point

in her program that she began to feel disheartened and struggled to connect to her university.

For some, *fit* was not based as much on values as it was on goals vs. outcomes. Jake, a

non-persister, reflected that he was "learning too much stuff that [he] was never going to use"

because his program focused mostly on K12 while his goal was higher education at the seminary

level. The mismatched fit (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005) left Jake feeling "hampered" and

"bored." At the end of our interview, Jake said, "The only advice that I would give somebody is

to make sure the program that you're in fits where you want to be, in terms of where you want to be professionally and academically . . . go to the program that is best going to suit your needs."

Timothy, another non-persister, had a similar struggle. Timothy began his DE EdD program because as an employee at his institution, he could complete his program for free. He already had an MBA degree, so to take advantage of his employee benefit, he thought he would pursue a doctorate. At that time, his institution only offered a few doctoral degrees and the EdD seemed the most applicable. After several years in the program, Timothy realized "getting the doctorate was not necessarily going to be beneficial to [him]" given his chosen career path. Despite complete economic integration, the program did not fit his future goals in business, leaving him with little motivation to persist.

While Jonathan is persisting in his program at the data collection stage, he too could relate to the importance of program fit. Jonathan experienced being rejected for admission to other doctoral programs and at first, did not understand why. But after some time at Institution B, Jonathan said, "I've come to understand this more after being denied twice to pursue my doctorate degree: you have to find a program that matches you."

During the earliest elements of the entry stage, an orientation component that assesses the fit of the student with his or her program may help make sure students are in the right place and/or program to persist. The assessment may look at things such as values and beliefs, future goals vs. program outcomes, and research/scholarship vs. practitioner focus. If a discrepancy in fit does occur, students and advisors could then determine the best course of action for that student (e.g., change programs/majors, change institutions, proceed with additional support).

Program expectations and curriculum. The third component of the entry orientation is the program's expectations and curriculum. To Keith, support at the initial stages of the doctoral

journey is crucial for DE EdD students. Part of that support to Keith is "knowing what the expectations are for the whole program." While Keith felt like he received that support and understanding those expectations were helpful to him, at the same institution, Jillian indicated that she felt like upfront communication of her program's expectations was missing. At his institution, Burt also struggled at the beginning of the program regarding expectations and experienced quite a bit of anxiety because of it. According to Burt, he was looking for "what the program is, what to expect, how to get through the admission process, what is your first class, how do we communicate" and how to meet his program's expectations.

Like Jillian and Burt, Chuck felt that he did not fully understand the expectations of his doctoral program when he first began. Chuck's recommendation for an orientation included university faculty "that would say, 'do you really understand the undertaking that you've taken on here? It is going to take hours, its gonna take many nights, its gonna take long weekends. Its gonna consume you. Are you really prepared for that?" Jackie, an alumna, was grateful that she received exactly that type of support from faculty when she began her program. They told her "this is what the program is. This is what's expected . . . you're giving up this amount of time . . . if you can give it up, give it up." She was grateful for that advice early on and credited it as part of the reason she was able to persist to completion.

EdD students who do not begin their program with the knowledge of their program's expectations often get frustrated, according to Institution A's faculty. Dr. Longfellow's prescription for an orientation to EdD programs was "some way that [students] could understand that when they finally took the first course after, or even before they sign and say, 'yes, I fully want to come in,' how long [the degree] process is." Dr. Valentine recommended that new EdD students "know what [their] program is. Don't have any surprises that come up . . . they should

really from the beginning of that program be able to see their curriculum from the start of the program to the end so they can plan their terms." It was that type of planning that was missing at Institution B, Dr. Armstrong recollected, so faculty there created a "scope and sequence" for their program along with a process that keeps EdD students on track with their dissertation elements (e.g., choosing a topic; completing bibliographies; communicating with their chair).

Amy went through Institution B's program before a scope and sequence were in place and as a result, she recommended that an orientation to EdD programs "lay out exactly what's going to happen in three years." Amy desired a timeline and specific steps. "I understood I was going to do coursework, comps, proposal, dissertation . . . because my dad and his experience in higher ed . . . I didn't know about the capstone project. I really didn't know what comps were."

Reflecting on how he could have been better supported in his program, Timothy indicated that he was searching for clearer expectations too, especially in regard to a total program timeline. Timothy needed clearer expectations regarding when "throughout the entire program you should have x, y, and z done. So, at what point should you have the lit review done, at what point should you have your idea presented, at what point should you have your methodology in place." Timothy remembered being told, "'hey, be thinking about it . . .' 'hey, be working on it,'" but he needed more structure.

Courtney, who has been in her program for seven years and recently received IRB approval, is one of those students who did not understand the timeline and expectations of the program up front. Because of that, she expressed some frustration with her program. Courtney shared, "honestly, I would never, ever, ever recommend [Institution A's] EdD program to anyone. I couldn't. It was too stressful and long and drawn out. I wouldn't." To mitigate struggles like Courtney's and to prevent ambiguity's potential effect on persistence (Gardner,

2007, 2009), during the entry orientation, departments should include an overview of the program's expectations and a detailed timeline of when different milestones in the degree should be met (e.g., choosing a dissertation topic; preparing for comps; choosing a chair and committee members; developing a prospectus; defending a proposal).

As programs cover their expectations and the milestones that should be achieved during the doctoral journey, they should also include a brief overview of the curriculum, especially their expectations for the dissertation. While incoming doctoral students may be aware that there is a dissertation requirement for their degree, most are not completely aware of what that entails. Dr. Fox shared that new EdD students "need to know what a dissertation is . . . many students come in and they think this is just a big paper." For candidates in the capstone course that Dr. Fox teaches, he passes around an actual dissertation so they can realize the breadth of what that entails, but at that point, students have lost valuable time they could have used towards choosing, refining, and researching a topic.

Burt shared, "I wish somebody would have told me at the beginning, 'when you start the program, think about what you think your dissertation might be.'" Burt explained that he reached candidacy feeling like he was "starting from scratch" while some of his classmates began their program with an idea in mind. "They've really understood their topic and a lot of the papers they've written were already chunks and pieces of chapters one, two, and three." Julia's experience was similar to Burt's. Without a true understanding of what a dissertation was up front, at candidacy Julia "felt like [she] could have saved [herself] a whole of time and effort if [she] had been continually pointed in the direction of whatever coursework [she] had to do, it always being around [her] dissertation topic."

During the focus group with Institution B faculty, Drs. Armstrong and Anderson discussed the fact that DE EdD students struggle to choose and refine an appropriate dissertation topic and this again, is partially because they are not really sure what a dissertation is. Dr. Armstrong shared that when she asked a cohort of hers what they wished they would have known when they began their program, they indicated that they had no idea what people were talking about early on in their degree when they would discuss chapters one, two, and three of the dissertation, annotated bibliographies, or literature reviews. According to Dr. Armstrong, "they don't know what that looks like. They want some examples. They want a template. They want to see things." Dr. Anderson joked that students often think they need to "save the world with [their] dissertation," because of their misconception of what a dissertation is.

Tonya recommended going one step further than simply showing new students a dissertation. She explained that she saw her first dissertation defense once she reached candidacy. It was that process that cleared up some misconceptions for her. While it was helpful for her at that point in her journey, she indicated that it would have been better for her to experience a defense twice- once at entry and then again at candidacy. Giving new EdD students concrete examples of actual dissertations, dissertation components, and even dissertation defenses early through an entry orientation would help DE EdD students be better positioned to persist to and through the dissertation process (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Salani et al., 2016). Programs should use this component of the entry orientation to showcase what makes their curriculum unique (i.e., signature pedagogies, collaboration opportunities, residencies), overview their program's expectations and timeline, and overview the dissertation.

Communication. Analysis of the data in this study revealed that understanding how to respectfully and proactively communicate with faculty early on in one's program was another

critical element for success in DE EdD programs. Thus, an element on respectful and proactive communication is the next component of the entry orientation for DE EdD students. Interestingly, all six faculty members who participated in this study highlighted communication as a skill that is necessary for persistence in DE EdD programs.

Communication is so critical for DE EdD students because, according to Dr. Valentine, in DE programs "everything is done pretty much through email communication." When asked about the skills necessary for persistence, Dr. Armstrong stated, "I know this is going to sound really funny, but recently I've had to address two students about how do you send a professional email." She jovially recounted a few situations where students lacked professionalism, used "two-word sentences," or struggled to differentiate between professional and relaxed contexts in their communication. She shared that it was sometimes confusing for students as they navigated relationships with faculty members within the doctoral program and the "power differential" that exists, even though both parties are professionals (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014). "You know," Dr. Armstrong said, "you are talking to a faculty member. How do you approach them? You say, Dr. so and so."

Several of the faculty highlighted the fact that a drawback to email and digital communication is that the recipient cannot always detect the sender's tone or understand their intended meaning. In the focus group at Institution A, Dr. Longfellow shared, "a lot of correspondence is email or just announcements. It often gets misinterpreted." Dr. Johnson expounded saying, "Right. And it's easy to misinterpret my voice. My tone." Dr. Longfellow sees this as something that inhibits her relationship with students and Dr. Johnson agreed. Dr. Johnson explained, "if we met with them in a face to face forum and they got to know us a little

bit better, it would be much easier for them to properly interpret what we're saying and what we're meaning."

Many student participants also highlighted the importance of communication as a necessary skill because they attributed their communication as what built their relationships with faculty and aided their integration. According to Jillian, her connectivity to faculty came primarily through "emails and telephone calls." Candace agreed and explained that reaching out to communicate and ask questions is what led to a connection with faculty deep enough to invite them to be a member of her committee. When asked about the support he experienced that influenced his persistence, Chuck recalled "several instructors that were very good about sending emails of encouragement to the class." Sometimes these emails went to the class as a whole, but he explained that the professors who emailed him individually were especially impactful. "They seemed to express, 'we know this is a super long journey; where are you in the process so that we know how to encourage you to continue pushing forward.'"

In DE programs, relationships can be helped or hindered through communication. It is important that DE EdD students are prepared with the department's expectations for respectful communication. Dr. Valentine explained, "we also need them to know how to communicate in a way that's professional and respectful and not demeaning or degrading." She explained that at times, the transactional distance between the student writing the email and the faculty member receiving the email is enough that the respect that would be afforded in face-to-face settings is forgone. Students may find themselves writing an "off the cuff" response out of anger and hitting send too quickly. Had they had the same conversation in person, they likely would have had to wait until an opportune time and as a result, they would have had time to think through the

appropriate response. Dr. Armstrong noted, "I think its learning to how to manage your emotions and knowing what's a professional interaction and how you can talk to your advisor."

While new EdD students should be oriented to how to respectfully communicate through email, they should also be oriented to the other types of communication they can use to reach out to faculty, their department, or other university supports. Many students attributed the relationships they had with faculty or the connectedness they felt with the university to phone calls, video conferencing technologies, and even face-to-face meetings. Keith mentioned phone calls and "video technologies like Google hangout or Skype" as "opportunities where I felt like I was getting connected with the faculty." Amy shared that at her most difficult times in the program, she would reach out to a faculty member by phone and "felt so much better about things when [she] got off the phone with her." Jillian noted that she had "infrequent visits up to campus every now and then." While "on campus social interactions really weren't as rich as the telephone calls and email correspondence," for Jillian, Jennifer shared that she had a different experience. "I got to see my instructors face-to-face," Jennifer explained. "I did feel like I belonged, like I was part of the university . . . I never felt disconnected or isolated . . . and I think it's because of my presence on campus." While faculty at Institution B shared they had "an open phone policy" for doctoral students, Dr. Longfellow from Institution A noted that she was working on doing more "face-to-face" time with students through videos and webinars. While these opportunities for communication are important, not all faculty want to be contacted for the sole purpose of a student feeling connected or building social bonds. Regarding social integration, Dr. Johnson from Institution A shared, "I don't facilitate it . . . don't encourage it. I mean, I didn't have it- didn't want it, didn't need it, just did my thing. I figure if they want it . . . if they need it, they can find other people who want it and need it." Dr. Fox from Institution A

shared, "I personally don't appreciate it when the answers are there . . . and I have to answer something that's already been presented to them." New DE EdD students could benefit from understanding what type of communication is acceptable, when it is appropriate, and how to initiate or request contact. Likewise, in an orientation, faculty have the responsibility to communicate their expectations for student communication and preferred communication methods.

Part of the DE EdD student's orientation to communication should also be learning the importance of being proactive. Regarding proactive communication, Dr. Valentine shared,

"I think the biggest thing is knowing that you have to communicate with your professor often and regularly. A lot of times it's hard for us to address situations or questions or problems that arise if they're not communicated to us. So what we get a lot of the time is a student communicating after something's been going on for three or four weeks."

Along those same lines, Amy, who is a professor while pursuing her EdD at Institution B said, "if you're struggling, [professors] don't know that. Especially in an online class; they don't know unless you send them an email or request a phone call." Students should know that they can and should reach out to ask for help and that they should do so before they reach a crisis point.

Amy agreed that proactive communication was a key skill that attributed to her persistence. Amy stated, "I say, you know, don't be afraid to speak out. College professors are not perfect. I mean I know for a fact because I am one. Don't be afraid to air grievances and ask questions. I mean that's the biggest thing. You're not going to get the support and help if you don't ask for it." Like Amy, Chuck shared that proactive communication was essential for persistence. Reflecting, Chuck said, "you know, I wasn't afraid to email a professor and ask for clarification or ask questions . . . I wasn't too afraid to call my dissertation chair and discuss

issues that I was having or frustrations." Proactive communication, initiated by the student, can help alert faculty when a student needs additional support. When they provide that support, it removes what could have been a potential barrier to persistence. An orientation component on communication early in DE EdD programs can equip students with the skills they need to be effective, respectful, and proactive.

Peer integration. While learning how to communicate with faculty is an essential skill for DE EdD students beginning their doctoral program, the data collected in this study also revealed that integrating, or connecting, with peers was imperative. However, this can be difficult in distance education. During the entry orientation, programs should give students an idea of how peer integration has happened for their previous DE EdD students as well as an overview of the peer integration opportunities they provide. One way participants in this study indicated they were able to connect quickly with other students in their programs was through social media. There were a wide variety of social media platforms that participants noted in this study and knowing which ones to turn to and how to navigate them could be difficult for some students. Candace and Doug mentioned using LinkedIn while many other participants referred to Google communities or Facebook as their principle means of connecting through social media. Overall, eight participants identified social media as one of the primary ways they integrated and made social connections with their peers.

Burt explained that he would typically wait until the end of a course and then reach out to classmates he had connected with to ask if he could friend them on Facebook. Burt said, I "use social media to build that little network of being able to reach back to them. Seeing where they are in the process kind of gives me a good gauge of where I'm at in the EdD program." Doug shared that he used social media to "touch base" with his previous classmates and to "even try to

plan a couple of intensives where . . . we could at least connect for the next class." While Amy's department required the use of Google+ Communities, she preferred an additional connection through Facebook because it was more personal. "Adding each other on Facebook has helped," she shared. "You can see that they're other humans with their kids and dogs and stuff."

While Keith used his institution's provided Google+ Communities as his main method of social media connection, he echoed Amy's sentiment. Social media connections, especially when he and his classmates were encouraged to share videos, helped him integrate with his peers. "Instead of just seeing text from my classmates, I actually got to see their face. I got to hear their voices and doing that on a regular basis in multiple courses really helped me feel like, you know, I felt like I was connected." Jonathan also used the forums to share strategies and encourage others on a regular basis.

During this component of the entry orientation, departments can point students to the social media tools provided by the institution. For instance, Courtney referenced Institution A's Yammer page. She noted that students use the Yammer page to "ask questions that they may not want to just email a professor." Dr. Armstrong shared that her program at Institution B utilizes Backchannel Chat as a safe and more personal way students can connect with each other without a faculty member present. However, Dr. Armstrong noted that she observes personal connections made in their required course-related mediums too. Things like, "'my child just had a birthday' or 'just got a part in a play.'"

If institutions do not provide their own sanctioned social media platforms, they can instead use the social media component of the entry orientation to simply encourage new DE EdD students to build that community themselves. Dr. Fox explained that in his late stage candidacy courses, he "strongly suggest[s] for [students] to form a . . . private Facebook group"

because he knows that at some point in the dissertation process, students will "need someone to vent to." Social media can be a great way for DE EdD programs to build a sense of community (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a) that quickly bridges the virtual distance between classmates (Moore, 1993, 2013). As Dr. Fox alluded, that community membership helps students deal with discouragement and disappointment (Rovai & Wighting, 2005). Social media can also be a tool that new students use to glean wisdom from alumni or students further along in the program to aid in the socialization process (Bragg, 1976; Gardner, 2010b, Portnoi et al., 2015; Weidman et al., 2001). This study identified highlighting the importance of peer integration and orienting students to existing peer integration opportunities as a crucial means of support for DE doctoral students.

Alumni advice. While social media is one way new students can learn from students who have already persisted, this study identified incorporating alumni advice as an additional tool institutions can use to help orient new DE EdD students. Dr. Fox shared that he encourages DE EdD students "to find who's been through the program." However, for new DE EdD students, it can be overwhelming to know where to even begin looking for an alumnus who will mentor you in the program or answer the questions you might have. Tonya shared that she thought an orientation to an EdD program would be most effective if it included "a panel of people who have recently finished who can share their experience . . . I think people's experiences are gonna be more motivating than even faculty." Dr. Fox and Dr. Johnson agreed with this idea for orientations, with Dr. Fox explaining that EdD students need to hear from people "who have finished." An alumni panel that allows students to interact with people who have completed the program before them can help motivate new students and aid with socialization (Bragg, 1976; Juedes, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001) while simultaneously giving them practical tips that will

help them persist in their specific program. Departments can ask alumni for tips for new students and distribute this advice through a variety of platforms (e. g., social media; video content; alumni spotlights; emails of encouragement). As students listen to the experiences of recent completers, their advice may clear up any questions or concerns they have about their program's requirements or expectations (Kumar & Coe, 2017).

Family orientation. While many new DE EdD students do not realize it upon entry, completing a doctorate really requires the full support of their family. One of the specific things Dr. Fox and Dr. Johnson mentioned as vital for students to recognize upon entrance into a doctoral program was the strain completing a doctorate could put on family relationships. Candace shared that her "daughter actually grew a little resentful because [she] was spending more time doing school work than [she] was helping her with school." Chuck explained that while his wife was incredibly supportive, "there were times that it was more difficult for her . . . she would need a little more of my time than maybe I felt like I had." It is important for families to aware of the needs of their doctoral student and how they can be mindful and supportive (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). Tonya recalled that at the end of journey, when she was trying to finish up her dissertation, her husband put a personal trip on the calendar that inadvertently required her to move her dissertation defense deadline up a few weeks earlier than she had planned. Family members of DE EdD students may not realize what doctoral success requires or how their own choices can impact the student completing the program (West, 2014).

The faculty at Institution A suggested having alumni and their family members as part of an orientation "to talk about what they went through because . . . none of us want to see their family disintegrate in this process." Dr. Armstrong from Institution B reflected during our focus group, "I can think of three of my students who have gotten divorced." She explained that

students and their families needed to better understand the demands of the doctorate even before the program began. "I think withdrawal from the program and the breakdown of family relationships are two things . . . that could potentially be mitigated if [families] had those candid conversations before they entered the program."

For new students starting in the program, Chuck recommended asking, "have you made accommodations with your family and with you friends to pick up pieces that you have typically taken care of in your life that you may not be able to because of this program?" Dr. Armstrong noted that setting expectations and boundaries (West, 2014) like these that can be adhered to is particularly difficult for her female students. One of her female students shared with her,

> You know, the men in our cohort, their wives run the household and keep everything together. But my husband doesn't have the capacity to do that, you know? So I'm still primary at home . . . and I envy my male colleagues and peers who their wives are sort of that central piece.

Dr. Armstrong shared that "males and females have different needs;" understanding how the demands of the doctorate can impact their unique roles and responsibilities, especially those based on gender norms (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018), is vitally important (Golde, 2006). Dr. Fox advised,

> "You need to communicate [what's involved in this process] if you don't want to be one of the ones that their family break up. I know in my case, my wife and I knew what was coming and we had a conversation about it. We kind of divvied up the responsibilities. I said that this is what I'll go to; these are things I can't go to, you know? And we'll have to make it work that way."

During the family orientation component of the entry orientation, families should be educated about the demands of the doctorate and have a chance to discuss what those demands may mean for their family (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; West, 2014). They can also be given an idea of the supports that alumni received from their family members that aided their persistence. Julie, Jillian, Burt, and Doug all shared that one of the main sources of family support they needed and received was just time. Their families understood the time they needed to do their studies. Jackie and Jillian recalled the help they received from family members with childcare and housework. Chuck shared that his wife "did the yard work . . . she even did home repairs" as a way help pick up the responsibilities he could not carry during the journey. For Burt, at times, the support was as simple as "bringing [him] coffee." Often, for many participants, familial support was merely that their family would encourage them or check in on their progress. Jake, a non-persister, shared that he could have been better supported if his family allowed him to have a dedicated, respected space to complete his work without familial interruptions. He shared, "I was just kind of all over the place – wherever a child wasn't. And if I had one place where I could just go to do the work, that would have been nice."

It is significant to note that when discussing the demands of the doctorate and the support received from family members, eight participants indicated that their family really understood what would be required of them and were willing to give the necessary support because the family member had an advanced degree or doctorate themselves. The participants in this study indicated that their institutions did not really provide support for their families or a way for them to share with their family what the journey would entail. However, those who had family members who had been through it felt well supported. They also make up a significant percentage of those who are counted as "persistent" in this study. Jake, a non-persister in this

study, indicated that his wife did not have the luxury of really understanding the demands of the degree. He noted that she was "rolling with the punches; she just kind of learned as she went." Jake and Timothy, who also left his program, both had ways they felt their families could have better supported them. Because his family did not have personal experience with completing a doctorate, Timothy felt like they did not understand how to encourage him when he reached his "tipping point" and fell behind.

The entry stage of the doctoral journey is critical time in the doctoral journey. The process is unfamiliar and there is a lot of new information DE EdD students will encounter. An entry orientation that includes technology and fit assessments, the program's timeline and expectations, an introduction to the dissertation, communication expectations, social media information, an alumni panel, and a family orientation can equip DE EdD students with the information and tools they will need for success during the early stages of the doctoral journey.

Coursework Stage

Each student, alumni, and non-persister participant was asked when they needed the most support during the doctoral journey. They were also asked about the best timing for a potential orientation. Julia, Amy, and Jillian noted the need for significant support during the coursework stage. Many participants, like Keith, were proponents for multiple scaffolded orientations, using each stage as "an opportunity to provide more specific details on what would be involved in that stage." Once the components for the orientation(s) were clear, the delivery survey helped identify when each component should be delivered. Analysis of the delivery survey resulted in the identification of seven orientation components important to the coursework stage: institutional resources, program curriculum, feedback, connections between research and practice, faculty integration, peer integration, and a family orientation.

Institutional resources. Many participants in this study highlighted institutional resources as sources of support offered by their university. Often, institutional resources were also mentioned as we discussed the skills and knowledge they needed for success in one's doctoral program. When asked about the skills that were most necessary for success in a DE EdD program, 14 of 20 participants noted that being able to write was critical. Dr. Johnson dubbed writing as "probably the most critical piece of knowledge. If a person writes well, they will be successful in the program. If they don't, it's going to be painful for them." Dr. Valentine echoed this saying, students "definitely have to know how to write . . . I would say the knowledge of just writing and composing a paper with proper formatting- that's been a big deal." Candace is an APA editor and has experience proofing books and dissertations. She shared that those experiences "really gave [her] the skills for getting through [her] program."

While some participants admitted writing was a skill they had to develop throughout this program, often, DE EdD students have an unrealistic view of their writing ability. Dr. Johnson explained, "you think you write well. You think you think well and communicate well. And then you run into one of us and it's like, 'wow! I never realized I didn't know how to write before,' and it's a humbling process." Courtney reflected, "I thought . . . I was a pretty good writer. But . . . I had to learn to be more of a scholarly writer for dissertation purposes." Despite two master's degrees, Courtney admitted, "I was always taking shortcuts and doing just the bare minimum with APA and I could no longer do that." Like Courtney, Chuck struggled with APA. While talking about skills he indicated that he "was a fairly good writer." But because he "wasn't as proficient in APA as [he] needed to be," he "spent a good bit of time kind of plowing through the [APA] manual to make sure [his] work was at a standard expected at the doctoral level." Jackie shared that while she writes well, starting out, she did not write academically. "Writing

academically is very prescriptive. It was . . . kind of an adjustment for me writing in that regard. I had to seek outside help to get me where I needed to be."

Jackie is not alone in this struggle. In the coursework stage, DE EdD students face large papers and projects that require academic, scholarly writing and unfortunately, this is often a challenge. Dr. Armstrong noted,

> In terms of skill, this is going to sound crazy, but writing is the number one thing I think most of our students struggle with . . . I just read one of my student's dissertations yesterday and it's like, this thought and this thought and this thought and this thought. All in a paragraph and there's nothing that links them together.

Dr. Anderson took the conversation even further. "I think writing and specifically, developing an argument, and then based on that argument, asking a couple additional questions that you want to pursue is the most important skill." This type of scholarly, academic writing is often a challenge for DE EdD students.

This orientation component can provide resources to help students better understand what doctoral level writing entails, but it should also make them aware of the supports that the institution or department has in place when help is needed. Dr. Johnson noted that Institution A's writing center is a "key" support for students. "For those who take advantage of it," he said, "I hear good things." Dr. Longfellow shared that she sends "probably two or three out of every class" to Institution A's writing center "because they don't understand what it is they're not doing." When doctoral students come in thinking they are a good writer, it helps to have another party work with them to see where their writing is missing the mark now that they are at the doctoral level. At Institution B, Dr. Armstrong shared there is "a writing center who helps students edit their dissertations and everything."

Despite these resources at both institutions, many students admitted they did not take advantage of them. Jillian explained they were only "partially helpful" because "what they provided was rather elementary." She was looking for more help than she felt like they could offer. Amy admitted, "I've never used the writing center because they've been really unreliable with scheduling people." During the writing support orientation, debunking the misconceptions that exist about the supports offered at an institution should be a primary focus.

Lastly, during this orientation component, institutions should give students a place to turn when the institutional supports offered do not meet their need or cannot accommodate their request in a timely manner. They can point students to outside resources and encourage students to leverage their social media connections to find peers who are skilled writers or to form writing groups. Eight of the participants in this study noted that proofreading, APA, and general writing support were some of the key ways they experienced peer support.

Writing is not the only area of support DE EdD students need during the coursework stage. The data in this study revealed that at times, remediation in the area of content knowledge is needed as well. This was particularly true for those without a background in education. Jillian's science-oriented background led to having "to do some backtracking on a lot of the content." Jake's experience was similar because his master's degree was in religion. Reflecting on the coursework he completed, Jake shared, "there were some areas in the education thing where I was like, 'I have no idea what I'm doing!' . . . And professors had to kind of walk me through it a little bit more hand in hand."

While it is perhaps expected that DE EdD students with a graduate degree outside of education may struggle with parts of the coursework stage, even EdD students who were experienced in education were surprised to discover that some of the coursework was a challenge

for them. Jennifer's background was in education, but her specialization prior to her doctorate was a little different. Acculturating to her specialization of instructional design was difficult for her. She explained, "I felt like, at times, the instructors or the professors kind of assumed that we already had [instructional design] knowledge, and I didn't." Even with a master's degree in the same specialization as her doctorate, Julia felt like "a lot of this was all new to me. Most of it was new." Candace also struggled in several content area courses despite her background in similar field and she felt like she did not receive the support from the professor that she needed. She ended up reaching out to "people who had taken the class before" for assistance.

Outside of education-specific content assistance, many participants noted that statistics was a particularly difficult course for them where additional support was needed. Doug recounted that there were a lot of problems he did not understand and he struggled to find tutorials to help with his remediation. Many others had similar experiences and discussed their desire for an institution supplied support service to help. Both institutions have some statistical support in place, but students were not aware it existed so many did not take advantage of it. For instance, Jillian shared, "I really am not sure what kind of statistical support we had. I wish that was more visible if we did have statistical support." For some, additional support was pursued, but the help needed was not available. Discussing her advanced educational statistics course, Courtney stated, "I was so stressed out with that class, I was almost shaking. And I had taken it twice because I needed to get a better grade." While she contacted Institution A's resource for statistical support, she shared, "they could not find anybody who was advanced enough to tutor me in advanced educational statistics- on campus or online." A lack of content area supports not only leaves students struggling in a particular course, it can set them up to struggle with future coursework that builds on that content. Furthermore, struggling in some subjects, particularly in

statistics and research courses, can lead to difficulty with the dissertation as students complete their own research.

At times, withholding support on the doctoral level is intentional as programs seek to develop self-directed learners (Ponton, 2014). Chuck recognized this and now that he is beyond the struggle, he embraces the process:

> For me, during coursework, there were times I needed more support. It took me a little bit to understand that the support that wasn't being offered was actually making me a better student. And so there was like this intentional withholding of support to force me to dig deeper. So that was not always well received information, but I look back and know that I'm a better student, even just as a completer, I'm still a better student because of that. I'm a better person.

Candace's struggle with her content course forced her to find books to teach herself. Many students, like Amy, turned to the Internet for support. Amy was looking for more because the resources provided in her program were "not enough to really understand the quantitative statistics." Like many others, she ended up having to remediate on her own. "I was searching YouTube for instructional videos on using SPSS software because we were having to do that and I mean, those were more helpful than the instruction."

While self-direction is an important aspect of doctoral programs (Ponton, 2014), Dr. Valentine shared that she also thought resources for content knowledge remediation were an essential part of developing persistent DE EdD students. Dr. Valentine explained, "I know we say a lot of times, you know, just go to the Internet. It'll show you. But I think to just have the human interaction is still a resource that you need, even when you're online." She suggested a resource center "for any type of remediation," mentioning statistical, software, and writing

assistance specifically. Resources for content knowledge remediation would direct struggling DE

EdD students to the help they need, aiding in their persistence. However, as shown by multiple

participants, offering the resources is not sufficient if students are unaware that they exist or do

not know how to access them. During the coursework orientation, providing information on the

institutional resources that exist for remediation and how to access them would provide timely,

accessible support for DE EdD students.

Program curriculum. During the coursework stage, this study identified an overview of

a program's curriculum as a helpful orientation component. One way to do this is by providing

access to detailed course guides. While students received support from their department at entry

regarding a program timeline, course guides provide a more detailed look at what each course

entails and its workload so students can plan accordingly. Amy shared this was something she

was really looking for during her program, "rather than just listing the course with names, you

know? It's like, 'learning theory.' Okay, but what is that going to entail?" Timothy explained

why this is helpful:

> During any program, there's gonna be a natural ebb and flow as far as times that you're
>
> busy verses times that you're not. Or times there's going to be a high workload verse not
>
> . . . so if students were able to know at the outset, you know, let's say they're going to
>
> have more free time during the summer. Then they can put a busier course there verses a
>
> lighter course, you know, say during like a fall time frame and what not.

Dr. Valentine, who suggested students have the ability to "plan their terms," supported this idea

so that students could schedule courses based on personal commitments or travel plans.

For Timothy, who ultimately chose not to persist, understanding the workload associated

with each course would have been very helpful. He continued explaining, stating, "I think it's

probably best termed *rigor*." Course guides provided "through some type of orientation" can provide the "rigor element of each course," Timothy suggested. Understanding the rigor of individual courses would have been helpful economically for Chuck, who explained he ended up paying more for his degree because he tried to "take more courses during those eight-week sessions than [he] could" and he had to take them a second time. Chuck did not have a way to gauge the "intensity" of each course and how it would fit in an eight-week session. Students completing more than one course at a time could plan what courses they might want to pair together through the course guides provided during this stage.

Feedback. As students choose their courses and progress through the coursework stage, one thing participants discussed often during this study as a desire of theirs was a way to *gauge their progress* or make sure they were on the right track. At times during their program, they were not sure how they were doing and if they were on target to reach the end of the program successfully. When follow up questions were asked, participants often described a desire for more feedback (See Figure 2). Several participants recalled times in their program where they were frustrated because of the feedback they did or did not receive. Keith explained that "good, timely feedback to your students" is part of "avoiding frustration and keeping people in a program." However, not everyone in this study felt like they received that consistently.
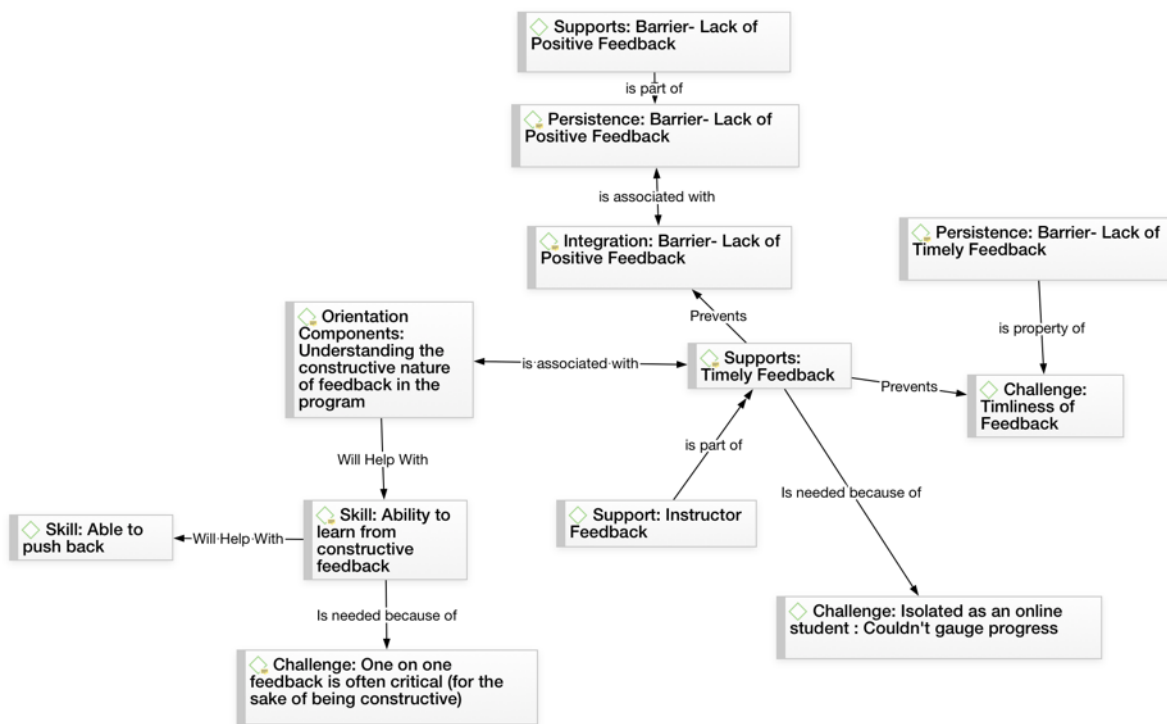
Figure 2. Relation of codes

Jackie was frustrated with a lack of feedback several times throughout her journey. She explained, "At times I would get, you know, a third of the way through the semester, or halfway through, or three quarters of the way, and realize I had gone off track and had not been notified." Because of this, Jackie felt like she had missed the opportunity to build a stronger foundation throughout her coursework. Amy related to this sentiment. "We did not get feedback," she shared. "We had no idea where we stood." Jillian, too, desired more frequent feedback from professors for validation. While she received feedback, she "would have appreciated more frequent feedback."

While it is clear that institutions should provide frequent, detailed feedback for DE EdD students, candidates may not always be well equipped to understand the intent of that feedback. While most of Candace's professors provided helpful feedback, she was also able to recount a

professor that "never gave any feedback [and] was not positive in anything she wrote either." To Candace, that instance was minor in comparison to the struggle with feedback she had with her research consultant. At Institution A, each candidate is assigned a research consultant, or an expert in their design, who must approve the student's manuscript before they are approved to progress to their proposal and dissertation defenses. Her consultant "never gave positive feedback" and she "almost quit" because of it. While Candace received feedback, she was frustrated with the process because the feedback received seemed harsh and her proposal manuscript required eight separate revisions. The faculty at Institution A suggested an orientation component that included understanding feedback because of this very problem. Dr. Johnson shared, "you know, the nature of our jobs is to be critical of their writing. They view, you know, the critical component as criticism and they take it very personally sometimes." From Candace's explanation, it was clear her research consultant's feedback that prohibited from her moving forward with her manuscript felt personal to her. However, it's likely that her research consultant was actually trying to help her in the long run by pointing out deficits or weaknesses in her design that would have impeded her dissertation research later on. Dr. Fox shared that he explains to students why the grading seems "harsh." While he understands "that writing is a very personal kind of thing," he clarifies that faculty are "trying to help . . . and there's nothing personal as far as trying to hurt you as part of it." Instead, professors are aiming to help students be successful at the next stage of the journey.

While some participants in this study identified the ability to accept constructive criticism as a disposition they possessed, Chuck looked at this idea a little differently. Chuck described, "not being afraid to submit knowing that there would be feedback that would be constructive" as a skill he had to develop. He elaborated, calling it "not having a fear, you know, of rejection."

Dr. Anderson discussed this challenge and noted that while it is not easy, it is a necessary part of the doctoral journey. "You might throw an idea out to your advisor and they don't like it or they want you to refine it or iterate it over and over again." He continued, "It's not the word rejection, but just saying, you know, 'this isn't quite good enough for scholarship.' I think can be a little bit challenging." When people reach that challenge, some DE EdD students "get defensive," Dr. Anderson explained. "They take that as kind of a personal criticism but being able to divorce the personal criticism with the criticism of the work and kind of maintain rigor and scholarship, I think, can be challenging." Much like Chuck described, Dr. Anderson shared that "being able to, I think, still persist in light of the rejection . . . it's not easy to learn . . . you get a lot of it at the doctoral stage when you're working with your advisor and they want you to revise the fifth or sixth time."

The data collected during this study illuminated *missing feedback* and *misunderstood feedback* as two potential barriers to persistence. After listening to the stories of students and faculty, an orientation element on understanding feedback and the purpose of its constructive nature was identified as an essential orientation component. DE EdD students, who as noted earlier, obtain almost all communication electronically, may struggle to filter through feedback and receive it as constructive, not critical or personal. This component, delivered in an orientation during the coursework stage, may help mitigate some of the frustration experienced by doctoral students.

As faculty discussed feedback and its role in helping students reach an end goal of scholarship, they shared that to them, feedback and the conversation it should elicit, plays a bigger role in socialization to the doctorate than students may realize. As this orientation element helps students understand the nature of feedback, it can also help students realize the importance

of the *process* feedback provokes. Dr. Anderson explained that his feedback is really about helping students get to a place where they are "able to challenge and kind of like, approach a problem in a new perspective. That's what furthers the field." The goal of each EdD program is that their alumni indeed, further their field; feedback is part of what helps this happen. Dr. Anderson continued, "If you don't really, kind of, get that questioning and challenging, (and you know, even in online, you know, you can kind of be seen as a bully, right? If you question too much or if you push back a little bit), which is so important to, you know, extending/expanding the research field," you're not really being done a favor. As faculty push back on student ideas through feedback, they are teaching doctoral students to be critical researchers prepared for scholarship and innovation.

Dr. Anderson and Dr. Armstrong discussed how difficult it is to develop the skill of pushing back, especially for DE students. Dr. Anderson shared that "maybe people have, like a little bit less refined understanding of just how much that they can kind of push back a little bit and that [pushing back] should be celebrated; but they may be a little reticent to do that." To Dr. Armstrong, helping DE EdD students learn how to accept push back through feedback and in turn, be better able to push back themselves requires the foundation of respectful communication discussed earlier. There's a "happy medium" that to Dr. Armstrong, is learned "the first year where you get socialized into the program. What does respectful interaction look like in a way where I can have my own opinion and develop my own thought process?" She explained that the dynamic of students expressing ideas, faculty pushing back, and then faculty allowing respectful pushback from students is even difficult for faculty, but it is necessary for obtaining an EdD degree. "You can push back, you know? It's fine. Ultimately though, to get through your dissertation, you're going to have to do what I ask, potentially, but I'm going to respect- if you

have a solid opinion- I'm going to respect that opinion. You may change my mind." At this stage in the doctoral journey, an orientation component that helps DE EdD students understand the purpose and nature of feedback and the process of respectfully pushing back for the sake of furthering the field equips students with tools they will need to persist in the dissertation stage.

   Connections between research and practice. As data were collected for this study, student, faculty, and non-persister participants alike discussed the idea of connecting research, or what they were learning, and practice. Participants often discussed the ability to apply what one is learning to one's own context. According to Dr. Armstrong, one of the greatest benefits of pursuing an EdD degree at a distance is that the student is able to "stay in the field." This is a unique because typically, for residential students, "there's been the limitation- you go to school and then you practice." DE EdD "students have the opportunity to integrate the two . . . so there's that nice marrying of practice and research in the 'ivory tower.'" Dr. Anderson explained that one of the benefits of this is that students are able to become more "reflective practitioners." Because "they're able to simultaneously work and go to school . . . they're constantly thinking about . . . I'm kind of going through this workplace issue and design challenge." As a result, students can then apply what they are learning immediately to their context or they can use that challenge as something they bring to class to discuss or study. For Jillian, this really aided in the learning process, as she was initially unfamiliar with her coursework's content. She explained, "I could put it to action very quickly, which I think aided the learning throughout the curriculum."

   While reflecting on what institutions could do to help students persist, Dr. Armstrong again discussed the "disconnect between higher education and practice." According to Dr. Armstrong, "there needs to be a better integration between 'what is the significance of this degree,' and 'how do I integrate it into my current practice' so that there's a real connection

between practice and scholarship." Doing so, she says, may help institutions "see a higher persistence rate." Jake testified of this concept when discussing the reasons he chose to leave his doctoral program. He explained that because his profession is outside of education, he did not "have a place to really practice" anything he was learning. He expressed that he felt "hampered" in his studies. Jake was even able to show the link between his attrition and educational theory (Knowles, 1980a). "I mean, they're showing in adult education [that] everything is about immediacy of learning. So if you don't have a way of making what you are teaching immediately impactful in a way that they can use it in a very tangible sense, adults are not interested in learning it . . . which is kind of why I lost interest in the doctoral program."

Burt also came from a non-education context, but he was able to find a way to link what he was learning to his personal context. Burt noted that linking his military experience and EdD coursework is part of what integrated him academically. While students have the ability to apply what they are learning directly to their context, not all innately do so on their own. While Burt looked for a way to apply what he was learning to his non-education context on his own, Jake needed assistance figuring out a way to combine *learning* and *doing*. Unfortunately for Jake, integration did not occur on that level. Therefore, the data shows that an orientation component during coursework that affords faculty the opportunity to work with students on how they can apply what they are learning to what they are already doing may reinforce program fit (Bragg, 1976; Tinto, 2012b) and help persistence and integration for DE EdD students (Knowles, 1980a).

Faculty integration. Faculty helping students identify ways to apply their learning to their personal contexts is also likely to naturally begin the process of the next coursework orientation component: faculty integration. While doctoral education and distance education research both show that integration is important, the social integration process is sometimes a

mystery for DE EdD students, especially in regard to integrating with faculty. The faculty at

Institution A discussed how difficult it was for DE EdD students to integrate socially with some

faculty. Dr. Fox identified this as one of the challenges for DE EdD students. Dr. Johnson

explained, "distance relationships are shallower" and tend to have "less of a meaningful

connection." Sometimes the struggle to connect relationally is outside of anyone's control.

Jonathan shared that he struggled to connect to faculty initially because of turnover and faculty

retiring. Jackie experienced the turnover of faculty too, but she felt like she had more

opportunities to connect with faculty before the shift in faculty. Jonathan and Amy shared that

unfortunately, their chair ended up with cancer, so they struggled to connect until a new chair

was assigned. The individual question scores for the Integration and Engagement Survey (see

Appendix L) reflected this challenge with the lowest overall scores regarding strong connections

to other students, making friends, and connections to faculty outside of the classroom (see

questions 9, 4, and 18). These shallower relationships do not only impact students. After teaching

in a DE program for over 10 years, Dr. Johnson only has "regular communication" and a

"lifelong friendship" with three of his former students.

One of the primary ways students in this study overcame the challenge of shallow faculty

relationships and developed a strong sense of social integration with faculty was through making

a connection on a personal level with a professor. For Jackie, Kevin, Doug, and Chuck, this

happened when they found faculty members with whom they shared similar interests. When this

occurred, Chuck shared that he would often keep in touch with them after the course ended.

"You know, I wasn't fearful to send them a reference to say, 'Hey. You know, I just came across

this. Don't know if you've seen this? Thought you may be interested.'" Doug expressed a similar

strategy and admitted that it took "a little more effort on [his] part." He would listen when his

professors "would share their background" and when he "would find things that [he] thought might be helpful to them as they were teaching their undergrad students or their graduate students, [he] would send that information along." Through these experiences, Doug felt he connected with faculty and built a relationship with them.

For some students, a meaningful relationship with faculty developed when faculty would begin reaching out to them because of the student's expertise. For instance, Jake described a time that after initiating his own outside of class discussions with faculty, the discussion switched to the professor "asking [Jake] Bible questions from some of the research [he] had done in [his] Bible program . . . There was investment both ways, which was nice." Jonathan had the opportunity to collaborate with a faculty member when that professor began doing research on adapting learning design for students with special needs. Because Jonathan was already working in Universal Design for Learning, he was asked to assist with the professor's Universal Design Instruction project. Doug had a similar experience when a professor wrote a book that he asked Doug to edit and be "thought partners" because of Doug's experience in urban school districts.

It was interesting to learn that for some participants, despite the choice to enroll in a DE program, opportunities for face-to-face connection were what facilitated a deeper level of social integration with faculty members. Tonya and Courtney connected most deeply with faculty from their residential intensive courses at Institution A. When Tonya was looking for online faculty participants for her dissertation study, the faculty from her face-to-face courses were willing to help while none of her solely online professors chose to participate. Courtney explained that on campus courses gave her a chance to "make an impression" on faculty by being a "hard-worker" and "serious about [her] research." When students do this, she expounded, "they'll remember you." Others connected with faculty in person because of institution sponsored events. For

instance, Jonathan and Kevin recounted connecting with faculty at a "national research conference that a lot of the faculty are involved with" and is at Institution B. A few students, like Jackie indicated that because she shared the same interests as some of her professors, they gave her the opportunity to co-present or co-write, facilitating her connection to faculty. Jackie stated, "now those are just the ones who, you know, share my interest in research. So the other ones, I've never really worked with because, you know of course, we didn't have any interests outside, you know? I didn't have any connections outside of the classroom."

Based on the data collected in this study, an orientation component at this stage that facilitates students making connections with faculty on a personal level, perhaps through learning about each other's research or even personal interests would be beneficial for social integration (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tinto, 1997). Furthermore, Dr. Johnson shared that the challenge of social integration with faculty for DE EdD students often results in the student struggling to choose a chair. If the student is not in a program that assigns chairs and he/she is not personally connected to a faculty member, it can be difficult to find someone who will take his/her study on because faculty are often restricted in how many students they can chair at one time. In this study, it was often the relationship that students shared on a personal level with a faculty member because of their shared interest or time spent face-to-face resulted in that professor becoming their dissertation chair or committee member. This was the case for Doug, Jackie, Keith, and Burt. Developing these connections early because of the coursework orientation faculty integration component may help alleviate some of that challenge for DE EdD students.

Peer integration. While integrating socially with faculty is important, literature shows that integrating with peers is important as well (Gardner, 2010a, 2010b; Tinto, 1997, 2012b). The

data collected in this study confirmed the idea that integrating with one's peers can be a valuable

source of support for DE EdD students. Because of this, an orientation component that reaffirms

the importance of peer integration and suggests methods for connecting with peers or a cohort at

this stage in doctoral journey would be beneficial. If possible, the orientation component could

include an element that helps facilitate meaningful peer connections.

Interestingly, Jake and Timothy, both non-persisters of their program, admitted that they

did not really have any peer support or peer integration. Jake noted, "There were definitely some

people that I got to a point to where I would comment on their discussion boards more than

others because you know, you got more meaningful dialogue back. But in terms of developing an

actual relationship, that didn't happen." Timothy initially rejected the need for peer support

because as an introvert, he did not really want it. But later in our conversation, Timothy said,

> I know I dismissed the idea of community before and in reality, it probably is needed, I
>
> think. It probably is an element of social benchmarking or just having another viewpoint .
>
> . . So, having another listening ear or someone to say "oh, this is how my professor, who
>
> is teaching the same class, presented things," I think that could be beneficial.

The literature, like Timothy, affirms having someone with whom you can share your

experiences, as you journey through the process together, is a valuable form of support (Gardner,

2010a, 2010b; Parker et al., 2015).

There were many methods of peer support represented by the DE EdD students in this

study. Julia appreciated having people she could turn to when she did not understand something

on her own, and Jillian consulted her peers when she had questions about a course. But for

Jillian, peer support was so much more than that. She shared, "The biggest support that I got was

just validating how I'm feeling and I'm not the only one going through this." Like Jillian, many

participants in this study valued the support of peers because they were sharing the same experience. Candace concurred: "Just being able to encourage someone and be encouraged by someone who is going through the same thing you are was helpful." Candace and Chuck noted that this level of understanding was particularly helpful in difficult courses like statistics. Candace, Courtney, Tonya, and Julia all indicated that one of the most beneficial methods of peer support they received was writing support through peer reviews, editing, and APA assistance. Amy shared that she met with a peer from her program who was local so they could review their potential "dissertation topics and discuss which avenues we were going to take."

The two institutions represented in this study had different program structures; these differences were particularly noticeable when participants discussed peer support. Most notably, at the time of this study, Institution A required three residential intensives while Institution B had no residency requirements. Additionally, Institution B follows a cohort model and Institution A does not. Both of these program structures impacted peer integration. At Institution A, many participants noted that they were closest to peers from residential intensives. Candace, Chuck, Tonya, and Courtney were all still in touch with classmates from intensives, even though years had passed. Tonya explained that she could not say the same things about any classmates from her online courses. This is interesting because Jake, who expressed a lack of peer relationships from Institution A also shared that he did not attend any intensives, noting "and that's probably why no relationships were formed." Courtney described some of her classmates from residential intensives as "life-long friends" and Chuck and his intensive classmates formed their own cohort, choosing to progress through the program together.

While Institution A participants often spoke fondly of their intensive requirement, Institution B participants did the same as they referenced their cohorts. Even Jillian, who

indicated that she did not require much peer support, when asked about the role her cohort

played in her persistence said, "I definitely think [my cohort] had everything to do with it,

honestly. Because everyone was going through it at the same time and just the validation of

feelings and stressors and understanding and support." Jonathan shared that progressing through

his courses with a cohort really helped him feel comfortable as he communicated with his

classmates. Jackie noted that one of the nice things about cohorts is that members are "all going

through the same type of rigor." She recommended adding the cohort model to other DE EdD

programs. "That would automatically build up support." Fascinatingly, some members of

Institution A also advocated for cohorts. Courtney, Candace, and Chuck shared that they took it

upon themselves to form their own cohort. They progressed through many of the degree

milestones with their cohort and kept each other accountable and on track. Chuck, like Jackie,

recommended the cohort model,

> I think that would be a strong strategy that they could utilize that, I believe, would invoke
>
> completers because they would have this support group that . . . would encourage each
>
> other through it. I mean, life happens, we know that. Jobs get difficult, family issues,
>
> sickness, and it was through those, through that cohort that we were able to support each
>
> other through all of those things. It wasn't just the doctoral program.

While cohorts and intensives can be tools for facilitating peer connection, participants

suggested a variety of methods they used to stay connected with the peers. The social media

information shared at the entry orientation is again applicable at this point and DE EdD students

can be reminded that those tools exist. They can also be encouraged to utilize the strategies the

participants in this study found helpful. Although Jackie's institution did not have a residency

requirement, she would meet peers on campus who were local, like she was. For members of her

cohort who lived further away, she texted, emailed, and used social media. Amy shared this strategy in her own area, meeting a peer in person who lived in the same geographic region as she did. While Candace did not live near campus, her and some of her classmates from her statistics course met on campus for a university event and then spent a day and a half studying statistics together. Many, like Doug, indicated that they would just check in with their peers often. "You know, we email back- where are you? Are you Dr. yet? Those kinds of things really helped a lot and I think they kind of encouraged us to keep going."

There were several participants who had new ideas for institutions to consider for this orientation component. Jake suggested "having like a chat room would be really nice, where everybody could get online at the same time and have a chat, you know, about things. If they're not understanding something or want to discuss an idea, I think that would be kinda neat." While Jake's program utilized discussion boards, he noted that they did not facilitate the same kind of peer connection and support because students were worried about word counts and citations. A synchronous chat, Jake thought, would better facilitate genuine connection. Tonya and Jake were both advocates for regional connections as well. Tonya shared that having a "geographically located" "peer committee" would have been helpful. She was interested in the institution providing a way she could meet up with others in her program who lived in the same state. Jake agreed:

> [Institution A] is big enough now where something like charters in different states is
> something completely possible. And don't just make it for students. Make it for
> professors teaching out of that region too. So, if you've got a professor that's living in
> Michigan, they can go to the Michigan charter. Have things where you can get together
> once a month or every other month, you know? And they don't have to necessarily be

like education oriented. They can just be getting together and getting to know one

another. So that way, that immediacy of support is there.

Jackie shared that early in her program, her department provided get-togethers for people

who were local to the university and then made sure to invite those who were remote as well.

"They would have social ice cream hangouts. So, they would send gift cards to Baskin Robbins

to the distance people . . . they would hook up online and everybody would use Adobe Connect

who was distant and eat ice cream and the professors would talk about things that were coming

up." A coursework orientation component could use some of these suggested tools while

providing information about the importance of peer connection. The data revealed that

facilitating peer integration while educating DE EdD students about the resources they have to

continue that connection may assist DE EdD students at this stage who are aiming to remain

integrated and persistent.

Family orientation. While the family orientation during the entry stage provided a lot of

information for the family members of DE EdD students so that they could be prepared to

support their doctoral student, this family orientation component exists to provide support for the

family of the doctoral student. It also aims to connect the family of the doctoral student to other

families and university resources. The goal of this connection is familial integration. Familial

integration is "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members

is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196) and it can result

in more support from the family for the doctoral student. While the literature is adamant that

doctoral candidates require support from their families (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Nettles & Millet,

2006; Tinto, 2012b), the data collected in this study revealed that there does not appear to be a

lot of support from institutions for the families of doctoral students.

When asked about the support their institution provided for their families or what their institution did to integrate their family, the participants in this study nearly all answered that their school did not do anything at all. Dr. Armstrong confirmed this at Institution B. "Currently there isn't anything," she said. "This will be interesting too, because some of our students are like . . . they completely segment. And so, they . . . this world, this degree, is theirs and they don't want their family involved. And there are others who are more integrators and they want their family involved. They wish their husband would understand more." Dr. Armstrong is right. Some participants, when asked what their institution could have done to integrate families indicated that familial integration should be optional because not everyone would desire it. The two strongest opponents of familial integration, interestingly, were the two non-persisters in this study. According to Jake, "You know, we're already busy. So adding one more onto the pile of people we have to communicate with the things we have to do . . . I'm not sure that would have been helpful." Timothy said that family integration had "never even been a thought of mine. I wouldn't have necessarily wanted the institution to integrate with my family too much." Conversely, it is possible that Timothy and Jake's lack of desire to integrate their families is not linked to their status as non-persisters. Instead, as both of these students are male, a gender difference may account for their opposition to familial integration.

Still, participants in this study came up with quite a few ways their families could be integrated into their doctoral programs. While brainstorming, Jillian noted, "I've never thought about [familial integration]. But it makes me curious if there was like a brief video or something that I could forward to my family members that's like, 'hey! If you want help understanding, here's something to look at.'" Institutional resources for families, including things that continue educating the family about the expectations of the doctoral program, would be a beneficial

component of this coursework orientation. Dr. Armstrong suggested that institutions could also communicate with families on a regular basis and provide suggestions for how they could provide support to their doctoral student during this stage. "So, 'Hey!,' you know, 'This week if you cook three times it would mean so much to your wife.'" While they may only be simple suggestions, they are helpful, practical ways families can provide better support.

Keith suggested that if there was a required face-to-face component, institutions could invite "family members or a spouse to be part of that . . . maybe do some specific communications to the spouse or family members to say- to let them know- what support services are available." Candace recalled that when her husband was at Institution A a few years prior, "they had an evening dinner with all the family members the first or second night of his classes with all the family members." While her institution no longer offers this at residential intensives, Candace spoke of it fondly. "I thought that was nice because I got to see some of the other families of the students." Doug also suggested providing a way for families to come along to residency requirements, when they exist. To make this possible, Doug recommended a family housing option. Doug explained, "some people I know would even take back-to-back [residencies] to try and get classes out of the way and I think that would be a big plus. Like the winter [residencies], you know, were tough because you know you're in the holidays or between. So, if they had some family housing, it would be . . . helpful as far as the family support."

Because not all DE EdD programs require residential attendance, Candace suggested that for families, departments may want to set up a "blog for family members or a Facebook page." She explained that through this page, families could connect virtually to other families of doctoral students for support, suggestions, or even to share personal triumphs. While Candace suggested this for each individual course in a program, just one page for all current family

members or for all doctoral students beginning the program in a particular year could be helpful too. While institutions would need to find the best fit for familial integration, integrating families through a family support and connection element during the coursework orientation emerged as a beneficial component. When discussing familial integration, Dr. Armstrong explained, "a doctoral degree is a family affair. You cannot do it on your own." Departments can better support DE EdD students by better supporting their families. In return, those families will better support their DE EdD student throughout the coursework stage as well.

Candidacy Stage

Analysis of the research completed during this study revealed that one of the most crucial times in the doctoral journey is the candidacy stage. This is when students complete their comprehensive exams and become doctoral candidates who are shifting focus to their dissertation. Many participants identified this stage as when they needed the most support during their doctoral journey and so to them, it was a critical time for an orientation. Keith explained, "I think the next big thing is kind of through that dissertation proposal/dissertation process really. You need a lot of guidance there on . . . if you're moving along on the right path." Jonathan agreed, "Probably during the comp- between the comp and dissertation proposal of my first three chapters; that was probably where I needed the most support." To Doug, support is so crucial at this stage because "the different dissertation stats and different milestones seemed very grey." Dr. Anderson explained, the candidacy stage is "more autonomous. It's more self-directed . . . I think it can be a little bit of a dynamic shift that students might not be prepared for." While students were informed at entry about what a dissertation is and some of the expectations during this stage, Dr. Fox noted that most students "don't understand the value of it until they get to the end." Therefore, an orientation at this point that covers institutional resources, the dissertation

process, chair and committee connections, peer integration, alumni advice, and a final family orientation is a strong way to finish a scaffolded, or "tiered" orientation to a DE EdD program.

Institutional resources. As students reach candidacy, a new set of challenges emerge. Students begin working on a dissertation proposal and then data collection and analysis. Students are again faced with the challenges that come with writing, statistics, and research. An analysis of the data collected during this study illuminated the importance of institutional resources and clearly communicating those supports to students at this stage. Some of the supports available during this stage should already be familiar to the doctoral candidate. For instance, at this point, they should already know what statistical and writing assistance exists for DE students, but reminding them of the application of these supports to their dissertation is still necessary.

At this stage, Julia, Keith, Jonathan, and Jillian mentioned that learning about the research process was a knowledge element they did not have when they began their EdD program. Instead, they were really learning it as they completed their dissertations. Because of this, research assistance is an important institutional support. Dr. Armstrong recommended "research coaching" be made available for candidates during this stage of the program. Such coaching could help students refine their dissertation topics. Jonathan noted "narrowing down that topic for me was not the easiest thing to do because a lot of times, I felt myself going back the other way. I had to keep refocusing myself." According to Dr. Anderson, Jonathan is not alone in this struggle; "Just thinking about a problem and developing a question and an inquiry . . . they tend to have a difficult time with that . . . specifically being able to develop an argument and being able to develop that argument based on previous literature" is a new process for many doctoral candidates. Knowing where to go for assistance with choosing a topic that identifies a

suitable gap in the literature and is narrow enough for dissertation research and for help writing about that topic is important for DE EdD students.

At this stage, highlighting the institutional library supports is also imperative. Chuck shared that having a better grasp on how to use "the search mode and the library" would have been helpful to him. While he was able to locate his sources, he admitted, "there may have been more proficient ways to go about it." Keith shared that Institution B has an online library with "a great support system." Jackie made appointments with the librarian as she completed her dissertation. They helped her understand "how to use the database, how to secure resources," and how to obtain interlibrary loans. Jillian shared that library support discussed her research with her and directed to the right search engines and applications for her research. Institution A also offers a library orientation that, according to Dr. Fox, is an important service offered to DE EdD students. As DE EdD students become doctoral candidates and take on the dissertation, providing an orientation component that reminds students of the institutional resources at their university can help expedite their doctoral journey.

Dissertation process. In many programs, the dissertation stage becomes more autonomous and self-directed. Because of this, it can be difficult for students to know what they should be completing and when it needs to be completed. A component during the candidacy stage orientation on the dissertation process is a nice refresher for students who have finally reached this stage. While students were given the opportunity in the entry orientation to look at a dissertation, at this stage, a reminder is a good idea. Dr. Fox passes his dissertation around during the candidacy course he teaches. This is a good way for candidates to understand the breadth of the task before them.

Timothy shared that the candidacy stage was the most difficult hurdle for him. He asked for "clearer expectations . . . in regard to the dissertation." According to Timothy, at this stage, this component should provide a well-defined picture of when one's research design should be chosen, literature review should be completed, and proposal should be defended. Outlining each of the milestones at this point and completing an anticipated timeline can help candidates stay on track for timely completion. Julia recommended other practical supports at this time such as reminders about the amount of time a dissertation takes, warnings to stay on topic, and reminders to reach out proactively to one's chair throughout the process.

During this component of the candidacy orientation, providing the opportunity for DE EdD students to watch actual proposal and dissertation defenses should be considered as well. Tonya explained that watching a dissertation defense during her candidacy course cleared up a lot of misconceptions she had about the dissertation process. Because unclear dissertation expectations can easily become a barrier to persistence, spending time at the beginning of the candidacy stage to clarify the dissertation process emerged as a significant component of this orientation.

Chair & committee connections. While the writing center, research and statistical support, and the online library are essential institutional supports, the doctoral candidate's chair is perhaps the most critical source of support during the dissertation stage. Dr. Valentine explained that candidates need the support of their chair "to keep them in the program and keep them from wavering" because of any unforeseen issues. According to Dr. Valentine, "the chair just needs to be on top of it with keeping contact with that student, with reaching out to them- with maybe once a month, once every two months, phone calls just to make sure you are on track, you are writing, you are doing things to get to the end."

Many participants in this study highlighted, as is consistent with previous literature, the support they received from their chairs was vital to their persistence during the dissertation stage (Earl-Novell, 2006; Gardner, 2009). Chuck explained that his chair, like Dr. Valentine noted, "was always touching base, always sending little notes of encouragement, either via text or email." For Chuck, that "really pushed [him] to finish and stick with it." Jackie's story was similar to Chuck's. It was her chair who really helped her reach the finish line. She provided a writer's retreat and provided feedback during the holidays that helped Jackie finish up her dissertation. Jackie shared, "I feel like she really went above and beyond. And I don't believe I would have graduated on schedule had it not been for her, you know?" Because a chair's support is critical, having the opportunity to find the right chair and information on choosing one's committee emerged as a significant orientation component for DE EdD candidates.

Choosing a chair, especially for DE EdD students, is not always easy. As discussed earlier, at times, shallow or absent relationships with faculty result in the absence of chair prospects when a student reaches candidacy. For Doug, finding a chair as a DE student took time and was a little discouraging. Unfortunately, his experience is common. Tonya explained, "you need a chair, you need a committee, to help you through the most intensive piece of this journey and because you're remote, you don't necessarily know people. Like they're just names on a paper." Jillian, who is still working on her dissertation, sounded like she might not be paired with a chair who provides the specific supports she needs. "I feel like I'm doubting myself a lot and I would like to have more feedback that I'm on the right line or 'is this normal?' or 'don't go down that path, stay this course.'" Tonya's experience was the opposite. She explained, "I had a great chair that helped me, and I think her and my personality were 100% in line. She was just highly motivated and encouraging." Finding the right match between a candidate and their chair

and committee can make the difference between ABD and completion (de Valero, 2001; Earl-Novell, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Ideally, students began developing relationships with faculty after the faculty integration component of the coursework stage orientation and can use those relationships to help identify an appropriate chair. For those who struggle, providing a component during the candidacy stage orientation that assists with that process and how to navigate the chair-candidate relationship is necessary.

Peer integration. While peers have been a vital source of support throughout the doctoral journey, peers are a particularly important element of persistence at the candidacy stage. Dr. Anderson explained that now that normal classes are done, remaining intentional about peer integration during the candidacy stage is important. Because of this, if the DE EdD student's program does not provide one, developing a late stage cohort is a good idea. If the student's program does provide a cohort, focusing in on a smaller cohort of peers that you have connected with the most or who are using a similar design might still be beneficial during the candidacy stage. Because of this, assistance forming a late stage cohort is a recommended element of the peer integration component of the candidacy stage orientation.

When asked what one thing he would recommend for someone just starting the same program he is finishing, Doug recommended that new DE EdD students "make connections with other people within the class and try to maintain some of those connections as you go through, especially after [your candidacy course]." Doug explained that he did this and now, he and his group of peers are pushing each other forward towards graduation. Burt's recommendation for new DE EdD students was similar, advising the formation of a late-stage cohort that progresses through the "writing of chapters one, two, and three." Chuck formed a cohort early on in his program so at this stage, they aimed to tackle the biggest hurdles together.

Jackie also had a cohort during her program and when they reached the final stages of their program, they were able to provide accountability for each other when it was no longer present in their courses. They also shared information with each other as they received it from their individual chairs. Tonya had a similar experience. The late stage classmates she stayed in contact with after candidacy encouraged her. They were also able to share tips on different dissertation milestones, like receiving IRB approval. Most importantly, they kept each other motivated. For Amy, having a cohort during the candidacy stage meant she had someone she could discuss her dissertation topic with "who understands." Her cohort asked her questions about her topic and helped her come up with new ideas or identify holes in her study. "Being able to discuss it with people who understand because they're going through the same thing has been really helpful."

Aiding in the cohort formation process or providing practical suggestions for late stage cohorts can happen during the candidacy stage cohort. Departments can remind cohorts to set up convenient ways to communicate, provide accountability for each other, celebrate milestones together, challenge each other by setting deadlines, and provide feedback to each other, all of which were important dissertation stage peer supports that emerged during this study. This peer integration support can help soften the transition to self-directed study (Ponton, 2014) and prevent the feelings of isolation that can occur at this stage (Gardner, 2009).

Alumni advice. At the beginning of the doctoral journey, alumni advice was introduced as a way to inspire and motivate new students with practical tips for persistence. At the candidacy stage, this is still the case. Tonya, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Fox recommended a panel of recent completers who can share a variety of dissertation completion experiences. The panel can provide practical tips, answer any questions candidates may not want to ask faculty, and provide

motivation for the candidate to finish. While this component was introduced at entry, the perspective of the doctoral student is immensely different as they near the finish line. Doctoral students will likely have new questions, need tips specific to dissertation development and completion, and understand the information offered by an alumni panel during the candidacy orientation in a whole new way.

     Family orientation. While peer support is important as doctoral students reach candidacy, familial support is perhaps even more important. This is the stage where families are at the most risk for conflict and according to Dr. Fox, when the most communication between family members is needed. Because of this, providing an additional family orientation during the candidacy stage is essential. Per Dr. Fox's suggestion, families at this time can divide household chores and familial responsibilities. They can also discuss a timeline for dissertation completion and the supports they will need to stay on track. A family orientation at this stage is a great way to provide time and space for families to do so.

     Dr. Johnson noted that a family orientation provided by the university after candidacy is a great time for programs to communicate with families that "this is what you need to be prepared for and this is how you can support [the candidate] through the process." While families may have heard this information at entry, as was the case with the candidate during the alumni panel component, they will be processing the information with a different lens after supporting their candidate through the coursework stage where students may have been autonomous but not yet self-directed learners, which is essential in the dissertation stage (Ponton, 2014). During this component, programs can again provide families with practical ways they can support the candidate and be a vital part of them reaching graduation. For instance, for Doug, his family celebrating each milestone, even the "small successes," was important. It was a way even his

pre-teen twins could be involved in the process. Amy's father and Jonathan's wife were involved as sources of proofreading support. For others, involvement came through other practical means, like housework, childcare, or encouragement. A family orientation component at the candidacy stage can help families communicate, unite, and reach degree completion together.

While the candidacy stage is exciting for doctoral students, as Timothy noted, that excitement can morph into guilt or shame if degree completion is delayed or never achieved. Support received at the candidacy stage through components on institutional resources, dissertation process, chair and committee connections, peer integration, alumni advice, and a family orientation component can help ensure candidates have the best chance possible to become doctors. Overall, as literature supports, this study found that scaffolding support (Parker et al., 2015) through a multiple session orientation (Bragg, 1976) is most effectively done by including components from five valuable sources of support: institutions, departments, faculty, peers, family.

Research Questions

The three research questions that guided this study were (a) How do DE EdD students persist in each stage of the doctoral journey? (b) How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities? (c) What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE EdD programs? While the answers to these questions can be understood in great detail through the discussion of the orientation model above, the following section summarizes the answers to these questions that emerged through analysis of the data collected during this study.

The first research question was (a) How do DE EdD students persist at each stage of the doctoral journey? Within this question, I was particularly interested in the skills, knowledge,

dispositions, and supports required for doctoral persistence. Throughout both sites, participants cited a variety of technology skills as essential to their persistence. More specifically, these included library navigation, LMS navigation, and word processing skills. Research skills also emerged as significant throughout this study, particularly the skills of narrowing research, statistical analysis, and research design. The third skill highlighted by participants in this study was that of communication. As discussed earlier, this included proactive and respectful communication with faculty. Additional skills that surfaced from analysis of the data included writing skills, the ability to accept and learn from constructive feedback, and the ability to focus coursework on the dissertation topic. Within the model, orientation components such as the technology assessment, the communication component, institutional resources, and the feedback component were recommended to help DE EdD students develop these skills.

In this study, participants often regarded knowledge as the least necessary component for their persistence. This is partially because students and faculty alike expected that knowledge would be a product of the EdD degree. It also appears to be because many of the students seeking an EdD have a strong background in education. Participants who did not have a background in education were more likely to discuss a need to develop content knowledge throughout their degree. Across the sites, four main themes emerged regarding the most necessary areas of knowledge. These included understanding the dissertation and the doctoral process, a knowledge of research design, statistics, and other research components, content knowledge as it relates to one's degree, and an early knowledge of one's dissertation topic or area of interest. In light of these knowledge components, the orientation model includes components such as the program expectations session, the dissertation process element, and the institutional resources sessions. It is interesting to note at this point that an element emerged that

linked both skills and knowledge. When students did this, they were able to apply what they were learning to their personal contexts. Linking skill and knowledge through application in one's personal context was integrated in the orientation model through the connections between research and practice component; this was because the data showed that students who were able to apply their learning immediately indicated that they were more satisfied and motivated throughout their degree.

Lastly, a variety of dispositions were identified throughout this study. While the list of dispositions was incredibly broad, some of the most common dispositions included a love of learning, being self-motivated, being persistent, being teachable, and being self-directed. Additionally, participants discussed the disposition of being proactive at length, both in communication with faculty and in seeking additional support as needed.

Regarding supports, there was a consensus from participants that there were five main sources of support: the institution, the department, faculty, peers, and family. In one way or another, participants cited support from each of these sources as important throughout the various stages of the doctoral journey. These five sources of support became the foundation for the orientation model. More specifically, institutional supports included advising, the online library, the writing center, IT support, and research support. These supports were integrated in the orientation model at each stage through the institutional orientation components.

When discussing departmental support, participants in this study expressed strong opinions. It was important that there was a good fit between the student and their chosen program. They also needed clear program expectations, clear course expectations, and clear dissertation expectations to be successful. Again, departmental supports are represented throughout the orientation model, with elements integrated at each stage. Next, participants noted

a need for faculty support throughout the doctoral journey. They received this support primarily through timely feedback, personal connections, and communication with faculty. They also needed strong chair support during the candidacy and dissertation stages that was only possible with a good chair-candidate fit. Like the other sources of support, faculty support was represented in all three orientation stages. Participants in this study, whether they realized they desired it or not, had a need for peer support throughout the doctoral journey. Peers provided encouragement, understanding through shared experiences, content knowledge assistance, dissertation development assistance and peer reviews, and accountability. This support was experienced through social media, text, email, and phone calls.

Finally, familial support was one of the most necessary elements of persistence that emerged in this study. Particularly valuable supports included practical supports such as childcare and housework, allowing the time needed for coursework and research completion, and celebrating milestones. Participants in this study who had family members who had also earned an advanced degree expressed the most understanding and supportive experiences with their families. Because familial support is essential, it, like the other four supports, is represented at all three orientation sessions on the model.

My second research question was how do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities? As identified in the literature, there is a very strong link between academic and social integration at the doctoral level (Barnett, 2008; Tinto, 2012b). Some of the integrating factors cannot be labeled solely academic or solely social. Notably, when students and alumni in this study were asked if they felt connected to their university, many of them responded with "yes and no." Feelings of academic integration were often very strong for participants and they resoundingly

noted that this occurred through their coursework. Particularly notable components contributing to integration include: the timeliness and depth of instructor feedback, opportunities to collaborate with faculty or to at least discover and discuss shared interests, a connection from their program to their personal context (again, contextual applications), and integration through synchronous moments (e.g., intensives; campus visits; video conferences). Components to facilitate these academic integration components include the communication, feedback, connections between research and practice, and faculty integration elements of the model.

Students often did not feel as socially integrated but with further digging, it became evident that the social integration that did occur often required that the student be proactive. The most noteworthy elements contributing to social integration included a cohort (whether required or self-designed), intensives or residential coursework, collaboration opportunities, and social media. Geographical distance was cited as a barrier to social integration or at the very least, a cause of shallow relationships. Social integration opportunities were represented on the model through the alumni advice, peer integration, contextual application, and faculty integration sessions.

Familial integration, or "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196), was also an interesting topic among participants. While there was overwhelming agreement that familial integration components should be optional, even those who thought they might not need it were very much in support of familial integration and "some sort of family orientation." While most regarded their family as supportive, they also didn't think their family members really understood what was required of them and at times, felt shamed because of their dedication to the degree. Most noted a need for more family support, particularly in reference to an

understanding of the many roles they balance and what the program truly demanded (West, 2014), especially during the dissertation process. They desired inclusion of their family on campus or in the program and resources for their family members regarding the process and how they could support the candidate. As a result, integration opportunities for families were included in all three orientations, with familial integration as a specific focus during the coursework orientation. Economic integration did not emerge as significant at either site, with many noting that their employer or GI Bill covered or assisted with the cost of their degree. All participants noted a feeling of economic integration, or the meeting of their financial needs. The financial aspect of completing the degree was really only noted as significant by those that experienced difficulty with getting to graduation and an extended TTD.

The final research question was: What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE EdD programs? This research question represented the most significant gap in DE EdD literature. As discussed earlier, the data overwhelmingly revealed that support should be scaffolded or tiered and that an orientation delivered solely at the beginning of the program would not be sufficient. At the very least, "two critical times" were noted. Those two times were the beginning of the program and the candidacy/dissertation stage. However, many also noted the need for significant support during coursework completion, especially those who possessed graduate degrees in areas other than education. After data analysis, I concluded that the need for support changes throughout the program, but support is indeed needed throughout the entirety of the doctoral program.

The scaffolded orientation to DE EdD programs model (Motte, 2019) illustrates that at the beginning of the program, the entry orientation should include a technology assessment, a program fit assessment, the program expectations and curriculum, a communication component,

peer integration, alumni advice, and a family orientation. During the coursework stage, the orientation should include institutional resources and a detailed look at program curriculum. This orientation should also include a familial integration element that provides support for families and opportunities for connection. Finally, elements on faculty feedback, peer integration, connections between research and practice, and opportunities for faculty integration should also be included.

Finally, during the candidacy orientation, students should be encouraged to continue peer integration, perhaps by forming a late stage cohort. The should also again be given the chance to hear from alumni regarding their advice for this stage. During this time the orientation should review the dissertation process and available institutional resources. Students should also receive assistance with chair and committee connections. Lastly, a family orientation at this stage can give families the time and space they need to discuss what will be required of all parties for the candidate to reach graduation.

Summary

To summarize, I presented a portrait of participants from the two sites utilized in this study. I introduced a model for a scaffolded orientation to DE EdD programs that was developed in light of the data collected in this study. The orientation model included three separate orientation sessions, including one at the entry stage, one during the coursework stage, and one at candidacy. Within each orientation, five main sources of support were represented. These included the institution, the department, faculty, peers, and family. I concluded the chapter with a summary of the answers to the three research questions presented in this study, (a) How do DE EdD students persist in each stage of the doctoral journey? (b) How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and

universities? (c) What are the necessary components and delivery model for an orientation to DE

EdD programs? These answers and the aforementioned model were grounded in the data

collected through surveys, student, non-persister, faculty, and alumni interviews, and focus

groups with faculty from two different institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a model for a distance education (DE) doctoral program orientation based on the perspectives of students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators. This chapter begins with a summary of this study's findings and the resulting model. I then discuss how this study relates to existing literature and its contribution to literature on DE EdD orientations. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

My research was informed by Knowles' (1980) Theory of Andragogy, Tinto's (1975) Persistence Theory, and Socialization Theory (Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001) and focused on determining a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs based on the perspectives of relevant stakeholders. One of the main findings of this study was that there are five sources of support that DE EdD students need throughout the doctoral journey. This support comes from the student's institution, department, faculty, peers, and family and it aids in the development of the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and integration necessary for persistence in DE EdD programs. Analysis of the integration and engagement survey (Hicks & Lerer, 2003; Kuh et al., n.d.; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980), individual interviews, focus groups, and the delivery survey determined that this support is best delivered through an orientation that scaffolds support throughout the program (Gardner, 2010; Parker et al., 2015) at three critical stages of the journey: program entry, the coursework stage, and the candidacy stage. These findings are reflected in this study's generated model (see Figure 3).

Entry >> **Coursework** >> **Candidacy**

Entry

FAMILIAL · PEER · FACULTY · DEPARTMENTAL · INSTITUTIONAL

Technology Assessment
Program Fit Assessment
Program Expectations & Curriculum
Communication
Peer Integration
Alumni Advice
Family Orientation

Coursework

FAMILIAL · PEER · FACULTY · DEPARTMENTAL · INSTITUTIONAL

Institutional Resources
Program Curriculum
Feedback
Connections Between Research & Practice
Faculty Integration
Peer Integration
Family Orientation

Candidacy

FAMILIAL · PEER · FACULTY · DEPARTMENTAL · INSTITUTIONAL

Institutional Resources
Dissertation Process
Chair & Committee Connections
Peer Integration
Alumni Advice
Family Orientation

Figure 3. Scaffolded Orientation for DE EdD Programs Model. The model shows three critical stages where support is needed for DE EdD Students. The same five sources of support are reflected at all three stages and are noted on the outside of each pentagon. The inside of the pentagon includes the specific supports needed for each individual stage. The supports are colored to match the source of support (e.g., all peer supports are blue).

Entry

During the entry stage, a technology assessment and resources to remediate related skills emerged as an institutional support that could foster integration by removing skill deficits that could impede engagement (Wilson & Allen, 2008). Departmental supports at this stage included a program fit assessment to determine if the student's values and goals match their institution's values and their program's outcomes (Bragg, 1976; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 2012b). Participants in this study regarded an overview of their program's expectations and curriculum as essential knowledge they needed during the entry stage, resulting in the remaining departmental support elements during this stage of the orientation. The entry stage orientation also includes support from faculty as they educate DE EdD students on proper, respectful, and proactive communication. Next, providing avenues to facilitate peer integration through social media and resources for its use delivers much needed peer support during the entry stage. Peer support continues through an alumni advice component that can provide practical tips on finding answers, managing time, and persisting in the very program new students are entering. This support socializes students to their doctoral program (Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001). Lastly, at the entry stage, a family orientation begins the process of familial integration and helps foster an understanding of what the doctoral journey really entails and how family members can be supportive throughout the journey.

Coursework

A second orientation is needed during the coursework stage. The anxiety related to program entry has subsided and after a few courses, DE EdD students are in need of a new set of supports. However, the five sources of that support remain the same. Many participants noted that their vast experience in education provided the knowledge they needed (Knowles, 1980a)

during the coursework stage and that they struggled when that knowledge was missing.

Therefore, providing an awareness of institutional supports like the writing center and resources

for content remediation (tutoring, interdisciplinary supports, tutorials/supplementary lessons,

etc.) emerged as an orientation component needed at this stage. The student's department

extends this support through a detailed look at the program's curriculum and each course's

learning outcomes and workload, allowing better planning and decreased frustration for students.

At this stage, many participants identified the dispositions of being teachable, not being easily

discouraged, and the ability to handle constructive criticism as necessary for persistence. The

feedback component emerged as a needed faculty support during this stage, in part to foster these

dispositions. Relationships with faculty are built and integration furthered as faculty help

students make connections between research, or what they are learning, to their personal contexts

and opportunities to collaborate and connect with faculty are offered. Integration with peers also

should not be overlooked during this stage; the coursework orientation should outline forming

and connecting with one's peers and how students can support one another (i.e., peer reviews,

synchronous connections, social media). Finally, a family orientation provides information

regarding the supports available to the families of DE EdD students and ways families can

connect to other families in the program.

Candidacy

This study's findings conclude with the candidacy orientation, which begins with a focus

on the continued socialization of the candidate to the skills and competencies needed to complete

the dissertation (Bragg, 1976; Weidman et al., 2001). The student's department supports the EdD

candidate with a detailed explanation of the dissertation process and a realistic timeline for its

completion. An overview of the institutional supports available to students during this stage

should be covered as well (i.e., online library/librarian, statistical support, writing support, research supports, topic development). Faculty support during this stage shifts from a variety of faculty supporting the candidate to support delivered through the chair and committee. Understanding this change and the process for selecting and communicating with one's chair and committee should be included in this stage's orientation. To combat potential isolation, keeping candidates connected to sources of peer support is made possible by encouraging peer integration and a late stage cohort during this orientation and providing alumni advice that can answer questions, provide tips, and remove some of the ambiguity normally present during this stage (Gardner, 2007). Lastly, the family orientation returns to ensure families understand the unique demands of the candidacy stage and that they are equipped to practically support the candidate to completion.

Discussion

While literature that focuses on the intersection of doctoral education and distance education continues to emerge, several theories and studies guided this research. The relationship between that literature and my research is discussed in this section.

Knowles' Theory of Andragogy

Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy is based on five main assumptions: self-concept, learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learn, and motivation to learn. Knowles' assumption of self-concept focuses on the adult learner's desire and ability to learn independently. This study confirmed that the transformation from autonomous to self-directed learning is difficult for many students (Ponton, 2014). While students in this study were capable of learning on their own and often had to remediate their own deficiencies, they also expressed frustration over having to do so. At times, students desired more feedback and to better

understand if they were on target regarding their progress in their programs. Knowles' (1980a) assumption of self-concept is important because evolving from autonomous learner to self-directed learner is especially necessary for successful completion of the dissertation stage of the doctoral degree (Holder, 2014; Milacci & Kuhne, 2014; Ponton, 2014). However, this study found that DE EdD programs could better support students through this identity transformation by delivering the right supports at the right time. Doing so not only reduces frustration but may also potentially increase persistence.

Knowles' (1980a) second assumption regarding the life experience that adult learners possess and the role their experience plays in their learning was also remarkably evident in this study. Participants highlighted the knowledge and skills they possessed at entry because of their experience. Participants who did not possess experience in education or lacked experience in a particular facet relevant to their degree (i.e., educational technology, differentiated instruction, distance instruction) indicated they were at a disadvantage and felt they were not meeting their professors' expectations. Fascinatingly, it was the experience that students possessed that often led to their integration with faculty as they followed up after course completion on a personal level to share their expertise, recommend items for research, or collaborated with faculty because of shared interests.

The next component of Knowles' (1980a) theory of andragogy that was well represented in this study was Knowles' fourth assumption regarding orientation to learn, or the idea that adults are problem-centered and learn best by applying their learning to their life situations. Knowles (1980a) concluded that students who understand why what they are learning is important and how their learning can be applied are usually more willing to learn and approach learning with a positive attitude. This study confirmed these sentiments, finding that students

who thought their learning was irrelevant to their personal contexts were at the very least, frustrated or uninterested, and for some, it led to the decision not to persist. Because many DE EdD students in this study were employed as they completed their degree, like most doctoral students (Nettles & Millet, 2006), they were especially interested in immediacy of application or the ability to use what they were learning in their personal contexts. Combining *learning* and *doing* not only satisfies the adult student's orientation to learning, but it may also reinforce program fit (Bragg, 1976; Tinto, 2012b). Knowles' assumption is so relevant that it is reflected in the orientation component *connections between research and practice*.

Tinto's Persistence Theory

Because persistence was the phenomenon at the heart of this research, Tinto's (1975; 2012b) persistence theory was particularly influential to the framework of this study. Foundational to Tinto's (1975) theory is the idea that students who integrate socially and academically typically have the lowest risk of attrition. Tinto (2012b) places much of the responsibility of academic integration in the hands of faculty and individual departments. According to Tinto (2012b), academic integration happens in and outside of the classroom. Linking course material to the students' personal context can aid in academic integration as students can immediately apply what they are learning. Tinto (2017) recommends that institutions intentionally highlight how learning can be applied to the student's personal context because their perception of the curriculum's relevance can impact their *desire* to persist. As already noted, the ability to apply learning to one's personal context was indeed important to the participants in this study. Those who made strong connections between their degree program and personal context reported feeling connected to their institution, or well-integrated academically. Furthermore, CPED's current initiative for a second generation of EdDs that focus on

professional practice and the intersection of doctoral and workplace learning (CPED, 2018;

Maxwell, 2003; Perry, 2012; Wergin, 2011) further validates the importance of relating

coursework and practice as illuminated by this study.

Social integration, on the other hand, occurs with both faculty and the student's peers

(Tinto, 1975). Tinto (2012b) explained that a link between academic and social integration

exists. Connections made in the classroom, according to Tinto, lead to students seeking out

contact with faculty members and classmates outside of class. This study verified that this aspect

of social integration is true of DE EdD students. The participants who indicated a connection to a

faculty member often cited reaching out to the professor after their course ended as the means for

developing that relationship. These participants noted that finding common ground with a

professor based on shared interest led to a lasting connection, or according to Tinto, integration.

Because of this, the orientation component *faculty integration* was incorporated into the model.

Likewise, students are most likely to integrate socially with peers they share courses

with. Gardner (2009) explained that early connections are built on shared experiences for

students too. Many participants in this study noted that peer support was experienced through

knowing someone else was experiencing the same thing they were (e.g., ambiguity regarding

program expectations, choosing a dissertation topic, challenges finding a chair). While literature

supports the use of technology and social networks for social integration among DE students

(Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014a), many of the traditional recommendations for social

integration simply are not relevant to DE EdD students. Their distance from campus makes many

of those recommendations (e.g., attending on campus activities or mixers, participating in

service-learning opportunities, attending athletic events) impossible. Because of this, a better

understanding of how DE EdD students integrate socially was needed. This study found that

social networking was indeed part of that process. However, even greater levels of social integration with peers were expressed among students who chose to form a cohort with their peers or if a cohort was a requirement of their program, connected meaningfully with at least a portion of their assigned group. Tinto (2017) also recommends cohorts for increasing a student's sense of belonging, which is a key factor in persistence. Students in this study who made meaningful connections with a cohort would stay connected throughout the program, share their experiences, support each other practically and emotionally, and celebrate various milestones. They indicated that they found comfort in "tackling the biggest hurdles," or challenges, in the program together and doing so (for example, by navigating a difficult course like statistics together), often strengthened their bond. Social networks were one of the means of connection for these cohorts, but often they connected through text, email, or even campus visits. Participants in this study noted that they felt more integrated with their peers than faculty, so fostering this connection among peers is important. Because of this, connecting with peers and forming a cohort is represented in various ways throughout all three orientations.

Familial Integration

Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c) first highlighted the phenomenon of familial integration as it relates to doctoral persistence. According to Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c), familial integration involves the candidate's connection to his or her family throughout the doctoral journey. Because the importance of familial support is well represented in literature as it relates to doctoral persistence (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; West, 2014) but many families are not sure how to support their doctoral student (West, 2014), familial integration was an area

of interest for this study. I found that the feelings of participants were mixed, with many noting

that familial integration should be optional for doctoral candidates. At the same time, many

participants indicated that their family's support was important and/or that they wished their

family had better supported them throughout the journey. Rockinson-Szapkiw (2019) replaced

the term *familial integration* with *doctoral academic-family integration,* defining the new term

"as the doctoral student's cognitive, behavior, psychological, and affective processes of

integrating academic and family domains" (p. 239). Doctoral academic-family integration

involves the student's satisfaction with how they are balancing academic and family life and

negotiating boundaries between academics and family to "maximize functioning" (Rockinson-

Szapkiw, 2019, p. 252). Rockinson-Szapkiw's (2019) study confirms, like this study, that

familial integration is based on the perceptions and desires of students and families. As a result,

as this study found, the degree to which doctoral students engage with provided familial

integration supports will vary student to student. However, familial integration opportunities are

still needed. When asked if their family understood what success throughout the doctoral journey

required, many participants answered that their family did not possess a real understanding of the

program's rigor and requirements at first. If they did, many participants noted it was because

their family member had an advanced degree of their own. Some participants highlighted areas

where more understanding was needed from a spouse, a child, or other family members. Family

orientations can help integrate the family into the doctoral journey, connecting the student and

their family to one united goal (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). Family orientations are also a

good time to prepare the student and his/her family for the stress and strain they will experience

so they can develop "realistic expectations, thereby decreasing feelings of frustration, confusion,

and disappointment" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016, p. 110). Lastly, they can help families

better understand the requirements of the degree and how they can support their student well throughout the process (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016).

Economic Integration

Economic integration, or the meeting of a student's financial needs as they complete their degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) has been linked to persistence and time to degree completion (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 1998, 2000; Tinto, 2012b; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Because of this, it was also an area of interest to this study. Economic integration was discussed with faculty, student, alumni, and non-persister participants. Every student, non-persister, and alumni participant indicated that his or her financial needs had been met throughout the journey. For two who experienced longer TTD than expected, there were periods where economic integration was a struggle, but for the majority of participants, the economic portion of the degree was not an issue for them. The ways they integrated economically varied, as some cited workplace benefits, GI bills, loans, or assistantships. However, significant findings did not emerge from this portion of the study. As Rockinson-Szpakiw et al. (2016) noted, DE EdD students often remain employed as they pursue their degree, perhaps mitigating some of the struggle to integrate economically. While this does not negate the importance of economic integration in doctoral education, this study also does not extend this area of literature. It does, however, confirm prior literature regarding the link between long time to degree completion rates and economic integration (Earl-Novell, 2006; Golde, 2005; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

Socialization Theory

One of the main goals of doctoral programs is socialization of the student to the professional and social roles appropriate for the profession they are studying (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Socialization, according to Bragg (1976), occurs when EdD students adopt the values and

behaviors that represent professional educators. In traditional doctoral programs, mentorship is often the vehicle for socialization (Bragg, 1976; Miller & Deggs, 2012). This mentorship occurs faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer (Bragg, 2976; Miller & Deggs, 2012). This type of mentorship was not widely evident in the experiences shared by this study's participants. If mentorship did occur, it most often came from the student's chair, but this was typically confined to the candidacy stage. While this does hold value, socialization should occur throughout the doctoral stages (Gardner, 2010b). There are limited opportunities in DE EdD programs for students to 'rub shoulders' with faculty or peers in the hallway of their departments (Gardner, 2010a; Gopaul, 2011; Weidman et al., 2001), which can make some components of socialization difficult. In this study, socialization elements such as respectfully and proactively communicating with faculty, understanding the program expectations/timeline, understanding faculty feedback and healthy push back, the chair and committee process, and the ins and outs of the dissertation process were orientation elements identified based on the need for additional opportunities for socialization.

Bragg (1976) prescribed orientation programs for students and their families for non-traditional institutions as a means of socialization. Gardner (2010b) recommended that orientations that facilitate socialization occur throughout the doctoral journey to better support the specific needs of each stage. This study confirmed that the needs of DE EdD students change over time. For some, entry was challenging and for others, the coursework stage was more difficult. For almost all, the dissertation stage was highlighted as time when support was most critical. Thus, multiple orientations that deliver scaffolded support throughout the doctoral journey are recommended based on this study.

Orientations

Literature shows that orientations are often non-existent at the doctoral level (Mullen,

2012; Scagnoli, 2001) and those that do exist are often just cursory introductions to one's

program. However, research supports the potential value of orientations (Biro, 2010; Lovitts,

2008; Matheswaran, 2010; Milligan & Buckenmeyer, 2008; Scagnoli, 2001; Stokes, 1999).

Kumar and Dawson (2012) even specifically recommend that a mandatory orientation be

included in DE EdD programs. Although a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs did not

exist before this study, the literature illuminated several potential components that this study

further verified.

This study's findings confirmed Kelso's (2009) recommendation for a technology

assessment in orientations for DE programs. Findings also confirmed the importance of

including information about institutional support services (Bozarth et al., 2004; Harmon, 2012).

Gelso et al. (2013) recommended teaching students how to apply research to practice, which was

also identified as an important orientation component in this study. However, Gelso et al.'s

(2013) recommendation was to do this late in the program. The delivery survey from this study

illuminated that contextual applications of what the student is learning through research should

be made earlier in the program during the coursework stage (see Appendix U). This is

understandable because linking research and practice is at the heart of the practitioner-focused

nature of the EdD degree (Boyce, 2012; Perry, 2012; Santovec, 2008).

Integration is also an area of focus for orientations according to existing literature (Clark

& Cundiff, 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Tinto, 2012b). According to Ali and Leeds

(2009), orientations can help foster relationships that last the rest of the student's degree. This

study illuminated a need to go beyond providing a one-time opportunity for students to interact

with peers and faculty by providing information about the tools that exist for continued student interaction. Thus, elements on peer interaction and integration are included in all three orientation sessions. Gardner (2009) also recommended that orientations provide opportunities for students to interact with faculty who could potentially be dissertation chairs or committee members. Therefore, intentional opportunities for faculty connection are included in the coursework orientation as well. Tinto (2012b) recommended several categories of support that institutions should offer in an orientation or first year program. While the recommendation of this research that an orientation to DE EdD programs extend past an initial orientation or even the first year, Tinto's advice to include transition assistance early on in the program, opportunities and resources to connect and integrate, and academic service information as well as remediation where needed were confirmed in this study and are thus represented in the model. This study extends Tinto's (2012b) first year recommendation, highlighting the late stage need for support that exists for doctoral students.

Lastly, recent literature on DE EdD programs illuminated the potential need for family orientation components (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b; Rocksinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). This research study confirmed the value of family orientations in DE EdD program as a way to help families understand how to best support their doctoral student (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014b; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; West, 2014). Families can use these orientation opportunities to discuss expectations and responsibilities (Golde, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; West, 2014).

The most significant contribution of this study is a recommended sequence and delivery for an orientation to DE EdD program. DiPerro (2007) highlighted the need for "ongoing orientations" for doctoral students that address "each phase of doctoral study" (p. 374). Gardner

(2009, 2010b) also recommended distributing information over time so students are not overwhelmed. The model generated by this study contributes significantly to the literature by providing a concise orientation model for DE EdD programs that helps deliver the supports needed for persistence in one's program. Specifically, the five sources of support- institutional, departmental, faculty, peer, and familial- are delivered throughout the doctoral journey at three distinct stages- entry, coursework, and candidacy.

Implications

This study has a variety of implications that help identify how this research fits within existing literature and modern higher education. The discussion that follows explores these implications, framing them as theoretical or practical in nature.

Theoretical

The first theoretical implication derived from this study is that for DE EdD students, significant, intentional, and specific support is needed at three primary stages: entry, coursework, and candidacy. This verifies literature that asserts that the types and amount of support DE doctoral students need changes throughout the doctoral journey (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2008; Storms et al., 2011). Specifically, Tinto's (2012b) persistence theory asserts that significant support factors from one stage of the degree may not be necessary later on. Using the stages of the doctoral journey identified by Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) and Gardner (2007, 2009), this research extends these theories specifically for DE EdD programs by identifying *what* supports are needed and *when* those supports are most necessary. Furthermore, this study illuminates *how* these supports should be delivered (see Appendix U). While participants did not indicate a desire for any orientation components to be delivered fully in person, there are several components that scored highest as best delivered

through blended sessions. In other words, there is a desire among stakeholders to experience some doctoral supports at least partially in person. These components included the program fit assessment, dissertation process sessions, the alumni advice sessions, the feedback component, and communication element. The connections between research and practice and chair and committee connections elements both scored with equal preference for blended and online delivery. While many components were marked as deliverable online, participants had a chance to choose between synchronous and asynchronous online delivery. Asynchronous was preferred over synchronous for all components except the program fit assessment; however, the fit assessment scored highest in the area of blended delivery. The results indicate that participants felt like there are some elements of *fit* that are best understood in real time, if not in person. The remaining orientation components: the technology assessment, program expectations and curriculum, peer integration, communication, family orientations, institutional resources, program curriculum, family orientations, peer integration elements, and faculty integration session, each scored highest in the area of online, asynchronous delivery.

The second theoretical implication of this study extends Rockinson-Szapkiw et al.'s (2014c) theory regarding familial integration. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c) asserted that familial integration may result in higher levels of familial support and that a family orientation may be beneficial. This research extends Rockinson-Szapkiw et al.'s (2014c) assertions by providing a theoretical model for when family orientations should take place and ideas of what they should include. Most significantly, these theories are grounded in data collected from relevant stakeholders who have a first-person perspective on doctoral persistence.

Specifically, based on this research study, my recommendations are to include three family orientations, one at each stage, with a specific look at familial integration/connection

during coursework. During this study, many participants discussed the importance of their family understanding the requirements and rigor of the EdD and the potential conflict that occurred when understanding was missing. Faculty participants specifically discussed the impact the EdD can have on marriages and families who do not embrace the demands of the doctoral degree as a team and echoed the importance of family understand what the EdD entails. Because of this, during the family orientations, institutions should take time to speak directly to family members about the "the time, money, organizational skills, and intellectual rigor required to complete a doctoral degree" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 197). Dr. Armstrong suggested providing practical support suggestions, such as taking care of dinner plans three nights a week, not just during these orientations, but also throughout the journey. These suggestions can go beyond meal planning to include Dr. Fox's suggestions regarding dedicated workspace respected by the family and dividing household responsibilities, assistance with childcare, specific agreed upon times dedicated to doctoral work, and mutually striving to find a balance between family time or care and schoolwork. Participants suggested institutions provide videos they could forward or literature they could recommend to family members. While this information is initially offered at entry, it should be adjusted to more specifically communicate the demands of the candidacy stage later in the program.

The familial integration/connection component during the coursework stage should not simply be a repeat of the information offered at the family orientation. Instead, at this stage, the institution should make a concerted effort to integrate the family of their doctoral students. Much like the suggestion of Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014c), Candace, Doug, and Keith suggested extending an invitation to family members to participate in on campus events. However, they took this a little further by suggesting using these on-campus events as opportunities for families

to get to know other families of students in the same doctoral program. Gearing these

opportunities around on-campus requirements for students (if a component of the degree) and

providing affordable family housing and meal options could make this support more accessible

to families. Additionally, institutions should consider the use of a widely used social media

platform to form a group for families of doctoral students. While this forum can provide a way

for families to "receive updates about the program and seek support during the program"

(Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 197), it can also allow families to offer support and

understanding to one another. It also removes potential accessibility barriers because it does not

involve travel, downloading a new software, or accessing the institution's website. Lastly,

institutions should communicate to families that the family structure is a priority. Strong familial

relationships and marriages may increase persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2015).

Providing resources for family counseling or care and communicating institutional policies

regarding family emergencies or extenuating circumstances can let families know that the school

is not just interested in garnering completers. Rather, candidates who reach completion with the

support of whole, healthy, and stable families are part of the goal.

Practical

The first practical implication of this study is the model for an orientation to DE EdD

programs. The model provides a structure for a three-stage orientation to DE EdD programs that

provides the supports students need to persist from entry to graduation. The model gives

institutions with DE EdD programs a concise look at the supports their students need from their

institution, specific departments, faculty, peers, and their families and suggestions for when and

how these supports can be offered (see Appendix V). The institutional supports identified, such

as statistical, writing, and research supports, should be of particular interest to universities, as

participants in this study communicated that they were unaware of offered supports, heard

institutional supports were not useful, or tried to use institutional supports but were unable to

because of limited availability or limited applicability. Tinto (2018) discusses the importance of

removing the stigma that is associated with students asking for help. Students who need help

sometimes take their struggle as a sign that they are incapable of persisting (Tinto, 2018).

Instead, the model recommends that doctoral programs should highlight their available

institutional supports and in turn, explain that academic struggles are normal for doctoral

students and that students who utilize academic supports are typically students who succeed

(Tinto, 2018).

A second practical implication resulting from this study is that greater investment or a

greater effort to forge deeper relationships is needed from faculty members in DE EdD

programs. Student participants recalling their experiences and faculty participants commenting

on social integration indicated that relationships between students and faculty are indeed difficult

to develop, but also do not appear to be a primary focus in DE programs. At the very least, they

do not occur on a level equal to traditional doctoral programs (Gardner, 2010a). Socialization in

doctoral education occurs simultaneously with collegiality (Bragg, 1976) or when the doctoral

student integrates into their department's community, both professionally and socially (Lovitts &

Nelson, 2000). Because traditional socialization measures, like observing students further along

in the program (Bragg, 1976), are often impaired by the transactional distance between students

in DE (Moore, 1993, 2013), professors become the most visible member in the DE environment.

When faculty appear uninterested in community with doctoral students, collegiality is hindered

and potentially, persistence is negatively impacted. Through the components of contextual

applications and faculty connections, there is potential for greater social integration. Practically,

this study begs for faculty that welcome DE EdD students into their community through embracing these integration components. A sense of belonging is the direct result of a student's perception of whether or not the stakeholders at their institution think they "matter and belong" (Tinto, 2018, p. 3). If the boxes of orientation components are merely checked but departmental culture is unaffected, belonging or membership will still cease to occur. That membership is crucial as it helps students weather the difficulties they encounter throughout the journey (Rovai & Wighting, 2005; Tinto, 2017, 2018).

While this study advocates for deeper relationships between faculty members and doctoral students in DE EdD programs, it also resulted in recommendations for the student-to-student social structure of DE EdD programs. As distance education continues to serve the doctoral student population, institutions may be tempted to steer away from residency requirements or the rigid structure that a cohort model requires in an effort to stay competitive and attract additional students. The participants in this study indicated that their ability to participate in a cohort was a key factor in their persistence and integration. Those who were not assigned a cohort shared the importance of creating their own, typically with students who were in their residency courses. As a result, the third practical implication of this study is that DE EdD programs consider the use of a cohort model, if not at the start of the program, that at least for the candidacy stage. Much like Byrd's (2016) study of doctoral students in an online program ($N = 12$), participants in this study indicated that their participation in a cohort, whether assigned or self-designed, and experiencing the milestones and challenges of the doctoral journey with others increased their sense of integration and community. Tinto (2017) recommended cohorts as a means of social support and increasing a student's sense of belonging. Literature highlights the importance of belonging (Garrison et al., 2000; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rovai, 2002a; Scagnoli,

2001; Tinto, 2017, 2018) and how it results in a community (Rovai, 2002a; Rovai et al., 2004) that helps students overcome threats to persistence (Joseph, 1995; Mutter, 1992; Picciano, 2002; Rovai, 2014; Tinto, 2012b, 2017, 2018; West et al., 2011; Wolniak et al., 2012). Developing a sense of belonging and membership in a community are also important in the process of socialization (Bragg, 1976; Weidman & Stein, 2003) which is a key focus of the doctoral journey (Weidman & Stein, 2003). Institutions should consider implementing a cohort model for their DE EdD programs to foster community and social integration among their students. If institutions choose to forgo this requirement at the start of the degree for the sake of the flexibility and convenience of new students, this study found that a late stage cohort was also beneficial; it gave students in the candidacy stage a way to gauge their progress, stay focused on the timely completion of milestones, and to receive peer support, guarding against isolation.

The final practical implication of this study applies to new and even current DE EdD students. As students prepare for or continue their program, this study's findings can help them assess their own readiness or likelihood to persist. DE EdD students should take a look at their current skills, knowledge, and dispositions to determine where remediation or further development may be needed (Ponton, 2014). They can also turn to their institutions, departments, or faculty to ask for the support they need for success at each stage. Lastly, this study reminds DE EdD students of the importance of integration throughout the journey. Connecting with faculty members throughout the program can help students identify a potential chair and connections made with peers early could potentially provide the relationships students need for a meaningful late stage cohort.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study had several initial delimitations that were conscious choices to narrow the scope and focus of this study. First, participants were delimited to doctoral students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators of programs that are delivered at least 80% at a distance. This 80% criterion followed Allen and Seaman's (2013) definition of an online program. While online education is only a facet of distance education, just like correspondence, tele-learning, or DVD learning (Taylor, 2001b), Allen & Seaman's (2013) definition of online learning provided a narrow look at a segment of EdD programs. The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC, 2019) defines distance education programs as programs that are predominantly offered at a distance, or 51% non-residency. Allen & Seaman (2013) contend that blended learning incorporates at least 30% of its requirements as non-residency components. Using the DEAC (2019) definition would mean that blended programs, those that are partially on campus and partially distance learning, could be part of this study. While this would have potentially allowed for additional participants, it could have potentially limited the transferability of the model as doctoral students in blended programs may experience supports that are not typically present in solely distance education programs. This allowed the development of a model specifically applicable to DE programs. However, because of this delimitation, the generated model may not be entirely applicable to EdD students in traditional or blended programs.

Second, only EdD programs were included in this study. Again, this decision was made to protect the transferability of the model. While a universal model for doctoral programs may have been generated if perspectives from a variety of disciplines were included, it is likely that the model would be of reduced use to individual disciplines or programs. The decision to use

only DE EdD programs was based on the fact that it is one of the degree programs with the highest attrition rates (Carr, 2000; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Frankola, 2001; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) and one of the longest time-to-degree completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

The next delimitation related to participant selection. First, to be an eligible participant, current DE EdD students had to have completed at least the coursework portion of their degree and established candidacy by passing their comprehensive exam or benchmark requirement for candidacy. This delimitation was established based on the assumption that examining individuals in the candidacy stage of the program would provide a better understanding of persistence behaviors than looking at students who had just begun their program. Second, non-persisters and alumni participants were delimited to those who had completed or left their program no more than three years prior to this study. This decision was made to protect the integrity of the study as memories can deteriorate or change over time.

One limitation of this study regarding participants was that despite various efforts to recruit more, only two non-participants could be identified who were willing to participate. Furthermore, these two non-persisters came from the same institution. Lastly, both of the non-persisters in this study were male. Because the perspectives of non-persisters were limited, it is possible that additional information could have been obtained if additional non-persisters and those from various programs were available.

A second limitation of this study is that only two sites were included. Furthermore, both institutions were located in the eastern United States. This means the transferability of the findings from this study may be limited. While many programs were considered as potential

sites, the timing of this study and the resources it would require from institutions resulted in several declined invitations to participate. Other institutions simply did not have well-established DE EdD programs, citing programs that were only a few years old as a reason they could not contribute to this study. While both participating institutions were located in the eastern United States, the two universities and their doctoral education programs are significantly different. Institution A is a non-profit, private, faith-based institution while Institution B is a public research university. Institution A's enrollment is about five times larger than Institution B's and a significant portion of its students are primarily distance education students. This distinction was evident in the department sizes and EdD faculty at each institution. Institution B follows a cohort model while Institution A required several courses in residence (now optional). Lastly, the degree concentration for participants at Institution B (design, learning, and technology) differed from the degree concentrations of participants at Institution A (primarily educational leadership and curriculum and instruction). While the number of participating institutions was limited, the differences in the two programs meant program-specific needs and characteristics were less likely to influence the finished model.

Lastly, while this study developed a model for an orientation to DE EdD programs, the efficacy of the model could not be determined through this study. Instead, generating the model was the focus of this study. Further development of orientation materials, implementation, and an assessment of the model's effectiveness still need to be determined.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research is an ongoing process and because of this, the completion of this research ends with recommendations for the future. The first recommendation for future research includes a detailed look at the orientation components and the development of orientation materials to

support the implementation of this model. Follow up research should assess the efficacy of the model on persistence and integration in DE EdD programs.

Findings suggested that many student, alumni, and non-persister participants were frustrated with a lack of faculty feedback or limited positive feedback both during coursework and throughout the dissertation process. Institutions may want to further invest in research on feedback and training faculty to communicate in a way that is more than constructive. Furthermore, student, alumni, and non-persisters indicated frustration with an inability to gauge their progress in the program because they were completing their degree at a distance. A closer look at helping DE doctoral students gauge progress is a valuable focus for future research.

Next, the orientation model suggests the use of a program fit assessment during the entry orientation. Academic mismatch can be detrimental to persistence (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 2012b); however, in a society of "underwater basket weaving degrees" (where just obtaining *any* degree is the goal), students are not always aware of how important fit really is at the doctoral level. A program fit assessment could quickly identify where student values and goals diverge from their institution's desired outcomes. While certain elements of a fit assessment are institution specific, future research would be beneficial to determine if a validated measure to assess fit is possible for doctoral programs. A widely applicable doctoral program fit assessment would be invaluable for institutions offering doctoral degrees.

This study also uncovered several themes that could not be saturated because they were outside of the focus of this research. One of these concepts was a connection between familial support throughout the doctoral journey and members of that family also possessing a terminal degree. Further research may want to explore this correlation and from that, determine how institutions can work to close the gap for families who do not have prior experience with doctoral

degrees. Second, the non-persisters in this study both indicated no desire for family integration. While other participants noted that family integration should be optional, the majority had a positive response to the idea or ways they think their family could have been involved. This connection could be explored further as families are integrated in doctoral program to determine if (a) family integration increases persistence and (b) when familial integration is optional, are those who choose not to integrate their families less persistent than those who do?

Researchers should also consider exploring the persistence and integration behaviors of DE doctoral students who stop-out, re-enroll, and then successfully complete a doctoral degree. The EdD degree specifically has one of the highest rates of stop-out (Nettles & Millet, 2006) and often, a second instance of stop-out, increased TTD, and/or departure from the program entirely results (Desjardins et al., 2002; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Woosely, 2004). Stop-out students were not a focus of this study and were not well represented in this study's sample, but there are potentially significant things to learn from DE doctoral students who do stop-out and later complete the degree despite their increased likelihood of departure. Future research should seek to understand the factors that led to the decision to re-enroll and the support that stop-out students in DE doctoral programs received that aided persistence and ultimately, completion. Potentially, future research could also consider comparing the integration and support experiences of students before stop-out and after re-enrolling to determine if there are critical elements that made a difference for this population of students.

Lastly, there is the potential for future research may be done to determine if the developed model can be effectively applied to other distance education doctoral programs. Few of the components in the developed orientation model are education-specific so determining the transferability of the model to other DE degrees may prove beneficial as the fields of doctoral

education and distance education continue to intersect (Evans et al., 2005; Terrell et al., 2012; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004).

Summary

Persistence in DE EdD programs is a known challenge (Carr, 2000; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Patterson & McFadden, 2009). Literature identifies orientations as a useful tool to foster various skills, remediate knowledge deficiencies, and facilitate integration (Lorenzetti, 2006; Tinto, 2012b). This grounded theory study identified three stages (entry, coursework, and candidacy) that are critical to doctoral persistence where five sources of support are needed (institutional, departmental, faculty, peer, and familial). This study contributes a model for DE EdD programs to the literature that scaffolds the supports and integration items related to doctoral persistence.

For doctoral students still in their program, I close with encouragement from this study's participants. Tonya closed by sharing, "[you] can do it! If you can get through one class, you can get through [your entire degree]." Timothy summarized by saying, "it's pretty simple. Just don't stop." Amy stated, "don't be afraid to speak out . . . you're not going to get the support and help if you don't ask for it." From Doug, "connect with people" in your program and like Jillian encouraged, remember to "develop your network outside of your family" too. Lastly, in the words of Julia, "never, ever give up . . . you have to work at your own pace, and you can't compare yourself to anyone else or anyone else's progress."

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 10, 2017

Kristy Motte
IRB Approval 2745.011017: A Grounded Theory Study of the Ideal Components of an
Orientation for a Distance Education Doctor of Education Program: The Perspectives of
Students, Non-Persisters, Alumni, Faculty, and Administrators

Dear Kristy Motte,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB.
This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol
number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as
it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participate

Dear Institution A/B Student or Alumni,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an EdD degree. The purpose of my research is to examine the ideal components for an orientation to a distance education (DE) EdD program based on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of students that have persisted in such a program. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are a current student, alumni, or non-persister (from within the last three years) of a DE EdD program and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete an integration survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. You will then have the opportunity to indicate your willingness to participate in a follow up interview that, if you are selected, will take 45-60 minutes. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after you click on the survey link. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please provide your name and the date on the first page to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey. Then, click on the survey link at the end of the consent information to continue.

Lastly, please forward this email on to others that you think may be interested in participating.

Consent form & Survey link: https://www.surveylegend.com/s/8f9

Sincerely,

Kristy Motte
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate for Non-Persisters

Dear former doctoral student,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an EdD degree. The purpose of my research is to examine the ideal components for an orientation to a distance education (DE) Ed.D program based on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of students that have persisted in such a program. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, are a non-persister (from within the last three years) of a DE EdD program and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete an interview that will take 45-60 minutes. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please provide sign and return the consent document to kaball@liberty.edu to indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Lastly, please forward this email on to others that you think may be interested in participating.

Sincerely,

Kristy Motte
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Integration & Engagement Survey

Please select the response that best describes your level of agreement with each question. Choose strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Demographic Information

1. Gender
   1. Male
   2. Female
2. Age
   1. Under 20
   2. 20-24
   3. 25-29
   4. 30-39
   5. 40-50
   6. Over 50
3. Ethnicity/Race
   1. Hispanic or Latino
   2. American Indian or Alaska Native
   3. Asian
   4. Black or African American
   5. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   6. White
   7. Other
4. Current Stage in doctoral degree completion
   1. Coursework in progress/ Pre-candidacy (prior to comprehensive exam completion)
   2. Proposal Development
   3. Research Execution/Data Collection
   4. Dissertation Defended
   5. Alumni- Graduated no more than 3 years ago
   6. Alumni- Graduate over 3 years ago

Peer-Group Interactions

1. I have formed personal relationships with other students since entering my EdD.
2. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.
3. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
4. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.

5. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.
6. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.
7. There have been opportunities for me to build quality relationships with other students during my EdD program.
8. This institution encourages contact among students.
9. I feel strongly connected with other students from my institution.

Interactions with Faculty

1. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.
2. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
3. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.
4. I have developed a close relationship with at least one faculty member since beginning my EdD.
5. I am satisfied with the opportunities to interact informally with faculty members.
6. There have been opportunities for me to build quality relationships with faculty during my EdD program.

Faculty Concern for student development and teaching

1. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students.
2. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally outstanding or superior teachers.
3. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.
4. Most of the faculty I have had contact with are interest in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.
5. Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in teaching.

Academic and Intellectual Development

1. I am satisfied with the extent of my intellectual development since entering this university.
2. My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
3. I am satisfied with my academic experience at this university.
4. Few of my courses this year have been intellectually stimulating.
5. My interest in ideas and intellectual matters has increased since coming to this university.
6. I have performed academically as well as I anticipated I would.
7. I have asked questions or contributed to class discussion during my EdD.
8. I have discussed ideas from my classes or course materials with people outside of my classes during my EdD.

9.   This institution has provided the support necessary for me to succeed academically in my coursework.

10.   My experience at this institution has contributed to me learning more effectively on my own.

Institutional and Goal Commitments

1.   I am confident that I made the right decision to complete my EdD through distance education.

2.   It is important for me to graduate from college.

3.   I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university.

4.   It is likely that I would recommend this institution to others.

5.   Getting good grades is not important to me.

6.   It is not important to me to graduate from this university.

APPENDIX E

Interview Request

Hello, [Recipient],

Thank you so much for completing the integration survey and for your willingness to participate in a follow up interview.

I am contacting you to set up that interview. Do you mind sending me an idea of when you're available (general days/times) and then we can narrow down a specific date and time? Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays tend to work best for me, but I can definitely work around whatever is best for you.

The interview will take about 45 minutes to complete and will be recorded and transcribed. If at any time you wish not to participate, that is no problem at all.

Thank you again for your time and for your assistance with my dissertation research!

Kristy Motte
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University IRB Study: 2745

APPENDIX F

Researcher's Bracketed Experience

After completing my master's degree, I spent a long time praying and considering whether or not I would pursue a doctorate. As the first person in my immediate family to finish high school and the first person in my extended family to attend college, obtaining a terminal degree was a personal goal of mine. Before committing to such a pursuit, I wanted to be sure that it was something I had fully surrendered to God. To me, completing my EdD has become a calling- something I am fully committed to complete as a steward of the knowledge, passion, and time that God has gifted me with.

Despite my commitment to completing this degree, the road has not been easy. The first year of my program went smoothly and passed by very quickly. I finished my Ed.S degree very quickly and was on track to progress just as rapidly through the program. At that time, God called my husband and I away from Lynchburg, VA, where I was blessed to not only attend school, but be on staff so that my schooling was free. The move meant that I now had to pay for school myself. It was also a very difficult period of time for my husband and I since the job he moved for turned out to be a challenge on many levels. I continued my coursework but couldn't progress quite as quickly as before.

After a whirlwind of a very challenging year, we moved again, this time to Michigan. Two cross-country moves and a time of unemployment for my husband resulted in a zeroing out of our savings and acclimating to new places, people, and roles in life. My degree pursuit slowed down further due to finances but continued on a steady pace. As we acclimated to life in Michigan, I remained committed to completing my degree. I completed my coursework and comprehensive exam.

As I completed my capstone course and exam preparation, the time had come to really begin to hone in on a topic for my dissertation. After I obtained my master's, I was blessed to be offered a position as a distance education adjunct professor at my university, without even applying for the position! The students in my classes came from a variety of walks, circumstances, and experience. I noticed that there was a disparity in the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of my own students. While some could research and cite well, others struggled to use the library's electronic resources. Some were committed to complete a degree and others weren't sure they were really in the right place. Some were motivated and upbeat, while others were unsure they would make it through the process or even thought the school was against them. It occurred to me at this time that an orientation for online students would be a great way to even the playing field for all online students. It would allow all students to develop the critical skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for success in their program.

Initially I was sure that I would center my dissertation around developing such an orientation. However, an orientation was actually developed at my institution during this time and my eyes were opened to the amount of research that had already been done in this area. I was privileged enough to be asked to teach the course that orients these students to a distance education undergraduate program but realized that my research in this area wasn't really needed. As I continued to ponder my topic, my professor pointed out that such a disparity also exists on the doctoral level. As she shared attrition rates in doctoral programs and that those rates merely increase when the program is online, I found a new niche being carved out for me. I looked around at my fellow classmates, completing their capstone course and preparing for their comprehensive exam, and realized that we each had different skills, knowledge, and dispositions. Some of us persisted through that point and others struggled to pass the comprehensive exam. I

became passionate about making sure students who decide to embark on the journey to completing a distance education EdD, like I had, have an opportunity to enter their program equipped with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to persist through their program. This meant my research needed to center on finding out what those skills, knowledge, and dispositions are, based on the experiences of online EdD students, non-persisters, alumni, faculty, and administrators.

The steady pace through my degree continued until I was blessed to become pregnant, three times! This was even more special to my husband and I since I had lost a baby a few months before this. Pregnancy definitely slowed down my progress a bit. There were times I just wasn't the student I should have been. Sickness and extreme fatigue were a battle, and after my precious daughters were born, progress continued slowly. Becoming a new mom while working on a dissertation proposal isn't really ideal. However, I was still committed to complete this degree as I trekked through the dissertation process. After the birth of my son, we finally achieved the balance as a family required to prioritize doctoral completion. Finances are still a very real struggle as I attempt to fund my degree. Having the time needed to consistently devote to my research is also difficult. Time management and the ability to say 'no' to people without feeling like I am letting them down are skills I have developed and continue to cultivate. I keep leaning on Christ to provide the money, time, and persistence needed for this journey. My husband has also been in my corner, rooting for me the whole way.

Early on in my degree, I centered all of my research on the motivation of college students, especially non-traditional ones. My motivation for this degree has definitely evolved over the past several years. At first, I was motivated by a personal goal to have a doctorate degree. Then I was motivated to better the experiences of my own online college students. Now I

am motivated to finally be done with school and the cost of school. My biggest motivator is to

set a good example for my children and to make my family and Creator proud.

APPENDIX G

Invitation to Participate in Dissertation Research & Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled "A grounded theory study of the ideal components of an orientation to a distance education doctoral program." The study is being conducted by Kristy Motte, doctoral candidate at Liberty University, (1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA 24502).

The purpose of this research study is to examine the ideal components for an orientation to a distance education EdD program based on the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of students who have persisted in such a program and how persistent students have been supported. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of how students persist in a distance education doctoral program and how perhaps through your experiences, future online EdD students may be better equipped to persist as well. You are free to contact the investigator at kaball@liberty.edu to discuss the study. You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:
1.   The online survey will take approximately 15 minutes of your time of your time.
2.   There is no financial compensation for your participation.

There are no known risks involved with this study. There will be no costs for participating, nor will you benefit from participating. Your name and contact information will be kept during the data collection phase for tracking purposes only. A limited number of research team members will have access to the data during data collection. The researcher will take precautions to protect participant identity. The questionnaire will be located on a web-based survey system, which is on a server, is kept in a password-protected database and is not shared with anyone. The information will be downloaded from the survey system and be stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Identifying information will be stripped from the final report of the data.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with your university or the researcher in anyway. If you do not want to participate either simply stop participating or close the browser window. You can also email kaball@liberty.edu to withdraw.

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your contact information, please contact Kristy Motte at kaball@liberty.edu or by phone at 810-908-8073. This study has been reviewed by The Liberty University Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2745.011017.

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at irb@liberty.edu.

If you agree to participate, please click on the following link_____ and complete the online survey.

Thank you.

Please print a copy of this document for your records.

Informed Consent

I have read and understand the description of the study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study. I understand that I must be 18 years or older to sign this informed consent and participate in this study. I understand that should I have any questions about this research and its conduct, I should contact one of the researchers listed above. If I have any questions about rights or this form, "I should contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

By clicking yes, I agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX H

Interview Guide

Opening Script:

I would like to begin today by asking for your permission to record and transcribe this

interview? (If yes, proceed).

Opening Questions:

While these first three interview questions do not directly address the research questions being

studied, they are important for the interview process. Corbin and Strauss (2015) note that asking

a few questions at the beginning of an interview can help relax the interviewee and promote

further discussion as his or her memory is stimulated and "he or she becomes more talkative and

spontaneous" (p. 28). These questions serve as a warm up for the interview and provide context

for the questions that follow.

1. *What stage of your online EdD program are you currently in?*

2. *Describe for me your entry into your doctoral program. What was the driving motivation*

    to pursue a doctoral degree?

3. *As you pursued your degree, what were your greatest challenges? Describe them or*

    provide an example for me.

Research Question One: How do DE EdD students persist in each stage of the doctoral journey?

There are a variety of skills (Gomez & Bocarnea, 2009; Mathes, 2003; Kelso, 2009; Sahin &

Shelley, 2008; Stokes, 1999; Yokselturk & Bulut, 2007), knowledge, and dispositions

(Yokesulturk & Bulut, 2007) that are likely necessary for persistence in DE EdD programs. Not

all students begin the EdD degree with these skills (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Gardner, 2009) or

the same knowledge-set (Nettles & Millet (2006), which can contribute to attrition (Lovitts, 2008; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Wighting, Liu, & Rovai, 2008).

The following questions seek to understand what skills, knowledge, and dispositions persistent students identify as essential to their success.

4.   *When you began your online EdD program, what skills had you already developed that proved to be critical to your success in your doctoral program?*

5.   *Looking back, as your EdD program progressed, would you have benefitted from having certain skills better developed? If so, which ones?*

6.   *What skills have you found to be vital to persisting through the dissertation process?*

7.   *When you began your EdD program, what knowledge did you already possess that proved to be helpful to your doctoral degree pursuit?*

8.   *Was there any knowledge that you did not have upon entering your program that later made the doctoral process difficult? Describe this for me.*

9.   *As your EdD program progressed, what knowledge did you obtain that helped you stay committed or persist through your doctoral program?*

10.   *Dispositions are qualities or attitudes towards learning and the educational process. What dispositions do you think describe you as a person?*

11.   *What dispositions towards learning do you possess that you attribute to your persistence through your EdD program?*

12.   *What dispositions towards the degree process do you possess that you attribute to your persistence through your EdD program?*

Research Question Two: How do DE EdD students integrate (socially, academically, with their families, and financially) in their programs and universities?

Research also supports the notion that integration is also linked to persistence in academic programs. Integration – both social and academic – can be difficult in distance education programs (Glogowska, 2007; Shouping, 2011; Wilson & Allen, 2008). Because of the impact integration has on retention (Joseph, 1995; Tinto, 2012b; Wolniak et al., 2012), it is important to understand how online EdD students have integrated and adopted a sense of membership in their institution (Wighting, Liu, & Rovai, 2008).

Integration – both social and academic – can be difficult in distance education programs (Glogowska, 2007; Shouping, 2011; Wilson & Allen, 2008). Because of the impact integration has on retention (Joseph, 1995; Tinto, 2012b; Wolniak et al., 2012), it is important to understand how online EdD students have integrated and adopted a sense of membership in their institution (Wighting, Liu, & Rovai, 2008). Because social integration at the doctoral level is closely tied to academic integration (Barnett, 2008; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 2012a), it is likely that elements of academic and social integration will be spread across the questions that follow.

13.   *Would you describe yourself as connected to your university? Why or why not?*

According to Tinto (1975), the greater the level of a student's integration into their university, the greater their commitment to that university. Since the students in this study have persisted to at least the latest stages of their EdD degree (candidacy and beyond), they should be committed to, and therefore integrated into, their universities. Since integration is difficult for distance education students (Anastas, 2012), it is important to understand how the students in this study have integrated.

14.   *How did you connect academically to your institution or your institution's School of*

       Education?

Lovitts and Nelson (2000) indicate that integrating into one's specific department, both socially and professionally is correlated to successful completion of the doctoral degree. Online EdD students must integrate into their institution as a whole but should also feel connected to the institution's SOE. Understanding how these persistent students have done this can help departments ensure this occurs in the future.

15.   *How did you build relationships with faculty members throughout your degree program?*
Tinto (2012b) stresses the importance of student-faculty relationships and notes that academic integration begins in the classroom, but naturally shifts into social integration when students seek out contact with their faculty after class. It is important to understand how academic integration has occurred within the classroom and if/how this has built a relationship that transcended the classroom (Rovai, Wighting, & Liu, 2005).

16.   *In what ways, if at all, have you collaborated with faculty throughout your degree? How did this affect your feeling of connectivity or integration?*
Lovitts and Nelson (2000) also note that the lowest attrition rates are seen in departments where collaboration is required between students and faculty. This question seeks to understand how this collaboration occurs with the online EdD degree.

17.   *How did you build relationships with your peers throughout your degree program?*
According to Nettles and Millet (2006), students should be given the opportunity to interact with students both inside and outside the classroom. It is important to understand how these interactions have occurred within the distance education environment.

18.   *In what ways do you think institutions could make it easier for online students to integrate (or connect) socially and/or academically?*

This question allows students to go beyond recounting their actual experience to suggesting ideas that may benefit future students.

19. *Do you feel like your family understood what was required and committed to your success at each stage of your doctoral journey, why or why not?*

20. *What types of support did your institution provide for your family members during your doctoral journey? In what ways do you think your institution could have better integrated your family into your doctoral program?*

Familial integration is "the degree to which the candidate's sense of connectedness with family members is met while pursuing the doctorate" (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014c, p. 196) and is important because it can directly influence persistence. Familial integration can directly influence persistence as conflict, guilt, and the decision to drop out may occur if familial integration is not present (West, 2014). Families that are integrated are more likely to provide the forms of support needed at each stage and be more understanding when the roles and responsibilities they must assume are adjusted.

21. *What types of financial support did you receive to allow you to integrate economically during your degree?*

22. *Do you feel like you achieved economic integration, or the meeting of your financial needs, so that you could focus on your educational goals, why or why not?*

Economic integration is the "degree to which students' financial needs are met while pursuing the doctorate" (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 117). Economic integration allows students to focus more fully on their degree pursuit without the stress that comes with struggling to finance one's education (Earl-Novell, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Students who struggle with economic integration may have longer times to degree completion (Earl-Novell, 2006; Wao &

Onwuegbuzie, 2011), struggle with the focus required during the dissertation process (Tinto, 2012b), or may not integrate socially and academically as thoroughly as those who are economically integrated (Earl-Novell, 2006).

Research indicates the value of a variety of sources of support and that this support may need to evolve as students progress through different stages of the doctoral journey (Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 2012b). Without proper support, the challenges of a doctoral degree can be overwhelming (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Gardner, 2009). It is likely that students will identify areas of support received or missing from their institution, faculty, committee members, chairs, peers, family, and other external communities. They may also indicate how they were financially supported and able to integrate economically (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

23. *What types of support did you receive from your institution and how did this support influence your persistence or success?*

24. *Were there any areas where you felt you could have been better supported by your institution, and if so, what were they?*

According to West et al. (2011), institutions must understand how to support students, especially as enrollment in professional doctoral programs is projected to increase. Jimenez (2011) also recommends the proactive intervention of faculty and university support systems to help students feel connected socially and academically, to lessen the potential stress experienced by students, and to increase feelings of well-being. Institutions can support doctoral students through technical, emotional, and writing support (West et al., 2011), financially to facilitate economic integration (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and by creating opportunities to develop a strong sense of community (Rovai, 2002).

25.   *How did you experience peer support during your doctoral journey and how did this*

        influence your persistence?

26.   *Were there any ways you felt you could have been better supported by your peers during*

        your doctoral journey, and if so, how?

Peer support can also help students persevere when challenges arise (Gardner, 2009; West et al.,

2011) and peers in the latter stages of the doctoral journey can serve as role models (Evans,

2008). Peers can also be a source of emotional support.

27.   *What types of support did you receive from family during your doctoral degree and how*

        did this support influence persistence?

28.   *Were there any ways your family could have better supported you through your EdD, and*

        if so, how?

Familial support is also important (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tinto, 2012b),

especially because family is typically the primary source of practical support (Jairam & Kahl,

2012). In particular, significant others provide a much-needed source of support for students

when concerns arise (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009) and play a vital role (Jairam & Kahl,

2012; Mutter, 1992).

29.   *Are there any other factors that contributed to your persistence or success and if so, what*

        are they?

Research Question Three: What are the necessary components and delivery model for an

orientation to DE EdD programs?

EdD students progress through five distinct stages as they complete their degrees (Rockinson-

Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). It is important to understand not only what support doctoral

students need, but also when they need that support (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009;

Ehrenber, Jakubson, Groen, So, & Price, 2007; Lovitts, 2008; Storms, Prada, & Donahue, 2011) and how that support should be delivered.

30.   *Were there times during your degree that you needed more support from your institution, faculty, or peers than others? If so, what kind of support and when was that support needed?*

31.   *How do you think an orientation program for new online EdD students would be beneficial to their development of the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and integration items you have noted today?*

32.   *In your opinion, when would be the best time to offer such a program?*

33.   *In your opinion, what would be the best delivery method of this orientation?*

34.   *Is there anything else we haven't covered today that you think is important that you would tell someone that is just starting out in the program you completed, to help them persist to the end? And if so, what?*

APPENDIX I

Focus Group Guide

1. Can you begin by describing the typical online student in your distance education EdD programs?

2. What are the positive aspects of pursuing an EdD degree at a distance?

3. What are the negative aspects of pursuing an EdD degree at a distance?

4. As online EdD students enter the program, what knowledge do you think they should possess to be best equipped to successfully persist through their program?

5. Ideally, to be successful, what skills should students have as they begin their EdD?

6. Reflecting on students who persist through your program, what dispositions or attitudes do these persistent online EdD students possess?

7. Are there any other characteristics or factors that persistent students possess that make them good candidates for DE EdD programs, and if so, what are they?

8. What types of support and/or services do you think are important for the DE EdD students at your institution?

9. What are some ways DE EdD students at your institution integrate economically during their doctoral journey?

10. How do students integrate academically and grow intellectually at your institution?

11. How do persistent online EdD students connect or integrate socially with their peers at your institution?

12. How do persistent online EdD students connect or integrate socially with their faculty during your program?

13.   What types of opportunities exist for the families of your EdD students, to facilitate

        familial integration during your program?

14.   How can an academic institution better promote persistence in an online EdD program?

15.   At what points during the online EdD program do you think students need the most

        support?

16.   What would be the best delivery method for this support?

APPENDIX J

Delivery Survey

The purpose of this Delivery Survey is to identify when and how the orientation components for a <u>Distance Education EdD (Doctor of Education) Program</u> should be delivered.

Completion should take no more than 15 minutes. I appreciate your continued assistance and participation!

Please select the response that best describes you:

1.   Role
  1.   Dean/Administrator of a DE (Distance Education) EdD program
  2.   Faculty Member for a DE EdD program
  3.   Student in a DE EdD program
  4.   Graduate of a DE EdD program
  5.   Non-persister of a DE EdD program
2.   Gender
  1.   Male
  2.   Female
3.   Age
  1.   Under 20
  2.   20-24
  3.   25-29
  4.   30-39
  5.   40-50
  6.   Over 50
4.   Ethnicity/Race
  1.   Hispanic or Latino
  2.   American Indian or Alaska Native
  3.   Asian
  4.   Black or African American
  5.   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  6.   White
  7.   Other
5.   Institution
  _____

Please select the response that you most agree with regarding when or how each component should be delivered.

1.   When would be the best time to offer a fit assessment? (To evaluate the fit of the doctoral student with the EdD program they are enrolling in).

1. The Program Entry Stage
2. The Coursework Stage
3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
4. Other _____

2. How should the fit assessment be delivered?
   1. Online-Synchronously
   2. Online-Asynchronously
   3. In Person
   4. Blended Delivery
   5. Other _____

3. When would be the best time to offer a technology assessment and resources for technological skill development?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4. Other _____

4. How should the technology assessment be delivered?
   1. Online-Synchronously
   2. Online-Asynchronously
   3. In Person
   4. Blended Delivery
   5. Other _____

5. When would be the best time to provide the expectations of the EdD program and the program's timeline?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4. Other _____

6. How should the program expectations and timeline be delivered?
   1. Online-Synchronously
   2. Online-Asynchronously
   3. In Person
   4. Blended Delivery
   5. Other _____

7. When would be the best time to provide a broad overview of what a dissertation is?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)

4.   Other _____

8.   How should the broad overview of the dissertation be delivered?
   1.   Online-Synchronously
   2.   Online-Asynchronously
   3.   In Person
   4.   Blended Delivery
   5.   Other _____

9.   When would be the best time to provide a detailed overview of what a dissertation is and its timeline for completion?
   1.   The Program Entry Stage
   2.   The Coursework Stage
   3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4.   Other _____

10.   How should a detailed overview of the dissertation and the dissertation timeline be delivered?
   1.   Online-Synchronously
   2.   Online-Asynchronously
   3.   In Person
   4.   Blended Delivery
   5.   Other _____

11.   When would be the best time to provide the support of an alumni panel that discusses tips for completing the DE EdD program that the student is enrolling in?
   1.   The Program Entry Stage
   2.   The Coursework Stage
   3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4.   Other _____

12.   How should the support of this alumni panel be delivered?
   1.   Online-Synchronously
   2.   Online-Asynchronously
   3.   In Person
   4.   Blended Delivery
   5.   Other _____

13.   When would be the best time to provide information about the social media forums required or suggested for the student's program and tips for their use?
   1.   The Program Entry Stage
   2.   The Coursework Stage
   3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4.   Other _____

14. How should the social media information and support be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

15. When would be the best time to provide information about how to respectfully and proactively communicate with faculty?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

16. How should the faculty communication information be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

17. When would be the best time to provide information for family members regarding the program's expectations and how they can support the student during his/her degree completion?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

18. How should this information for family members be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

19. When would be the best time to provide information regarding institutional writing supports?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

20.   How should the information regarding writing supports be delivered?
       1.   Online-Synchronously
       2.   Online-Asynchronously
       3.   In Person
       4.   Blended Delivery
       5.   Other _____

21.   When would be the best time to provide course guides with detailed information
       regarding course outcomes, expectations, and workload?
       1.   The Program Entry Stage
       2.   The Coursework Stage
       3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
       4.   Other _____

22.   How should the information regarding course guides be delivered?
       1.   Online-Synchronously
       2.   Online-Asynchronously
       3.   In Person
       4.   Blended Delivery
       5.   Other _____

23.   When would be the best time to provide resources for content knowledge remediation
       for courses a DE EdD student is struggling with?
       1.   The Program Entry Stage
       2.   The Coursework Stage
       3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
       4.   Other _____

24.   How should the resources for content knowledge remediation be delivered?
       1.   Online-Synchronously
       2.   Online-Asynchronously
       3.   In Person
       4.   Blended Delivery
       5.   Other _____

25.   When would be the best time to provide families of DE EdD students with resources to
       connect to other families in the program?
       1.   The Program Entry Stage
       2.   The Coursework Stage
       3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
       4.   Other _____

26.   How should the resources for families to connect to other families be delivered?
       1.   Online-Synchronously

2.   Online-Asynchronously
3.   In Person
4.   Blended Delivery
5.   Other _____

27.   When would be the best time to provide resources for understanding and learning from constructive faculty feedback without getting discouraged, offended, etc.?
     1.   The Program Entry Stage
     2.   The Coursework Stage
     3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
     4.   Other _____

28.   How should the resources regarding using constructive feedback be delivered?
     1.   Online-Synchronously
     2.   Online-Asynchronously
     3.   In Person
     4.   Blended Delivery
     5.   Other _____

29.   When would be the best time to provide information about how to connect with and support one's DE EdD peers?
     1.   The Program Entry Stage
     2.   The Coursework Stage
     3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
     4.   Other _____

30.   How should the resources regarding peer connection and support be delivered?
     1.   Online-Synchronously
     2.   Online-Asynchronously
     3.   In Person
     4.   Blended Delivery
     5.   Other _____

31.   When would be the best time to provide information about how to apply what the doctoral student is learning in his/her DE EdD program to his/her personal or professional context?
     1.   The Program Entry Stage
     2.   The Coursework Stage
     3.   The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
     4.   Other _____

32.   How should the information regarding the application of learning to one's personal or professional context be delivered?
     1.   Online-Synchronously

2. Online-Asynchronously
3. In Person
4. Blended Delivery
5. Other _____

33. When would be the best time to provide information about connecting with faculty beyond the classroom (regarding their research/personal interests, collaboration opportunities, etc.)?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4. Other _____

34. How should the information about connecting with faculty beyond the classroom be delivered?
   1. Online-Synchronously
   2. Online-Asynchronously
   3. In Person
   4. Blended Delivery
   5. Other _____

35. When would be the best time to provide an alumni panel that provides tips and answers questions regarding late-stage persistence (passing comprehensive exams, practical tips for narrowing your dissertation topic or completing the dissertation, etc.)?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4. Other _____

36. How should the alumni panel information regarding late-stage persistence be delivered?
   1. Online-Synchronously
   2. Online-Asynchronously
   3. In Person
   4. Blended Delivery
   5. Other _____

37. When would be the best time to provide information about maintaining late-stage peer connections and how to connect to one's peers to encourage topic development, dissertation completion, provide peer reviews, etc.?
   1. The Program Entry Stage
   2. The Coursework Stage
   3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
   4. Other _____

38. How should the information about late-stage peer connection and support be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

39. When would be the best time to provide an overview of the comprehensive exam process and expectations for successful completion?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

40. How should the information about the comprehensive exam be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

41. When would be the best time to provide information regarding choosing a chair and committee members?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

42. How should the information about choosing a chair and dissertation committee be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

43. When would be the best time to provide information regarding communicating with your chair proactively and respectfully while appropriately pushing back regarding dissertation choices?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

44. How should the information about communicating with your chair be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

45. When would be the best time to provide information about the supports one's institution offers for dissertation students (i.e., writing support, statistics or research supports, counseling supports, technology supports, library supports)?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

46. How should the information about the institutional supports available for dissertation students be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

47. When would be the best time to provide information to family members of doctoral candidates regarding the rigor and expectations of the dissertation process and how they can support their family member throughout the dissertation process?
    1. The Program Entry Stage
    2. The Coursework Stage
    3. The Candidacy Stage (Comprehensive Exams, Proposal Development, etc.)
    4. Other _____

48. How should the information to family members regarding the dissertation process and suggested supports be delivered?
    1. Online-Synchronously
    2. Online-Asynchronously
    3. In Person
    4. Blended Delivery
    5. Other _____

APPENDIX K

Delivery Survey Follow-up Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an EdD degree. Earlier this year, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. Thank you for your involvement in this study through your completion of the integration survey, interview, and/or focus group. This follow-up email is being sent to invite you to complete the final element of the study: a delivery survey.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

To participate, go to https://www.surveylegend.com/s/i6s and complete the attached survey.

A copy of your signed consent document can be provided upon request. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research, but no further action is required at this time since your consent was previously provided.

Sincerely,

Kristy Motte
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX L

Integration & Engagement Survey Mean Scores by Question*

Peer-Group Interactions	Overall	Institution A	Institution B
1. I have formed personal relationships with other students since entering my EdD	M = 3.85 SD = 1.01	M = 3.74 SD = 1.07	M = 4.33 SD = 0.47
2. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.	M = 3.89 SD = 0.91	M = 3.87 SD = 0.99	M = 4 SD = 0.47
3. My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	M = 3.82 SD = 1.01	M = 3.73 SD = 1.08	M = 4.22 SD = 0.42
4. It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students	M = 3.28 SD = 1.18	M = 3.21 SD = 1.22	M = 3.56 SD = 0.96
5. Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.	M = 3.37 SD = 1.03	M = 3.41 SD = 1	M = 3.22 SD = 1.13
6. Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.	M = 3.70 SD = 0.92	M = 3.77 SD = 0.96	M = 3.44 SD = 0.68
7. There have been opportunities for me to build quality relationships with other students during my EdD program.	M = 3.74 SD = 0.96	M = 3.76 SD = 0.98	M = 3.67 SD = 0.82
8. This institution encourages contact among students.	M = 3.77 SD = 0.78	M = 3.68 SD = 0.8	M = 4.11 SD = 0.57
9. I feel strongly connected with other students from my institution	M = 3.06 SD = 1.04	M = 2.97 SD = 1.06	M = 3.44 SD = 0.83
Interactions with Faculty	Overall	Institution A	Institution B
10. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	M = 3.91 SD = 0.95	M = 4 SD = 0.97	M = 3.5 SD = 071
11. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	M = 3.96 SD = 0.88	M = 3.95 SD = 0.92	M = 4 SD = 0.71
12. Outside of the classroom, my interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.	M = 3.54 SD = 0.95	M = 3.5 SD = 0.97	M = 3.75 SD = 0.83
13. I have developed a close relationship with at last one faculty member since beginning my EdD.	M = 3.74 SD = 1.1	M = 3.79 SD = 1.10	M = 3.56 SD = 1.07
14. I am satisfied with the opportunities to interact informally with faculty members.	M = 3.45 SD = 0.99	M = 3.47 SD = 0.99	M = 3.33 SD = 0.94
15. There have been opportunities for me to build quality relationships with faculty during my EdD program.	M = 3.47 SD = 0.94	M = 3.55 SD = 0.94	M = 3.11 SD = 0.87

Faculty Concern for Student Development and Teaching	Overall	Institution A	Institution B
16. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students	M = 3.53 SD = 1.2	M = 3.61 SD = 1.18	M = 3.22 SD = 1.23
17. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally outstanding or superior teachers.	M = 3.34 SD = 1.2	M = 3.55 SD = 1.18	M = 2.44 SD = 0.83
18. Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.	M = 3.26 SD = 1.05	M = 3.41 SD = 1	M = 2.67 SD = 1.05
19. Most of the faculty I have had contact with are interest in helping students grow in more than just academic areas.	M = 3.6 SD = 0.94	M = 3.61 SD = 0.96	M = 3.56 SD = 0.83
20. Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in teaching.	M = 4.09 SD = 0.71	M = 4.13 SD = 0.69	M = 3.89 SD = 0.74
Academic and Intellectual Development	Overall	Institution A	Institution B
21. I am satisfied with the extent of my intellectual development since entering this university	M = 4.32 SD = 0.59	M = 4.34 SD = 0.62	M = 4.22 SD = 0.42
22. My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	M = 4.34 SD = 0.56	M = 4.37 SD = 0.58	M = 4.22 SD = 0.42
23. I am satisfied with my academic experience at this university	M = 4.15 SD = 0.77	M = 4.21 SD = 0.77	M = 3.89 SD = 0.74
24. Few of my courses this year have been intellectually stimulating	M = 3.5 SD = 1.06	M = 3.66 SD = 1.01	M = 2.89 SD = 0.99
25. My interest in ideas and intellectual matters has increased since coming to this university.	M = 4.17 SD = 0.69	M = 4.21 SD = 0.73	M = 4 SD = 0.47
26. I have performed academically as well as I anticipated I would.	M = 4.11 SD = 0.88	M = 4.13 SD = 0.89	M = 4 SD = 0.82
27. I have asked questions or contributed to class discussion during my EdD.	M = 4.47 SD = 0.65	M = 4.5 SD = 0.64	M = 4.33 SD = 0.67
28. I have discussed ideas from my classes or course materials with people outside of my classes during my EdD.	M = 4.38 SD = 0.70	M = 4.39 SD = 0.74	M = 4.33 SD = 0.47
29. This institution has provided the support necessary for me to succeed academically in my coursework.	M = 4.06 SD = 0.88	M = 4.11 SD = 0.91	M = 3.89 SD = 0.74
30. My experience at this institution has contributed to me learning more effectively on my own.	M = 4.26 SD = 0.67	M = 4.29 SD = 0.72	M = 4.11 SD = 0.31
Institutional and Goal Commitments	Overall	Institution A	Institution B
31. I am confident that I made the right decision to complete my EdD through distance education.	M = 4.89 SD = 0.37	M = 4.86 SD = 0.41	M = 5 SD = 0

32. It is important for me to graduate from college	*M* = 4.45 *SD* = 0.85	*M* = 4.42 *SD* = 0.88	*M* = 4.56 *SD* = 0.68
33. I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university	*M* = 4.32 *SD* = 0.97	*M* = 4.29 *SD* = 1.02	*M* = 4.44 *SD* = 0.68
34. It is likely that I would recommend this institution to others	*M* = 4.47 *SD* = 0.99	*M* = 4.37 *SD* = 1.06	*M* = 4.89 *SD* = 0.31
35. Getting good grades is not important to me	*M* = 4.8 *SD* = 0.45	*M* = 4.78 *SD* = 0.47	*M* = 4.89 *SD* = 0.31
36. It is not important to me to graduate from this university.	*M* = 4.26 *SD* = 0.79	*M* = 4.22 *SD* = 0.84	*M* = 4.44 *SD* = 0.5
Average Overall Scores	*M* = 3.92 *SD* = 0.45	*M* = 3.94 *SD* = 0.48	*M* = 3.86 *SD* = 0.26

Scores rounded to nearest hundredth

APPENDIX M

Theoretical Memo Sample

Memo: 2/4/17

While discussing peer integration, several participants have mentioned group work. They indicate that group work helped them build relationships with their peers, but when follow up questions are asked, they also express frustrations they've had with group projects.

Initially, I think I expected to find a link between group work and integration, and it definitely is a by-product. But it appears that the relationship here that participants are expressing comes from group experiences they had in residential intensives specifically. The rich peer integration they recall has come from groups in this context.

After expressing their frustration with group work or suggesting that you should be able to choose your own groups or that professors should group students together based on work ethic, I started to notice that the same passionate discussion about peer integration resurfaced when students would talk about how the peers they were closest to helped them even after the course they had together ended.

Chuck was the first to identify these peers using the term 'cohort.' He explained that because of their connection through required group work, he and a group of his peers formed a self-designed cohort that they maintained throughout their degrees. They bounced questions off each other, held each other accountable, and offered each other peer reviews.

It seems that while integration occurs because of positive group work experiences, the integration was fostered through the 'cohort' experience. A group of doctoral students who could share their experiences and relate to each other has been imperative for several participants. It will be interesting to see if the 'cohort' idea continues to develop despite the fact that Institution A doesn't follow this model.

APPENDIX N

Institution A Initial Codes

1. "Learning comes from the process"
2. "Standard Expected at the Doctoral Level"
3. Ability to prioritize School over Social Life
4. Academic Integration
5. Admiration / Respect for Faculty (Integration?)
6. Application of Learning to Profession
7. Barrier - lack of availability in institutional supports
8. Barrier - lack of real time communication
9. Barrier - redundancy in the program
10. Barrier - school would usurp God-given priorities
11. Barrier - Sense of Calling elsewhere
12. Barrier - technological requirements (livetext, my dissertation portal, etc.)
13. Barrier to persistence- the time it takes away from family
14. Barrier to persistence- time away from ministry / calling
15. Barrier- lack of face to face (interaction with real people)
16. Barrier- lack of social integration
17. Barrier- program fit
18. Barrier- program quality
19. Barrier- program's content that can't be applied
20. Barrier: Mentoring nearly absent due to distance
21. Barrier: Shallow Relationships
22. Benchmarking
23. Build relationships through cohort
24. Candidates Fully Extending Themselves
25. Chair support - Pushing the committee
26. Challenge: Balancing family and work during doctoral pursuit
27. Challenge: Dissertation process ambiguous
28. Challenge: Finding a Chair
29. Challenge: Getting to Proposal Defense
30. Challenge: Misinterpreting electronic communication
31. Challenge: One on one feedback is often critical (for the sake of being constructive)
32. Challenge: Research Consultant
33. Challenge: Solely focusing on the dissertation
34. Collaboration
35. Collaboration: Limited
36. Compare progress with others
37. Connect through group work
38. Connection: "Yes and No"
39. Course guides
40. Deeply connected to peers from statistics- one of the most difficult experiences / classes
41. Delivery - Synchronous
42. Desire to choose your own groups

43. Discrepancy in familial support - some get it and some don't
44. Disposition: "Wanted to be done"
45. Disposition: Adaptive
46. Disposition: Can take constructive criticism
47. Disposition: Committed
48. Disposition: Desire to "Move the profession forward"
49. Disposition: Desire to apply learning
50. Disposition: Grit
51. Disposition: Hearer
52. Disposition: High-achiever
53. Disposition: Honoring God with My Best
54. Disposition: Humble
55. Disposition: I know I can do it
56. Disposition: Innovative
57. Disposition: Integrity
58. Disposition: Internally motivated
59. Disposition: Leadership
60. Disposition: Life-long learner
61. Disposition: Love of Learning
62. Disposition: Love of teaching others / helping them "get it"
63. Disposition: Motivated
64. Disposition: Not getting discouraged
65. Disposition: Persistent
66. Disposition: Problem Solver
67. Disposition: Resilience
68. Disposition: Self-aware
69. Disposition: Self-Directed
70. Disposition: Sense of accomplishment
71. Disposition: Sense of Calling to EdD
72. Disposition: sticking with it
73. Disposition: Teachable
74. Disposition: Wanting to help others
75. Disposition: Willing to work hard
76. Dispositions
77. Dissertation completion required eating out a lot
78. Dissertation completion required work during vacation / family time
79. Dissertation Persistence: Able to get the research needed when it was needed
80. Distance was a barrier to connection
81. Faculty Collaboration: Helped Shaped Dissertation Study
82. Familial Frustration because of the demands of the degree
83. Familial understanding of the doctorate was a process throughout the journey
84. Family didn't understand intensity / rigor of degree
85. Felt a lack of support during dissertation process
86. Fostered his/her own social integration outside of the classroom
87. Frustration: Blackboard formatting difficulties
88. Frustration: Group Projects

89. Frustration: Lack of shared interests with professors
90. Frustration: Lack of Understanding from Professor
91. Frustration: Poor course design
92. Frustration: Some people not pulling their weight (group work)
93. Frustration: Timeliness of obtaining answers
94. Frustration: Unclear course expectations
95. Frustration: Unfair grading
96. Gauge progress through peers
97. Immediacy of Support Desired (non-persister)
98. Integration: Facilitate through Community Connections (in geographic proximity)
99. Integration: Proactive Communication (Orientation Component)
100. Integration is a challenge
101. Integration through synchronous moments
102. Integration through video conferences / posts
103. Integration with faculty required student initiation
104. Integration: Academic - Faculty from intensives
105. Integration: Academic - Individual Interactions with faculty
106. Integration: Academic - Instructor initiated emails beyond course requirements
107. Integration: Academic - Quality Professors
108. Integration: Academic - through quality program
109. Integration: Academic integration & link to persistence
110. Integration: Academic- Asking Questions
111. Integration: Academic- Linking Experience and Assignments
112. Integration: Barrier- Advisor changes
113. Integration: Barrier- Lack of Positive Feedback
114. Integration: Barrier- Program changes
115. Integration: Barrier- Values that aren't shared
116. Integration: Connected because Family member is student/alumna of same school
117. Integration: Connectedness to a professor results in a committee member
118. Integration: Deep connection to peers from first class (figuring it out together)
119. Integration: Economic: Institutional Incentives
120. Integration: Economic (barrier) - Unrealistic Expectations regarding cost
121. Integration: Economic - Employer stipends
122. Integration: Economic - GI Bill
123. Integration: Economic - loans
124. Integration: Economic - military discount
125. Integration: Economic - Paying out of pocket
126. Integration: Economic - Too many classes at once (underestimated rigor)
127. Integration: Economic- Full time Job
128. Integration: Economic- TTD equals more financial strain
129. Integration: Faculty pushes relationships/integration to peers (beyond selves)
130. Integration: Faculty: Finding common ground
131. Integration: Faculty: Finding common ground (personal, professional, military, etc.)
132. Integration: Faculty: Outside of the Classroom
133. Integration: Faculty: Social- not a focus
134. Integration: Faculty: Videos

135. Integration: Familial - Attending graduation
136. Integration: Familial - Celebrating milestones together
137. Integration: Familial - Families could be supported and integrated by meeting other families
138. Integration: Familial - institutional family dinner / family program
139. Integration: Familial - involving family in the process
140. Integration: Familial: Taken to campus / campus event
141. Integration: Familial- Families could be integrated through social media
142. Integration: Familial- Off Campus / Outside of Class
143. Integration: Familial- Should be optional - not all families need it
144. Integration: Find an alumna of the program
145. Integration: Humor
146. Integration: Institutional emails
147. Integration: Institutions facilitate through discussion boards
148. Integration: Institutions facilitate through intensives
149. Integration: Lacking with faculty of online classes
150. Integration: Limited by desire to build relationships
151. Integration: Limited by time
152. Integration: Meeting with peers outside of class
153. Integration: Peers: Milestones
154. Integration: Peers: Through common interests
155. Integration: Shared values/beliefs
156. Integration: Social - Informal / Outside the classroom
157. Integration: Social - Lack of Social Integration with Faculty
158. Integration: Social - Social Media
159. Integration: Social - through discussion boards
160. Integration: Social: Cohort = Strong Relational connection
161. Integration: Suggestion- family housing
162. Integration: Synchronous Meetings (Cohort)
163. Integration: Deep connection to peers from intensives
164. Intensives were helpful
165. Intensives: Helpful with "becoming a candidate" process
166. Knowledge
167. Knowledge: Content- Educational Technology
168. Knowledge: Gained by experience
169. Knowledge: History of Education
170. Knowledge: Research - Qualitative
171. Knowledge: Understanding the dissertation
172. Knowledge: Vocabulary
173. Knowledge: Work Experience: Significant experience in education
174. Lack of Familial Understanding if they haven't attended college
175. Lack of Social Integration & No intensives attended
176. Lack of Support resulted in self-direction
177. Life Experience "Old Enough to know..."
178. Longer than expected results in financial burden
179. Making the most of the opportunity

180. Mistrust of the program / program policies / hidden agenda
181. More connected to peers that professors
182. More difficult than expected
183. More supported by peers than professors
184. Motivated by a problem looking to solve
185. Motivation increased by intensives
186. Non-Persister - felt economically integrated
187. Non-persister- did not desire familial support
188. Not as connected as the traditional classroom
189. Orientation Component: Connect with peers and how
190. Orientation Component: Real People
191. Orientation Component: Skill based components
192. Orientation Component: Watch a dissertation defense
193. Orientation Components: Acclimating to the Online Environment
194. Orientation Components: Alumni Panel - Learning from Alumni
195. Orientation Components: Clarification of Expectations
196. Orientation Components: Dissertation Process
197. Orientation Components: Family orientation
198. Orientation Components: Learn by doing
199. Orientation Components: Making Accommodations for Persistence
200. Orientation Components: Motivation
201. Orientation Components: Online Library Navigation
202. Orientation Components: Understanding the constructive nature of feedback in the program
203. Orientation Delivery: In intensives
204. Orientation Delivery: Online
205. Orientation: Delivery -- face to face (for real support)
206. Orientation: Delivery Method - Online
207. Orientation: Scaffolded support
208. Orientation: Timing: 919
209. Orientation: Timing: First Course
210. Persistence Factor: Stability
211. Persistence: Barrier - Anxiety at the beginning of the program
212. Persistence: Barrier - Unrealistic or unmet Expectations regarding the timeline for completion
213. Persistence: Barrier- Health because of workload / lack of sleep / stress
214. Persistence: Barrier- Lack of Positive Feedback
215. Persistence: Barrier- Lack of quality / timely work by peers
216. Persistence: Barrier- Lack of Timely Feedback
217. Persistence: Chair fit
218. Persistence: Challenged to use frustration proactively
219. Persistence: Flexibility
220. Persistence: Not over-committed
221. Persistence: Rest when dissertation out of your hands
222. Persistence: Staying immersed in the dissertation
223. Proposed- peer committee like dissertation committee
224. Required more time than expected

225. Self-Care
226. Self-designed Cohort
227. Skill: Ability to learn from constructive feedback
228. Skill: Able to write clearly and concisely
229. skill: attention to detail
230. Skill: Blackboard Navigation
231. Skill: Communicating / support needs to family
232. Skill: Learning from mistakes
233. Skill: Navigating the Online Environment
234. Skill: Prayer
235. Skill: Relying on God
236. Skill: Self-directed learning (finding resources to teach self)
237. Skill: Time Management
238. Skill: Writing - Grammar
239. Skill: Writing- APA
240. Skills
241. Skills: Analytical skills (analysis)
242. Skills: Goal Setting
243. Skills: Intentional use of coursework's papers as dissertation research or topic navigation
244. Skills: Leadership
245. Skills: Management / Planning
246. Skills: Online Library Navigation / Use
247. Skills: Organization of literature / research
248. Skills: Prepared by master's program
249. Skills: Prioritizing
250. Skills: Proactive Communication
251. Skills: Professional / Respectful Communication
252. Skills: Reading Comprehension / Summary
253. Skills: Writing
254. Skills: Writing- Proofreading
255. Skills: Writing- synthesis
256. Social Integration
257. Socialization to the doctorate
258. Some familial discord exacerbated by economic factors
259. Suggested Cohort- from 919-989
260. Suggested- more group work
261. Support: Chair support
262. Support: Church Support- prayer
263. Support: Faculty Support
264. Support: Institutional
265. Support: Peer Support
266. Support: Peer Support: Types
267. Support Needed: Content knowledge
268. Support Needed: Early in the program
269. Support Needed: Transition from coursework to research
270. Support Needed: Varies from student to student

271. Support- Lack of Institutional support for families
272. Support: Chair support - Encouragement
273. Support: Chair Support - Integral for persistence at dissertation stage
274. Support: Chair Support - Prayer
275. Support: Chair Support- Care for the Candidate beyond the degree
276. Support: Chair Support- Familial Integration / Supporting the Family Unit
277. Support: Chair support- Going to battle for candidate
278. Support: Chair support: Motivated
279. Support: Faculty support - 'to the course as a whole' through email
280. Support: Faculty support - emails to 'each of the students in the course individually'
281. Support: Faculty Support - emotional
282. Support: Faculty Support - encouragement
283. Support: Faculty Support - honesty / tough love
284. Support: Faculty support - offering support (even if not utilized)
285. Support: Faculty support - overlooking disrespect / emotional outburst
286. Support: Faculty support - providing opportunities (to shine)
287. Support: Faculty support - sharing experience
288. Support: Faculty support - understanding the journey
289. Support: Familial
290. Support: Familial - "we can get through it together"
291. Support: Familial - Allowed the time needed
292. Support: Familial - practical support - housework
293. Support: Familial - Prayer support
294. Support: Familial - Reminder of God's calling to EdD
295. Support: Familial - Spouse encouragement
296. Support: Familial - Spouse praying
297. Support: Familial - Spouse support
298. Support: Familial - Spouse Support - Listening to Research / Expressing interest
299. Support: Familial - Spouse understood what was required
300. Support: Familial - Understanding of requirements because of their own terminal / advanced degree
301. Support: Familial support- childcare
302. Support: Institutional - Academic advising
303. Support: Institutional - Economic
304. Support: Institutional - extended hours
305. Support: Institutional - IT Help Desk
306. Support: Institutional - Library Orientation / Online Library
307. Support: Institutional - Writing Center
308. Support: Institutional- Academic advising - prayer support
309. Support: Lack of Professor Support
310. Support: Lacking from friends 'external community'
311. Support: More support from faculty needed early in the program
312. Support: Peer Support - Accountability
313. Support: Peer Support - Emotional
314. Support: Peer Support - Phone Calls
315. Support: Peer Support - Prayer

316. Support: Peer Support - Spiritual
317. Support: Peer Support - Studying together outside of class
318. Support: Peer Support - tackling the biggest hurdles together
319. Support: Peer Support - Texting
320. Support: Peer support sought to assist with content knowledge
321. Support: Peer support through discussion boards
322. Support: Peer Support- be willing to give support - even if not getting it
323. Support: Peer Support- Beyond the doctoral program - Personal Support
324. Support: Peer support- communication outside of class
325. Support: Peer Support- Encouragement
326. Support: Peer Support- Motivation
327. Support: Peer Support- Proofreading for each other
328. Support: Peer support- referred to additional resources
329. Support: Peer support- Shared Experiences
330. Support: Peer support- Social Media
331. Support: Peer Support- Writing support (grammar and APA)
332. Support: Peer support: Shared Assignments
333. Support: Professional Support from work network
334. Support: Professors of other classes to assist with content Knowledge
335. Support: Sought support outside of the institution (Military education center)
336. Support: Statistics
337. Support: The Need Changes throughout the program
338. Supports: Barrier- Lack of Positive Feedback
339. Supports: Timely Feedback
340. Timeline
341. Understanding the doctoral process

APPENDIX O

Institution B Initial Codes

1. Academic Integration
2. Barrier: Advisor Changes
3. Barrier: Felt Isolated
4. Candid Conversations about Program Demands
5. Chair Support
6. Challenge: Inability for honest informal discussion between students - monitored by faculty
7. Challenge: Interdisciplinary support
8. Challenge: Timeliness of Feedback
9. Challenge: Acclimating to the Online Environment
10. Challenge: Balancing many roles other than doctoral student
11. Challenge: Barrier - general feedback or lack of feedback
12. Challenge: Isolated as online student: Couldn't gauge progress
13. Challenge: Statistics
14. Challenge: Taking Courses (Coursework)
15. Challenge: Time Management
16. Challenge: Unrealistic Professor Expectations (Workload)
17. Challenges: Connecting with the right people to find answers
18. Challenges: Finding information as an online student
19. Challenges: Understanding the process
20. Cohort: Competition - Staying on track - accountability
21. Collaboration through project courses (capstones)
22. Disposition: Ability to accept constructive criticism
23. Disposition: Autonomous
24. Disposition: Detail oriented
25. Disposition: Hard working
26. Disposition: Love of learning
27. Disposition: Not a quitter
28. Disposition: Analytical
29. Disposition: Flexible
30. Disposition: Natural Curiosity
31. Disposition: Perfectionist
32. Disposition: Persistent
33. Disposition: Positive
34. Disposition: Self-aware
35. Disposition: Self-directed
36. Disposition: Self-motivated
37. Disposition: Setting a good example for daughter
38. Disposition: Tenacious
39. Dispositions
40. Immediacy of Application (Could put information to use quickly)
41. Institutional Support Needed: Counseling
42. Integration: A desire for face-to-face interaction - recommends on-campus requirement

43. Integration: Academic: Group Projects
44. Integration: Academic: Video components - Live Sessions
45. Integration: Adobe Connect
46. Integration: Collaboration: With faculty advisor on dissertation
47. Integration: Connection beyond the program to professional context
48. Integration: Economic: Institution covered cost of conferences and room
49. Integration: Economic: Not a financial burden to family
50. Integration: Economic: Reimbursement from Employer
51. Integration: Economic: Scholarship (institutional)
52. Integration: Economic: Student Loans
53. Integration: Faculty: Because of proximity to campus
54. Integration: Faculty: Collaboration due to shared interests
55. Integration: Faculty: Collaboration
56. Integration: Faculty: Getting to know students / cohort
57. Integration: Faculty: Phone Calls
58. Integration: Faculty: Social Media
59. Integration: Faculty: Through coursework
60. Integration: Familial: Some limited desire to integrate family
61. Integration: Institutional: Advisor
62. Integration: Institutional: Desired online student inclusion into campus life
63. Integration: Institutional: Emails
64. Integration: Institutional: Needed more personal contact / support
65. Integration: Peers (gauge process / share experiences)
66. Integration: Peers: Cohort
67. Integration: Peers: Conference (suggested attendance)
68. Integration: Peers: Emails (gauge process / share experiences)
69. Integration: Peers: Limited by desire to connect or time / ability
70. Integration: Peers: Most connected with those met face to face
71. Integration: Peers: Peer Feedback
72. Integration: Peers: Shared Challenges
73. Integration: Peers: Social Media
74. Integration: Peers: Social Media (Google Communities)
75. Integration: Shared experiences virtually (ice cream social)
76. Integration: Social: Through emails with classmates
77. Integration: Struggle to integrate with faculty
78. Integration: Varied desires to integrate
79. Integration: Connected on campus and face-to-face
80. Integration: Connection, even if limited, due to proximity
81. Integration: Economic: Grad Assistant
82. Integration: Faculty: Email
83. Integration: Faculty: Google Communities (discussion forum)
84. Integration: Faculty: Only student initiated
85. Integration: Faculty: Through asking Questions
86. Integration: Lacked in courses that didn't have a social / video component
87. Integration: Limited Connection: Critical of Program
88. Integration: Limited Connection: Geographical Distance a Barrier

89. Integration: Peers: Social Media: Google Hangout
90. Integration: Peers: Through Group Work
91. Integration: student was proactive in integrating
92. Integration: Synchronous Moments
93. Integration: Video - not just text (real person)
94. Knowledge: Family Integration
95. Knowledge
96. Knowledge: Content Knowledge: Not as much of a concern
97. Knowledge: Dissertation
98. Knowledge: Dissertation / Problem-Question Development
99. Knowledge: Due to experience in field
100. Knowledge: Knowing Dissertation Topic Early
101. Knowledge: Statistics
102. Knowledge: Content Knowledge
103. Knowledge: Research process / methodologies
104. Lack of informal integration
105. Limited departmental integration: Cultural Issue
106. Little Perceived Social Integration
107. Memo: Wanted more connection to campus and wanted family to be connected to campus too.
108. Motivation: Expand knowledge for current field
109. Motivation: Job Requirement to get doctorate
110. Motivation: Taking opportunity to use education benefit
111. Orientation Component: Connecting with peers and forming a cohort
112. Orientation Components: Advisor
113. Orientation Components: Dissertation Expectations
114. Orientation Components: Dissertation Process
115. Orientation Components: Familial integration - helping understand process / resources
116. Orientation Components: Other students
117. Orientation Components: Practical Tips
118. Orientation Components: Program Timeline
119. Orientation Delivery: Interactive Online
120. Orientation Delivery: Mixed - online and in-person
121. Orientation Timing: "Two critical times"
122. Orientation Timing: Research
123. Orientation Timing: Before First Course
124. Orientation: Scaffolded Support
125. Professionalism / Respect
126. Program Fit (research scholar vs. practitioner scholar focus)
127. Role Conflict
128. Self-Care
129. Skill: Dealing with Emotion
130. Skill: Self-directed (work at own pace)
131. Skill: Reminding self of past accomplishments for confidence
132. Skill: Reminding self of past accomplishments for motivation

133.	Skills
134.	Skills: initiate the need for support (reach out proactively)
135.	Skills: Organizing Research
136.	Skills: Word Processing
137.	Skills: Able to push back
138.	Skills: Ask Questions
139.	Skills: Blackboard or LMS
140.	Skills: Communication
141.	Skills: Due to experience
142.	Skills: Identifying credible sources
143.	Skills: Navigating School Requirements
144.	Skills: Online Library
145.	Skills: Organization
146.	Skills: Researching
147.	Skills: Researching: Focusing Research
148.	Skills: Researching: Locating Articles / Navigating Results
149.	Skills: Scholarly Writing
150.	Skills: Technological Skills
151.	Skills: Time Management
152.	Social Integration
153.	Socialization to the doctorate
154.	Support: Chair Support: Above and beyond
155.	Support: Chair Support: Drove the committee
156.	Support: Chair Support: Emotional
157.	Support: Chair Support: Motivator
158.	Support: Chair Support: writing retreat
159.	Support: Faculty: Accessibility
160.	Support: Faculty Support: Extensions
161.	Support: Faculty Support: Phone Calls
162.	Support: Familial: Childcare
163.	Support: Familial: Dissertation Assistance (articles, reading chapters, etc.)
164.	Support: Familial: Giving Time Needed
165.	Support: Familial: Listening
166.	Support: Familial: Practical Support
167.	Support: Familial: Supportive
168.	Support: Familial: Understanding due to advanced degree
169.	Support: Familial: Varied- some didn't understand
170.	Support: Institutional - no support for families
171.	Support: Institutional: Advising
172.	Support: Institutional: Did not use institutional supports
173.	Support: Institutional: Dissertation Support (Statistician)
174.	Support: Institutional: Helpdesk (technical support)
175.	Support: Institutional: Limited availability for Supports
176.	Support: Institutional: Online Library / Librarians
177.	Support: Institutional: Student had to initiate
178.	Support: Institutional: Timeliness of Responding to questions

179.   Support: Institutional: Writing Labs
180.   Support: Instructor Feedback
181.   Support: Institutional: Service Desk (IT support)
182.   Support: Needed a lot more institutional support
183.   Support: Needed for statistics and research resources
184.   Support: Needed support changes throughout the degree
185.   Support: Needed with the milestones
186.   Support: Peer Support: Celebrating Milestones
187.   Support: Peer Support: Dissertation Development
188.   Support: Peer Support: Email
189.   Support: Peer Support: Emotional
190.   Support: Peer Support: Feedback
191.   Support: Peer Support: Peer reviews
192.   Support: Peer Support: Phone Calls
193.   Support: Peer Support: Program / Course Questions
194.   Support: Peer Support: Shared Experiences
195.   Support: Peer Support: Shared information
196.   Support: Peer Support: Social Media (Google Communities)
197.   Support: Peer Support: Text
198.   Support: Peer Support: Writing Cohort
199.   Support: Spouse support
200.   Support: Timing: Beginning of the program
201.   Support: Timing: Coursework
202.   Support: Timing: Dissertation
203.   Support: Timing: The Whole Program
204.   Support Needed: Clear communication about program expectations
205.   Support Needed: Course Guides
206.   Support Needed: Dissertation Development
207.   Support Needed: More family Support

APPENDIX P

Institution A Axial Coding

Category	Subcategories	Initial codes
Orientation: Scaffolded Support	Orientation Timing: First Course	Support Needed: Early in the program Support: More support from faculty needed early in the program
	Orientation: Timing: Candidacy	Support Needed: Transition from coursework to research Felt a lack of support during dissertation process Support: Chair support - integral for persistence at dissertation stage
	Support: The Need Changes throughout the program	Support Needed: Varies from student to student Support: Professors of other classes to assist with content knowledge Support Needed: Content Knowledge
Support: Faculty Support	Support: Lack of professor support	Frustration: Timeliness of obtaining answers Frustration: Unfair Grading Frustration: Unclear course expectations Support: Professors of other classes to assist with content knowledge Lack of support resulted in self direction
	Support: Faculty Support- emotional	Support: Faculty support- overlooking disrespect / emotional outburst Faculty support: Honesty / Touch love Support: Faculty Support: Encouragement
	Support: Faculty Support- providing opportunities (to shine)	Application of learning to the profession Integration: Academic- Instructor initiated emails beyond course requirements Integration: Academic - Individual Interactions with faculty
	Support: Faculty support- sharing experience	Support: Faculty support- understanding the journey "Learning comes from the process" "Standard expected at the doctoral level" Integration: Shared Values/Beliefs Frustration: Lack of shared interests with professors

		Integration: Faculty: Finding common ground
		Faculty Collaboration: Helped Shape Dissertation Study
		Collaboration: Limited
	Support: Chair Support	Challenge: Finding a chair
		Chair Support: Pushing the committee
		Challenge: Getting to proposal defense
		Persistence: Challenged to use frustration proactively
		Support: Chair support- going to battle for the candidate
		Support: Chair Support- encouragement
		Support: Chair support- care for the candidate beyond the degree
		Support: Chair support- prayer
		Persistence: Chair fit
		Integration: Barrier: Advisor changes
		Support: Chair support- integral for persistence at dissertation stage
	Supports: Timely feedback / Communication	Persistence: Barrier- Lack of Timely Feedback
		Skill: Ability to learn from constructive feedback
		Orientation Components: Understanding the constructive nature of feedback in the program
		Challenge: Misinterpreting electronic communication
		Disposition: Teachable
		Persistence: Barrier- lack of positive feedback
		Challenge: Misinterpreting electronic communication
		Integration: Proactive Communication (Orientation Component)
	Orientation Components: Family Orientation	Challenge: Balancing family and work during doctoral pursuit
		Familial frustration because of the demands of the degree
		Skill: Communicating / support needs to family
		Family didn't understand intensity / rigor of degree

Support: Familial		Familial understanding of the doctorate was a process throughout the journey Integration: Familial- involving family in the process
Support: Familial	Support: Familial	Integration: Familial - Celebrating milestones together Integration: Familial: Taken to campus / campus event Integration: Familial- attending graduation Lack of familial understanding if they haven't attended college Support: Familial - Understanding of requirements because of their own terminal/advanced degree Integration: Connected because family member is student/alumna of same school Support: Familial: "We can get through this together" Support: Familial- Allowed the Time needed Barrier to persistence: The time it takes away from family Support: familial - practical support - housework Support: Familial support- childcare
	Support: Familial- spouse support	Support: Familial: Spouse praying Support: Familial - Spouse support - Listening to research / expressing interest Support: Familial - Spouse understood what was required
Support: Peer Support	Self-designed Cohort	Integration: Synchronous Meetings (Cohort) Integration: Social: Cohort = Strong Relational Connection Support: Peer Support - tackling the biggest hurdles together Support: Peer Support- Shared experiences Gauge progress through peers Support: Peer Support - Accountability Support: Peer support- proofreading for each other Support: Peer support: Assignments Suggested Cohort - from 919-989 Benchmarking
		Support: Peer Support- Encouragement

	Support: Peer Support: Types	Support: Peer Support- Emotional Integration: Social- Informal / Outside of classroom Integration: Meeting with peers outside of class Support: Peer Support- Beyond the doctoral program- Personal Support Support: Peer Support - Writing support grammar and APA) Peer Support: Sought to assist with content knowledge Integration: Facilitate through Community Connections (in geographic proximity)
	Orientation Component: Connect with Peers and How	Support: Peer Support- Phone calls Support: Peer support- communication outside of class Support: Peer support- texting Integration: Social: Social Media Support: Peer Support- Social Media Orientation Component: Alumni Panel - Learning from Alumni Integration: Peers: Through common interests Support: Peer Support through discussion boards Integration through synchronous moments Connect through group work More connected to peers than professors
Support: Institutional	Support: Institutional	Support: Institutional - Academic Advising Support Institutional - IT Help Desk Support: Institutional - Wiring Center Support: Institutional- Library Orientation / Online Library Barrier - lack of availability in institutional supports Orientation Components: Online Library Navigation Support: Statistics
Support: Departmental Support	Fit	Barrier- program's content that can't be applied Barrier - program quality Barrier - school would usurp God-given priorities Barrier- sense of calling elsewhere

		Barrier- program Fit Integration: Barrier - values that aren't shared Mistrust of the program / program policies / hidden agenda
	Orientation Components: Clarification of Expectations	Persistence: Barrier- Anxiety at the beginning of the program More difficult than expected Challenge: Dissertation process ambiguous Frustration: Timeliness of obtaining answers Course Guides Orientation Components: Dissertation Process Persistence: Barrier- Unrealistic or unmet expectations regarding the timeline for completion Required more time than expected Timeline Understanding the doctoral process Orientation Component: Watch a dissertation defense
	Tech Assessment	Orientation Component: Acclimating to the Online Environment Skill: Blackboard navigation Skill: Navigating the Online Environment Skills: Online library navigation / use Knowledge: Content - Educational Technology

APPENDIX Q

Institution B Axial Coding

Orientation: Scaffolded Support	Support Timing: Beginning of the program	Skills: Communication Orientation Components: Program Timeline Orientation Timing: Before First course Support needed: Clear communication about program expectations Orientation Components: Practical tips Orientation Components: Other students Orientation Components: Dissertation expectations Orientation Timing: "Two Critical Times"
	Support Timing: Coursework	Support Needed: Course Guides Knowledge: Statistics Knowledge: Content Knowledge Support: Instructor Feedback
	Support Timing: Dissertation	Orientation timing: Research Orientation Components: Dissertation expectations Orientation Timing: "Two Critical Times" Orientation Components: Dissertation process Orientation Components: Dissertation expectations Challenge: understanding the dissertation process Support Needed: dissertation development Support: Institutional dissertation supports
	Support: Timing: The whole program	Support: Needed support changes throughout the degree Socialization to the doctorate Self-care Orientation: Connecting with peers and forming a cohort
Familial Support	Familial Integration	Orientation Components: Familial integration - helping understand process / resources Candid Conversations about program demands Role Conflict Support needed: more familial support

		Challenge: Balancing many roles other than doctoral student
	Support: Familial support	Support: Familial practical support Support: Familial: Giving time needed Support: Familial understanding due to advanced degree Support: Family giving time needed Support: Familial: Childcare Support: Familial: Listening Support: Spouse support
Peer Support	Cohort	Support: Peer support: Celebrating milestones Cohort: Competition - Staying on track-accountability Support: Peer support: Shared experiences Support: Peer Support: Dissertation development Support: Peer Support: Peer reviews Support: Peer support: Program / course questions Integration: Peers (gauge progress / share experiences) Integration: Peers: through group work Support: Peer Support: Writing Cohort
	Integration: Peers	Integration: Peers: Social Media Challenge: Inability for honest informal discussion between students Integration: Peers: Most connected with those met face to face Integration: Shared experiences virtually (ice cream social)
Institutional Support	Institutional Supports	Integration: Institutional: Needed more personal contact / support Support: Institutional: Online library / librarians Support: Institutional dissertation supports Support: Needed for statistics and research resources Support: Institutional - no support for families Integration: familial: some limited desire to integrate family Challenge: Interdisciplinary support Knowledge: Statistics

		Knowledge: Research process/ methodologies Skills: Scholarly Writing
Faculty Support	Chair/advisor support	Knowledge: Knowing Dissertation Topic Early Knowledge: Dissertation / Problem-Question development Integration: Institutional: Advisor
	Faculty Integration	Integration: Faculty: Email Integration: Faculty: Social Media Integration: Faculty: Through asking questions Integration: Faculty: Phone calls Integration: Faculty: Due to shared interests Integration: Connection beyond the program to professional context Immediacy of Application Integration: Faculty: Collaboration
	Skills: Communication	Challenge: Timeliness of feedback Professionalism/Respect Challenge: Barrier - general feedback or lack of feedback Skills: Able to push back Skills: Ask questions Skills: Initiate the need for support (reach out proactively) Skills: Communication
Departmental support	Program Support	Orientation Components: Practical tips Orientation Components: Other students Orientation Components: Dissertation expectations Support needed: Clear communication about program expectations
	Program Fit	Support Needed: Clear communication about program expectations Program fit: research scholar vs. practitioner scholar focus
	Technology Skills	Skills: Word processing Skills: Blackboard or LMS Skills: Online library Skills: Technological Skills

APPENDIX R

Scaffolded Orientation for DE EdD Programs Model

Entry >> **Coursework** >> **Candidacy**

FAMILIAL · PEER · FACULTY · DEPARTMENTAL · INSTITUTIONAL

Entry
- Technology Assessment
- Program Fit Assessment
- Program Expectations & Curriculum
- Communication
- Peer Integration
- Alumni Advice
- Family Orientation

Coursework
- Institutional Resources
- Program Curriculum
- Feedback
- Connections Between Research & Practice
- Faculty Integration
- Peer Integration
- Family Orientation

Candidacy
- Institutional Resources
- Dissertation Process
- Chair & Committee Connections
- Peer Integration
- Alumni Advice
- Family Orientation

APPENDIX S

Audit Trail

Date	Action Taken	Notes
1/10/17	Liberty University IRB approval Received	
1/16/17	Received approval to use Institution A as site one	
1/16/17	Launched Integration & Engagement Survey. Distributed via Institution A's SOE	
1/20/17	Pilot Interview with "Janet"	*3 disposition questions is redundant*
1/20/17	Received approval from Institution B	
1/22/17	Contacted "Mark, Chuck, Tonya, and Burt" to set up interviews	
1/23/17	Interview with "Candace"	*Need to reword Institutional Support Question* | *Challenge: Getting to proposal defense; research consultant, professor support, feedback* | *Skills: Research, Writing, technology* | *Peer support sought, family support significant* | *Family integration at intensives, decline in involvement*
2/3/17	Interview with "Chuck"	*Added 34. Is there anything else we haven't covered today that you think is important that you would tell someone that is just starting out in the program you completed, to help them persist to the end? And if so, what?* | *Self-designed cohort, lack of help resulted in self-direction* | *Challenges- more difficult than expected, longer than expected, unfair grading, blackboard/LMS, feedback* | *Skills: Online library navigation, writing, from work experience* | *Spouse support, significant peer support and celebration of milestones, faculty support-admiration/respect* | *Life-long learner, committed, grit*

2/4/17	Interview with Tonya	Components-- Alumni panel, dissertation defense, scaffolded support - candidacy, real people | Dissertation, balancing family | Skills: Writing, organization, analytical, reading comprehension, work experience | Chair support, deep connection from intensives, peer support minimal, lack of faculty support unless residential, family didn't understand | Persistent, determined, love learning
2/4/17	Interview with Burt	Connection- yes/no (again!); components- clarification of expectations, real people | balancing family | Skills: Leadership, work experience | Proactively sought faculty integration, gauged progress through peers, integrated social media | Love of teaching, goal oriented
2/11/17	Interview with "Doug"	Dissertation overview | Statistics, family didn't understand, needed content knowledge support | Gained by experience, leadership, chair support, significant means of peer support | Intensives, fit/values
2/12/17	Interview with Jake	Content knowledge timing; "Scaffolded support," peer connection | Challenges: Lack of experience, can't apply, balancing family, program fit, distance, feedback, grading, timeliness | Little to none throughout | love of learning, love of teaching
2/17/17	Focus Group with Residential LU faculty	Scaffolded support candidacy, clarify expectations, need changes, needs vary | Finding a chair, writing, library supports, social integration not a focus | Writing, attention to detail, APA, planning, self-direction | Through videos, barriers, shallow relationships | Humility, stability
2/20/17	Interview with Keith	Acclimating to the online environment, LMS, technology skills, identifying credible sources | Coursework challenges | skills due to experience | flexible | Social media | Collaboration, desire for face to face
2/24/17	Interview with Julia	More institutional support, dissertation process, overview, topic, balance, scaffolded support | finding information, LMS, technology, isolation | researching, organization, writing, academic writing | peers through email, social media, in person

	Corresponded with additional willing participants but they were not far enough along in their program. Must wait until they pass comps through Institution B (newer program, smaller student base)	
3/31/17	Interview with Jackie	Socialization, peer support, dissertation, feedback, practical supports, candid conversations about demands, scholarly writing, dissertation topic | Balancing family | proactive, lacked in courses with no video/social media, shared experiences, collaboration | curious, not a quitter
10/11/17	Interview with Amy	Socialization, family integration-- dissertation supports | balancing many roles, struggle to integration, institutional supports | Due to experience, statistics, technology | Peer support on topic, dissertation, proofing; to faculty through phone calls and video conferences
10/20/17	Interview with Jillian	Communication, technology, immediacy of application, faculty connections, dissertation; "two critical times" | Balance, communication | statistics, institutional support, candid conversations | Faculty collaboration, emails, phone calls, in person; peer- cohort/shared experience; family through time, practical support
10/26/17	Focus Group with Institution B	Socialization, support, dissertation milestones, respectful communication, accepting criticism, family support | balancing roles, immediacy of application, role conflict, topic, ability to push back | due to experience, concise academic writing, topic development, word processing, stats, research | Family - honest conversations, role development | social media, phone calls, cohort
11/24/17	Interview with Jonathan	Fit, navigating LMS, website | getting accepted, topic development, staying narrow | experience, technology, writing | Faculty support through family hardships, collaboration, peer support - social media | family understood- prior degrees

11/25/17	Interview with Courtney	Family orientation, dissertation process, expectations | Feedback, research consultant, faculty, time to degree | Writing, statistics, institutional support unavailable | Gained by experience | Peer support- shared experience, biggest hurdles, milestones, spouse, lacking from friends | Not getting discouraged
12/1/17	Rough Draft of Theoretical Model	
12/12/17	Received IRB Approval for Delivery Survey	
12/13/17	Interview with Timothy	Milestones, gauging progress, immediacy, course guides | balancing family, getting to proposal, prioritizing | shallow relationships, more time than expected, lacking peer integration, poor fit, no family involvement, shame | Not getting discouraged
12/18/17	Launched delivery survey	
12/19/17	Interview with Dr. Valentine	Communication, institutional supports, finding a chair, candidacy | proactive, respectful | able to write clearly, APA, academic writing, communication, statistics | immediacy of support
4/1/18	Analyzed delivery survey	
5/1/18	Analyzed Courtney, Jonathan and Dr. Valentine to confirm saturation and delivery survey findings	

APPENDIX T

Integration & Engagement Scores by Participant

Institution A	
Participant 1	2.69
Participant 2	2.89
Participant 3	3.03
Participant 4	3.17
Participant 5	3.31
Participant 6	3.53
Participant 7	3.61
Tonya (8)	3.67
Burt (9)	3.67
Candace (10)	3.71
Participant 11	3.72
Participant 12	3.72
Participant 13	3.78
Participant 14	3.83
Participant 15	3.83
Participant 16	3.86
Participant 17	3.88
Courtney (18)	3.92
Participant 19	3.97
Participant 20	3.97
Participant 21	3.97
Participant 22	4
Participant 23	4.08
Participant 24	4.14
Participant 25	4.19
Participant 26	4.22
Participant 27	4.22
Participant 28	4.25

Participant 29	4.28
Pilot (30)	4.31
Participant 31	4.36
Participant 32	4.39
Chuck (33)	4.42
Participant 34	4.56
Participant 35	4.56
Participant 36	4.58
Participant 37	4.61
Doug (38)	4.78

$M = 3.94$
$SD = 0.48$

Institution B	
Julia (39)	3.42
Jillian (40)	3.61
Participant 41	3.69
Amy (42)	3.75
Participant 43	3.89
Jackie (44)	3.92
Keith (45)	3.97
Participant 46	4.17
Jonathan (47)	4.33

$M = 3.86$
$SD = 0.26$

Delivery Survey Results

Component	Timing	Delivery Method
Fit Assessment	Entry- 61%	Blended- 53%
	Coursework- 18%	Online- 41%
	Candidacy- 15%	*(Synchronous-23.5%*
	Other- 6%	*Asynchronous-17.5%)*
		Other- 6%
Technology Assessment	Entry- 85%	Online- 70%
	Coursework-12%	*(A-29% S-41%)*
	Candidacy-3%	Blended-24%
		In Person-6%
Program Expectations & Timeline	Entry- 85%	Online- 62%
	Coursework- 6%	*(A-38% S-24%)*
	Candidacy- 6%	Blended- 35%
	Other (All stages)-3%	Other- 3%
Broad Dissertation Overview	Entry-50%	Blended- 44%
	Coursework-35%	Online- 41%
	Candidacy- 9%	*(A-26% S-15%)*
	Other (All stages) -6%	In Person-12%
		Other- 3%
Detailed Dissertation Process & Dissertation Timeline	Entry- 21%	Blended- 53%
	Coursework- 44%	Online- 36%
	Candidacy- 32%	*(A-24% S-12%)*
	Other- 3%	In Person- 9%
		Other- 3%
Alumni Panel	Entry- 21%	Blended- 53%
	Coursework- 32%	Online- 35%
	Candidacy- 41%	*(A-3% S-32%)*
	Other (All stages)- 6%	In Person- 9%
		Other- 3%
Social Media	Entry- 53%	Online- 61%
	Coursework- 38%	*(A-35% S-26%)*
	Candidacy- 6%	Blended- 35%
	Other- 3%	Other- 3%
Respectful & Proactive Communication	Entry- 76%	Online- 59%
	Coursework- 21%	*(A-38% S-21%)*
	Candidacy- 3%	Blended- 41%
Family Orientation	Entry- 74%	Online- 67%
	Coursework- 12%	*(A-41% S-26%)*
	Candidacy- 3%	Blended- 21%
	Other- 12%	In Person- 6%
		Other- 6%
Institutional Writing Supports	Entry- 71%	Online- 67%

	Coursework- 26%	*(A-38% S-29%)*
	Candidacy- 3%	Blended- 29%
		In Person- 3%
Course Guides	Entry- 62%	Online- 66%
	Coursework- 38%	*(A-44% S-32%)*
		Blended- 24%
Content Knowledge Remediation	Entry- 21%	Online- 56%
	Coursework- 76%	*(A-32% S-24%)*
	Other- 3%	Blended- 38%
		In Person- 6%
Familial Connection / Integration	Entry- 44%	Online- 50%
	Coursework- 26%	*(A-35% S-15%)*
	Candidacy- 12%	Blended- 32%
	Other- 18%	In Person- 6%
		Other- 12%
Understanding Feedback	Entry- 30%	Blended- 48%
	Coursework- 42%	Online- 45%
	Candidacy- 18%	*(A-30% S-15%)*
	Other (All stages)- 9%	Other- 6%
Peer Connection / Support	Entry- 36%	Online- 48%
	Coursework- 48%	*(A-30% S-18%)*
	Candidacy- 12%	Blended- 45%
	Other (All stages)- 3%	In Person- 3%
		Other- 3%
Contextual Application	Entry- 12%	Blended- 48%
	Coursework- 70%	Online- 48%
	Candidacy- 15%	*(A-33% S-15%)*
	Other (All stages)- 3%	Other- 3%
Faculty Connection	Entry- 9%	Online- 60%
	Coursework- 79%	*(A-39% S-21%)*
	Candidacy- 12%	Blended- 39%
Alumni Panel (Late Stage Persistence)	Entry-3%	Blended- 48%
	Coursework- 33%	Online- 39%
	Candidacy- 61%	*(A-21% S-18%)*
	Other- 3%	In Person- 12%
Late Stage Cohort	Coursework-33%	Online- 51%
	Candidacy- 64%	*(A-33% S-18%)*
	Other- 3%	Blended- 45%
		In Person- 3%
Comprehensive Exam Overview	Entry- 12%	Online- 48%
	Coursework- 48%	*(A-33% S-15%)*
	Candidacy- 36%	Blended- 42%
	Other- 3%	Other – 6%
		In Person – 3%
Chair & Committee Member Process	Entry- 18%	Blended- 45%
	Coursework- 52%	Online- 45%

	Candidacy- 27%	*(A-33% S-12%)*
	Other- 3%	In Person- 6%
		Other- 3%
Chair Communication & Ability to Push Back	Entry- 6%	Blended- 48%
	Coursework- 33%	Online- 45%
	Candidacy- 61%	*(A-36% S-9%)*
		In Person- 3%
		Other- 3%
Institutional Dissertation Supports	Entry- 42%	Online- 54%
	Coursework- 24%	*(A-41% S-13%)*
	Candidacy- 27%	Blended- 44%
	Other- 6%	Other- 3%
Family Orientation (Late Stage)	Entry- 30%	Online- 48%
	Coursework- 9%	*(A-36% S-12%)*
	Candidacy- 45%	Blended- 39%
	Other- 15%	Other- 12%

APPENDIX V

Orientation Handout for Institutions

Components for a Scaffolded Orientation to Distance Education EdD Programs

Entry Orientation

☐ **Technology Assessment**
- *University website*
- *LMS navigation & interaction*
- *Email*
- *Word processing*
- *Remediation resources*

☐ **Program Fit Assessment**
- *Blended or Synchronous Delivery*
- *Assess student and institution values/beliefs*
- *Assess program outcomes and student goals*
- *Identify program focus (research-scholar vs. practitioner-scholar)*

☐ **Program Expectations & Curriculum**
- *Degree scope and sequence*
- *Expected timeline for program milestones (i.e., choosing a topic, choosing a chair, proposal defense) and completion*

- *Broad dissertation process & timeline overview*
- *Identifying a topic*
- *Dissertation examples*
- *Proposal and/or dissertation defense example*

☐ **Communication**
- *Blended Delivery*
- *How to communicate in DE*
- *Guidelines for respectful communication*
- *Guidelines for proactive communication (including late policies, extension requests, etc.)*
- *Phone or videoconference policies and request process*

☐ **Peer Integration**
- *Institution provided forums*
- *Safety & respect guidelines*
- *Using social media for socialization*
- *Cohorts*

☐ **Alumni Advice**
- *Blended Delivery*
- *Recent completer experiences*
- *Practical tips*
- *Q & A*

☐ **Family Orientation**
- *Program expectations & timeline*
- *Practical tips*
- *Discussion prompts*
- *Resources for families*

Coursework Orientation

☐ **Institutional Resources**
- *Grammar & APA*
- *Academic writing guidelines*
- *Institutional writing supports*
- *Peer writing groups/support*
- *Institutional remediation supports*
- *Remediation support request process*
- *Statistics & research supports*
- *Education for non-education backgrounds*

☐ **Program Curriculum**
- *Detailed scope & sequence*
- *Individual course outcomes & anticipated workload by week*

☐ **Feedback**
- *Blended Delivery*
- *Purpose of feedback*
- *Accessing feedback*

- *Interpreting constructive feedback*
- *Respectful push back/continuing the conversation*

Connections Between Research & Practice
- *Blended or Online*
- *Sharing personal contexts*
- *How to apply learning to practice*
- *Integration of contextual application (course assignments or discussions)*

Faculty Integration
- *Faculty spotlight videos*
- *Faculty bios/CV*
- *Tips for continuing faculty relationships after course completion*
- *Collaboration opportunities*

Peer Integration
- *Assistance forming peer groups if needed*
- *Social media or discussion forum for cohorts/peer groups*
- *Guided discussion prompts (throughout degree)*
- *DE institution facilitated connection opportunities ("ice cream social")*
- *Regional connection opportunities*
- *On campus connection opportunities*

Family Orientation
- *Communication with families (blog, newsletter, email).*
- *Social media for families*
- *Family events (housing, meal, and activities)*
- *Support suggestions (throughout the degree)*
- *Family support resources*

Candidacy Orientation

☐ **Institutional Resources**
- *Library resources/orientation*
- *Research coaching*
- *Writing support*
- *Statistical support*

☐ **Dissertation Process**
- *Blended Delivery*
- *Detailed dissertation process (prospectus, defenses, IRB, etc.)*
- *Dissertation milestone timeline*
- *Proposal & dissertation defenses*
- *Example dissertations*

*Online delivery suggested unless noted

☐ **Chair & Committee Connections**
- *Blended or Synchronous Delivery*
- *Choosing a chair*
- *Committee guidelines and selection*
- *Communication guidelines*
- *Faculty bios/CV*

☐ **Peer Integration**
- *Assistance forming if needed*
- *Social media or discussion forums for cohorts*
- *Guided discussion prompts*
- *On campus connection opportunities (i.e., writing retreats)*

☐ **Alumni Advice**
- *Blended Delivery*
- *Recent completer experiences*
- *Practical tips*
- *Q & A*

☐ **Family Orientation**
- *Dissertation expectations & timeline*
- *Celebrating milestones*
- *Practical support tips*
- *Specific social media forums for families of candidates*
- *Resources for families*