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A Cohort, is a Cohort, is a Cohort…Or is it?

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This paper presents findings from a multi-year qualitative study based upon life-history narratives of women pursuing doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership. This paper focuses on findings specific to educational cohort models, and suggests that perhaps, at least for women, naturally emergent cohorts – born of relationships of choice – may be more consistent with women's lived experience, and therefore more relevant, empowering, and sustaining of their educational journey. These findings contribute to increased understanding of women's experiences individually and collectively in pursuit of graduate education and thereby inform educational leadership programming regarding the value, role, design, and implementation of educational cohort models.

Introduction and Background

This paper is about cohort education. The original inquiry did not start out that way, but that is, at least in part, what emerged. Two different and originally seemingly unrelated background aspects provided the foundation for this paper: (a) personal experience as chair of an Educational Leadership graduate program, and (b) membership in the Sisters cohort. The more recent of the two (experience as chair) precipitated a reflective inquiry of cohort education generally and a reconsideration of a personal cohort experience (i.e., the Sisters).

In the fall of 2001, I began a three-year term as chair of an educational leadership department. The department offerings ranged from a master's program in education administration to an EdD with concentration areas in educational administration (K-12 emphasis), higher education administration, and instructional technology. Up to that fall, all programs had operated using a relatively rigid or "closed" (Maher, 2001, p.3) educational cohort model, that is, students were recruited from various regional areas, admitted as an identified group, and provided with a specific rotation of courses over a defined period of time (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Maher, 2001, 2005). As of that fall, virtually all the cohorts had run their curricular course, and the educational leadership program

had over 100 graduate students who had fallen out of synch with their cohort course rotations. As the new chair, I found myself faced with students clamoring for course accommodations, curricular adaptations, and program of study exceptions in an attempt to bring closure to what had become for them a frustrating degree pursuit with limited post-cohort support. What went wrong?

Related Literature

In graduate education, retention and completion pose significant challenges, with as many as 50% of doctoral students failing to complete their programs (Denecke & Frasier, 2005; Golde, 2005). According to Wenniger (2005), "a disproportionate number of them [are] women" (p.2). In a paper that reviewed theories relating to graduate study, Tokuno (2008) noted: "Where conflict between ongoing social roles and the need to be a student arise, obstacles may occur" (p. 30). This may be particularly true and problematic for women, who are more likely than their male counterparts to be older, returning to school as part-time students, married, and parents with home and childcare responsibilities (Sax, 2008).

Studies on program completion show that peer relationships, in the form of meaningful professional and personal connections, are associated with increased motivation for learning, persistence in the face of challenges, and success in program completion (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989 as cited in Barnett & Muse, 1993; Dorn, Papalewis, & Brown, 1997; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Miller, 2007; Milstein & Henry, 2000, 2008). Relative to educational leadership programs in particular, Dorn et al. (1997) stated: "educators who work together as a team earning doctorates benefit from the experience, share those benefits with their workplaces, and most importantly tend to find the motivation to complete their doctorates" (p. 305).

In an effort to be more responsive to changing student demographics (i.e., increases in working-adult student populations), and positively impact retention and completion, undergraduate and graduate programs across a variety of disciplines have increasingly adopted an educational cohort model characterized by group admissions and lock-step curricular course progression (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1996; Freiberg-Svoboda, 2003; Harris, 2006-2007; Reynolds, 1997; Seifert & Mandzuk, 2006). Educational cohort models (ranging from flexible open-cohort formats to restrictive closed-cohort formats) are described and defined as purposefully grouped students entering and pursuing a program of study together, characterized by social and cultural processes, shared experiences and interactions, collective efforts, and mutual commitment to an educational goal (Horn, 2001; Maher, 2001, 2005; McPhail, 2000; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Yerkes, Basom, Barnett, & Norris, 1995).

Cohort Benefits

A number of studies have reported on the benefits of cohorts in enriching members' learning

experiences (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Bratlien, Genzer, Hoyle, & Oates, 1992; Harris, 2006-2007; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2001, 2005; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Reynolds & Herbert, 1995; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995). According to Barnett and Muse (1993), cohort students experienced improved academic performance related to enhanced feelings of support and connection, as well as increased exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives. Similarly, Bratlien et al. (1992) noted that among cohort members, camaraderie lent "the support and motivation needed to strive and reach for higher expectations" (p. 87). Norris and Barnett (1994) cited empirical research on university-setting cohorts, indicating that cohort members developed strong interpersonal affiliations, experienced "a reduced sense of loneliness" and reported receiving "psychological support from group members" (p. 10). Research by Yerkes et al. (1995) and Teitel (1997) indicated that cohort students and faculty may experience a greater sense of interpersonal connection, belonging, and increased collaboration.

Barnett and Muse (1993) also cited benefits associated with cohorts deriving from group member affiliations and networking for career opportunities and advancement. Similarly, research by McPhail (2000) and Horn (2001) stressed the value of the cohort experience relative to its real-world group and interpersonal dynamics, and the ability to generalize and transfer cohort experiences into the work setting. Beyond these benefits, research by Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, and Norris (2000), identified faculty and programmatic cohort advantages, citing increased program delivery efficiency and enrollment management. Specific to graduate program challenges regarding retention and completion, in a study titled, *Cohesion or Collusion: Impact of a Cohort Structure on Educational Leadership Doctoral Students*, Hampton Wesson, Oleson Holman, Holman, and Cox (1996) observed cohort benefits in terms of program persistence and completion, particularly in relation to facilitating the dissertation process. In a study of the leadership programs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Teitel (1997) added to the list what he called unexpected yet "substantial impacts" such as "deeper discussions of sensitive issues in class," as well as "increases in the students' cohesiveness and voice in program planning" (p.8); further, Barnett and Caffarella (1992) pointed out that cohorts are excellent venues through which to teach and learn about diversity issues, especially when diversity is purposefully maintained in the group composition.

Cohort Drawbacks

Despite the benefits described, drawbacks to cohort models and participation have been noted. Barnett and Muse (1993) cited the following challenges: (a) faculty uneasiness with increased voice associated with students who view themselves as and in a collective, relative to perceptions of program/teaching quality and relevance of course materials; (b) impact of personal issues on group morale and

performance; and (c) competition and jealously between cohort and non-cohort students, and one cohort to another. Likewise, according to Basom, Yerkes, Norris, and Barnett (1996), (a) cohort students may feel increased "pressure to produce" from supporting agencies (i.e., schools, districts, etc.), as well as other cohort members; (b) faculty may feel threatened by perceptions of overly "empowered" cohort students (p. 107); (c) tensions may arise or exist between cohort groups or groups of cohort and non-cohort students; and (d) faculty may perceive or experience inordinate time demands associated with launching and maintaining a cohort program thereby reducing time, energy and resources for scholarship. Research by Barnett et al. (2000), identified cohort disadvantages associated with perceptions of structural and organizational rigidity (i.e., lock-step course sequencing and curricular rotations). Maher (2005) noted that cohort student empowerment can be both an advantage (i.e., increased student voice) and disadvantage (faculty pressure to alter course or cohort requirements in response to collective student initiatives); further, Teitel (1997) portrayed the introduction of a cohort model as a potential source of tension on and among the existing structures related to the traditional teaching and learning processes, the nature of the role of faculty members, and the purposes of the education program.

Educational Cohort Models and Educational Leadership

Cohort models have been employed in educational leadership preparation programs for some time with fairly consistent "benefits and drawbacks" evidenced across programs (Basom et al., 1996; Horn, 2001, p. 319). Regarding the student cohort experience and relevance to educational leadership, Horn (2001) stated:

> In cohorts, students must struggle with all of the issues that are inherent in the workplace, the school community, and in society in general. In a cohort, students struggle with personal issues, issues of difference, and power arrangements within the cohort and between the cohort and the preparation program. (p. 318)

Zhao, Bently, Reames, and Reed (2002) concurred, particularly with regard to the evolving role of educational leadership and the educational leader. Zhao et al., described the cohort experience and the community of learners that emerged as a "collaboration of comrades [and ultimately] friends [who worked] with each other to establish their identity within the community as contributors" (p. 17). Basom, Yerkes, Norris, and Barnett (1995) added that the cohort model presents opportunities, and challenges, as well as great potential in its capacity to provide space and opportunity for the development of learning communities and to give

students the chance to explore their leadership potential.

According to Milstein (1992), the widespread use of the cohort model in educational leadership / administration programs can be traced to a Danforth Foundation initiative designed to improve university educational administration programs—principal preparation. This initiative proposed the cohort model as the educational delivery design of choice to enable students to function as members of a learning community. There are wide variations in the design and practices of cohorts across educational administration programs (i.e., certification, master's, doctoral) and universities (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Milstein, 1992; Teitel, 1997). Despite noted differences, Barnett and Caffarella (1992) offered the following as defining elements in terms of successful cohort structures (i.e., design and practice):

- Admission/selection criteria that aims at increasing the diversity of the group and at selecting qualified candidates;
- Instructional delivery mechanisms that include: (a) initiation activities aimed at encouraging interactions among cohort members and establishing a climate of trust and support; (b) opportunities for reflective practice that focuses on common issues among the cohort members; (c) individual learning opportunities, such as selecting their own mentors, identifying personal learning goals, and flexibility in how to meet program goals; and (d) facilitating long term involvement through activities that connect new and old cohort members and sustain the evolving connections among members beyond graduation; and
- Responsiveness to adult learner characteristics, in particular, acknowledging learner experiences, involving learners in the design of the learning process, and addressing the non-cognitive aspects of the learning process—such as pacing, meaningfulness, and motivation.

Given the benefits identified, despite noted drawbacks, the literature presents a strong argument in favor of cohort model education programming, particularly and especially when cohort delivery models are designed inclusive of the key elements identified by Barnett and Caffarella (1992). That said, how is it that a clearly defined and structured educational cohort model, applied across the master's through doctoral levels, seemingly failed over 100 graduate students, a disproportionate number of them women?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This paper (a) explores the concept of cohort education through the

lived experiences and educational journeys of seven women who pursued doctoral degrees in educational leadership, between 1993 and 2000; and (b) contrasts the success of what became a naturally emergent cohort to the apparent failure described in the introductory case scenario; further, based on the findings presented, the researchers suggest that although cohort connectedness has many benefits, the lock-step rigidity that typifies closed-cohort structures (Note: the cohort described in the introductory scenario adhered to a closed-cohort structure) is incompatible not only with women's lived experiences and their ways of knowing, being, and relating (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Britzman, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Hill Collins, 1997, 2000; Madsen, 2008), but also, perhaps more generally with the overly occupied lives of the adult education professionals Educational Leadership programs attempt to serve (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Madsen, 2008; Milstein, 1992; Teitel, 1997).

This study is important because it describes a successful and naturally emergent cohort in the context of women's lived experiences and demonstrated resiliency throughout their educational journeys (Christman & McClellan, 2008, Jones, 2003; Madsen, 2008); and, from that grounding supports implementation of an alternative to the rigid closed-cohort structure that often typifies Educational Leadership program delivery (Milstein, 1992). It is also important because, as asserted by Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998), "We need and deserve our stories. They ground our understanding…in culture and context, elements frequently missing in mainstream literature" (p. 3). In particular, because the narrative voices that underlie this study represent the voices of women from diverse personal, professional, and ethnic/national backgrounds and experience, the emergent themes and associated understandings offer "an [important] alternative view…steeped in a rich array of cultural pasts and encompassing various ethnic" backgrounds (p. 4).

This study invites researchers and professionals interested in cohort education effectiveness to reflect on the conditions that facilitated the Sisters cohort's success: openness, flexibility, and membership choice—or, as Hill Collins (1997) termed them, "rights of mobility" (p. 375)—among a group of students pursuing a program of study characterized by social and cultural processes, shared experiences and interactions, collective efforts, and mutual commitment to an educational goal. Through this exploration, this study has the potential to increase our understanding of women's experiences, individually and collectively, in pursuit of graduate education, and thereby help inform educational leadership programming with regard to the value, role, design, structure, and implementation of cohort models.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative methodology following a life-history/case-study participant-

researcher design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Cresswell, 2007; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The study was grounded in both a constructivist paradigm that holds that the purpose of inquiry is to gain understanding of the various constructions people have of their world, an approach that is especially important for research on women and other under-represented groups (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987), and standpoint theory—a feminist epistemology that makes explicit the value of the relational perspective and collective vantage point of the other (e.g., marginalized and oppressed groups) (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; Hill Collins, 1997, 2000). Specifically, this study approached the exploration of the cohort education experience from the standpoint of both the women individually and as the Sisters cohort collective, for whom, according to Hartsock (1987), "the position…is structurally different from that of men…[with]…the lived realities of women's lives [being] profoundly different from those of men" (p. 158). As such, this study does not attempt to situate findings within an empirical frame, but instead attempts to understand and study women's experiences "on their own terms" (Lyman, Ashby, Tripses, 2005, p. 7) and then use that understanding to inform conceptions of educational programming/cohort model education.

Participant-Researchers/Cohort Members

According to Harding (1987), "While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences, so that women can understand themselves and the world, can claim virtually no history at all" (p. 8). Harding went on to reject efforts to "make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible" (p. 9) and stressed the value of "locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter…the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher…placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint" (pp. 8-9). This study embraced this approach. The primary and secondary investigators were both researchers and members of the Sisters cohort (i.e., participant-researchers) and experientially located within "the same critical plane as the overt subject matter" (p. 8).

The participants were seven women who pursued and completed doctoral degrees in educational leadership between 1993 and 2000; they voluntarily self-identified as Sisters cohort members, that is, they exercised their "rights of mobility" and choice to associate and identify themselves with and as the Sisters cohort (Hill Collins, 1997, p. 375). This is an important distinction between the Sisters' naturally emergent cohort and the rigid closed-cohort structures typical of educational leadership/administration programs (Milstein, 1992).

During the course of the study, one participant assumed the role of primary researcher, another as secondary researcher. In its final stages, one participant withdrew reducing the

group size to six. Table 1 displays the participant demographics.

Table 1: ***Cohort Member Demographics***

Participant	Age: 1993-2000	Race	Country of Origin	Partnership Status	Parental Status (# children in the home)
Cyd	35-42	Caucasian	US	Domestic Partnership	0
Don	32-39	Caucasian	US	Domestic Partnership	2
Ell	34-41	Caucasian	US	Married	3
Mo	48-55	Caucasian	US	Married	1
Tia	26-33	Mid-Eastern Arab	Lebanon	Married	1
Wan	Undisclosed	African	Kenya	Married	0

In addition to the demographics noted, these women's life-histories reflect rich circumstantial and experiential diversity, ranging from early village life in Kenya colored by memories of "bad boys" and what came to be known as the Mau Mau Rebellion (Wan), to growing up during the Lebanese Civil War (Tia), to middle-class Americana in the 1950s and 1960s (Mo), to family-values rooted in self-sufficiency and faith (Ell), to growing up in generational poverty immersed in homelessness and despair (Don), to a life frustrated by learning disabilities and dominated by athletic achievement (Cyd). These very different women found themselves in the same place (attending a program of study together) at the same time (1993-2000) doing the same thing (sharing experiences and interactions, collective efforts, and committing to an educational goal—pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership).

Instrumentation/Procedures and Design / Analysis

The study employed a loosely structured informal interview protocol to guide the unfolding of each participant's life-history around the recurrent theme of educational advancement, culminating in a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Data were collected in the form of first person narratives (life-histories). Interviews were taped in various locations (participant homes) over the course of approximately two years (1995-1997). Taped narratives were transcribed by a person external to the study, then reviewed and edited for accuracy by

each participant. Employing a general inductive method, the participant-researchers (i.e., the primary and secondary investigators) read and reread the narrative data noting themes and patterns (Thomas, 2006). Finally, during two multi-day retreats (fall 2004 and winter 2005), participants engaged a member-checking process to verify the data and emergent themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). It is important to note that despite careful attention to qualitative research design methodology and analysis, and human subjects approval, this study and the implications of the findings derived are limited by the small sample size and unique interpersonal relationships among the participants and participant-researchers (Berg, 2001; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Findings

The emergent themes from this study provide insight into two main areas: (a) the lived experiences / educational journeys of the women participants, and (b) the natural emergence of what came to be called and known as the Sisters cohort. To that end, the findings are reviewed relative to themes associated with the participants' lived experiences / educational journeys (i.e., challenges and evolving educational goal pursuit) and the emergent Sisters cohort. The lived experiences / educational journeys reflect the participants' life paths up to their entry into the doctoral program. Cohort emergence moves from that background to and through their experiences in the educational leadership doctoral program.

Lived Experience/Educational Journey

"Life is not a straight line, it weaves back and forth, back and forth" (Wan, 2005). In 2008, Susan Madsen published a book titled *On Becoming a Woman Leader: Learning From the Experiences of University Presidents.* In this book Madsen notes that what was particularly noteworthy was not the differences among the ten women university presidents she interviewed, but their commonalities. She stated: "One of the surprises for me…[was]…the similarities among such a diverse group" (p. xiv). Likewise, in this study, despite differences in age, abilities, race/ethnicity, cultural background, and life circumstances, these women's journeys revealed commonalities associated with facing and overcoming the challenges of competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours as well as an evolving rather than purposeful education goal pursuit.

Challenges: Competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours. Among these women, like the women in Madsen's (2008) study who "did not plan their legacies" (p. xv); and engaged "nonlinear or indirect paths" (p. 141), the Sisters' norm was not lock-step progress from one degree to another, nor was their collective seven year doctoral education journey characterized by smooth and systematic progress. For these women, their educational journeys' were characterized by fits and starts in

response to competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours.

For Cyd, early memories of school were far from reinforcing; an inability to concentrate, and letters and numbers that she just could not seem to consistently put in the right place, made school a place of frustration and failure. Largely due to a long undiagnosed learning disability, despite ultimate attainment of a doctoral degree, Cyd's academic journey was often one of aggravation and disappointment. In contrast, in the athletic arena she piled success upon success and flourished. Through dogged persistence over the course of 20 years (1976 to 1996) Cyd obtained a bachelor's degree, then a master's, and ultimately a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Amidst careers in coaching, teaching, and athletic administration; marriage, divorce, marriage again, and moves from one side of the country to the other, for Cyd, life has not been a straight line.

Ell's educational progression from high school to community college, to bachelor's and master's degrees, progressed over time during the course of marriage, parenthood, family relocations, and job changes. Throughout it all, Ell's priorities were clear: her decision to get married and start and care for a family were and remain her main focus. School was fit in around the margins. Amidst a family move from Arizona to Oregon, troubled financial times ending in a prolonged and painful personal bankruptcy, family-centered decision making, and resiliency in the face of constant change (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Jones, 2003), Ell's educational journey spanned over 30 years. Ell commented as follows:

> After our financial crisis in 1987, I decided that I would never again let a job rule how I connected with my kids. It has always been important that my kids and family come first. I deliberately sought opportunities that allowed me to be available and have flexibility in my schedule. If one of my kids was sick and needed me, I worked at home that day. If I wanted to attend a school concert or go on a field trip in the middle of the day, I did so, working my meetings and activities around it….That flexibility was and is key for me, and for the life we chose as a family.

Mo's seemingly cavalier joy-ride through late adolescence and early adulthood epitomized how many viewed the culture of American youth in the 1960s. Graduating from high school, moving in and out of college, jobs, and ski adventures, Mo was, in her own words, "focused on now." As a working adult, she drifted from job to job, juggling family, work, and school.

Tia lived much of her childhood through early adulthood (7-23 years old) in Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War; according to Tia: "War is a strange thing. It can become almost completely normal, overtime, almost routine. We went to school, played in the street, visited friends and family. We lived our

lives." She continued, "in a war, life becomes a series of next steps…long-term dreams being luxurious secrets too embarrassing to admit having."

For Tia, completing her bachelor's degree during a time of civil war, enduring the unexpected and early death of her father, navigating and declining proposals for marriage in a culture literally screaming for her to conform, completing her master's degree, teaching, marrying on her own terms, and then relocating to the United States makes characterizing her journey as one filled with interruptions, distractions, and detours an understatement.

Wan's life weaves a cross-cultural, cross-continental tapestry rich in color and texture, complete with obstacles and challenges, starts, stops, and shifts in direction. Wan grew up in what many would characterize, at least at the time, as a third-world country—Kenya. Even so, despite poverty and hardship, Wan speaks of valuing education, and her early memories of school reflect both pain and pride:

> We did not have birthday parties. We do not mark the years that way. There are, however, big events that mark time, comings of age. One is starting school. That is a momentous occasion. My parents, especially my mother, who had never gotten more than two years of education, wanted us to have the highest education possible. I was 10 or 11 years of age when I started boarding school. I remember a teacher in my second year who taught geography, and, as we used to say in our language, liked to *open and close school with me*, which meant he would beat me. He beat me on the back with a small stick. I remember it clearly…a long thin switch. Over time I began to have pains and got scarred on my back. I don't remember a reason for the beatings. I wasn't a dull student.

According to Wan, school was and is very different in Kenya than in the United States:

> I don't remember reading stories in primary school. We told stories, but didn't read them. We are an oral culture, and this aspect was visible throughout our schooling. I cannot even remember how I learned to read. Nor do I remember practicing to read. I have no real memories of books with words. I think that is one reason why my journey has been a long one.

Don's all too turbulent life of poverty has been fraught with difficulties and disappointments. Don dropped out of high school to get married. She struggled to have children and was forced by cruel realities and twists of fate to endure the death of her first child just days after her troubled birth. She endured a second pregnancy miscarriage, and, years later, the tragic death of her teenage daughter just

months shy of starting out on her own to pursue a college degree. In addition to this, most of Don's brothers have spent time incarcerated, some much of their lives. She has been married, divorced, and homeless. She has had to lie and steal to put food in the mouths of her children. For Don, education not only was not important, it was, if not silly, certainly frivolous, at least until it became a means to an end she valued—taking care of her children:

> No one in my family had ever completed high school or even knew someone personally who had. Education wasn't seen by people we knew as something of value. We never knew anyone who benefited from education. Education was a diversion, a distraction, an impediment to work. Education got in the way of earning money, and without money we went hungry.

The participant demographics, combined with their life journey descriptions, reveal experiential commonalities in terms of challenges, competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours. Time-after-time, for these women, challenges associated with competing priorities and expectations conflicted with and took precedence over educational attainment. Role responsibilities associated with being daughters, wives, and, for most of the women, mothers, exerted a constant press on their time, energy, and personal and professional space. These commonalities were and are consistent with the broader literature specific to the challenges and barriers that can and do disparately impact women's educational pursuits and experiences (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Madsen, 2008; Sax, 2008).

Evolving rather than purposeful education goal pursuit. None of the women purposefully set out to seek and complete a doctoral degree. Instead, the idea of pursuing graduate education evolved over time, sometimes prompted by "influential individuals" (Madsen, 2008, p. 153), teachers/professors, advisors, and parents, as a series of next steps fit in around the margins of already overly occupied personal and professional lives (Hill Collins, 2000; Madsen, 2008). According to Madsen (2008):

> People often don't know they have *ability* unless they are told and encouraged by others. People often don't display *desire* unless others help them see the options. People often don't focus their *drive* unless they learn from following someone else. And people don't always have *opportunities* unless they are provided them by others. (p. 153)

Similarly, for the women in this study, their perceptions of educational ability, desire, drive, and opportunity were influenced by others.

For Cyd, while on some levels a college education was a given in terms of household conversation, no one in her immediate or even extended family had ever earned a college degree, let

alone a graduate degree. Reflecting on her decision to pursue a doctorate, Cyd said:

> At the time I was working full-time, coaching, and teaching at a local community college and part-time at the university. I don't remember having any focused plan or purposely pursuing a particular educational or professional goal. It seemed I'd always been in school and I was certainly used to doing more than one thing at a time.

According to Ell:

> Coming from an academic household, I've always been drawn to education. From the time I was little. Early on it never occurred to me that I could be anything else. I just knew I'd become a teacher**.** To me a teacher was the best thing you could be, unless of course you were a principal, but even then you had to be a teacher first.

After completing her associate's and then bachelor's degrees, Ell got pregnant and then began master's level course work in adult education. Over the course of three pregnancies culminating in three pre-school age children, Ell "worried about how to juggle being a wife, a mom, a teacher, and still continue my master's program." Over time, with her children well into their teen years and her career in education spanning teaching and administrating in both public and private school settings, Ell began work on a second master's degree.

> One afternoon my advisor asked if I was planning to get my doctorate and queried why I was working on a second master's degree. Once again, after much conversation and thought, I decided to walk through yet another new door. It didn't occur to me that applying for the doctoral program was a hard thing to do, that it was extremely competitive, or that some people didn't get in. I also didn't explore other degree options or do any comparisons with other university programs. I filled out the application materials, went to the interview, and upon acceptance started taking classes. It wasn't a planned sort of thing—more [like] an ongoing educational progression, with one step simply leading to the next.

Regarding her decision to go to school, Mo said, "I don't remember why exactly I went to college. I had no idea what I wanted to major in, no long term dreams or goals." After starting college, stopping, and starting again, working, traveling, moving away from home and then back, Mo successfully completed her bachelor's and master's degrees. She reflected on her decision to pursue a doctoral degree as follows:

> As I was finishing my master's program [one of my] professors

> asked me if I'd ever considered getting my doctorate. No, it wasn't something I'd considered before, but as he talked on I remember thinking, "I'm used to being busy, and, that sounds pretty good."

For Tia, like Cyd and Ell, despite a cultural heritage deeply differentiated by sex, attaining a college degree was a given:

> I don't remember ever "deciding" to go to school, it was just assumed that I would. Both my parents believed this was the minimum. The discussions during high school were not about if, but where, what was the "best" university to attend.

From a little girl tortured in boarding school, Wan went on to college in Uganda. After attaining her bachelor's degree and working as a teacher and later boarding school head mistress, she began attempts to pursue a master's degree abroad, first in Canada, and then after getting "locked out" due to financial limitations, she was granted admission and secured funding to attend school in the United States. Ultimately, completing her master's in education, and later, after going home to Kenya and struggling to find fulfillment working again as a head mistress, Wan returned to the United States to begin her doctoral degree in educational leadership:

> Coming here, it is a big story, a story that encompasses breaking away from big responsibilities at home and work, a story about getting a man in my life, who shortly after became my husband, and a story about restarting my education after many years absence from attending class. It is a complex story. driven by change, life is not a straight line, it weaves back and forth, back and fourth, but I will start with the specifics. I had always wanted to do my master's, a doctorate had never occurred to me, but a master's seemed attainable. Besides knowing I wanted something different from my past life, I chose [university] largely because of where I was living. I'd grown accustomed to the…area, I had a comfortable living arrangement, I knew my way around, and it seemed to make sense to me.

Don's first positive motives regarding education revolved around a desire to take care of her children. Reflecting on support she received from the *Women in Transition* social services program, and her decision to pursue a GED, she had this to say:

> I wrote in my diary in January 1986, "I'm gonna try and get one of those GEDs. Then, I will be SOMEBODY and I'll be able to take care of my kids!" I went back to school and within two months finished three and a half

> years of high school. From there with the mentoring of *Women in Transition* staff, I applied for financial aid, and started school at …Community College.

Building on that momentum, driven by a desire to "take care" of her children, and supported by family and social service agency personnel, Don took a next educational step:

> By this time in my life, I had met people who were doing jobs that I was interested in, and I had learned that they had at least a four-year degree. I remember thinking, I'm done with the associate's and it wasn't so bad. Maybe I could get a bachelor's degree. As I neared completion of my bachelor's degree, people told me: You could get a master's degree." I graduated with honors and a master's in communication. By that time, I didn't need anyone to tell me I could or couldn't earn a doctorate, I knew I could.

As the data above reveal, for these women, the idea of pursuing graduate education evolved over time, and did not represent a singularly focused pursuit. Instead, the quest for doctoral degree presented itself one step at a time, prompted and supported by influential others, and fit in within the existing context of these women's lives (Hill Collins, 2000; Madsen, 2008).

The Emergent Sisters Cohort

Despite widely different lived experiences, socio-cultural backgrounds, race/ethnicity, and country of origin, the women in this study found themselves together, each pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Although they shared most of their classes, and started the program within a term of each other over the course of the 1992-1993 academic year, they were not purposefully grouped together (i.e., they were not formally admitted as a cohort, nor was their progress through coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation research prescribed by programmatic design or structure). At that time their doctoral program did not adhere to a rigid or closed-cohort structure. Even so, by the end of their first academic year, a naturally emergent cohort had taken root and grown, ultimately becoming self-sustaining. According to these women, within and through this group's shared experiences, collective efforts, and social and cultural engagements, they developed and supported a mutual commitment to the educational goal of successfully completing a doctoral degree, culminating in a 100% retention and completion/pass rate, a collective identity (i.e., the Sisters), and friendships that persist even today (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 1995; Basom et al., 1996; Bratlien et al., 1992; Hampton Wesson et al., 1996; Harris, 2006-2007; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2001, 2005; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Reynolds &

Herbert, 1995; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995; Zhoa et al., 2002).

Shared experiences and collective efforts. When asked when and how the Sisters began, all agreed that shared experiences, interactions, and collective efforts, especially as they emerged through the year-long (3-term) research course sequence, marked the beginning of their togetherness (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Bratlien et al., 1992; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995). Specifically, the Sisters noted that the research course sequence, commencing during the first year of their doctoral work, presented a series of challenges that generated opportunities for team work, peer coaching, and group solidarity (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989 as cited in Barnett & Muse, 1993; Dorn et al., 1997; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Miller, 2007). Remembering those early connections,

Mo stated:

> Two of the Sisters were very good at math and came into the course with a lot of statistical knowledge. The rest of us struggled and formed a bond because of our common need for help. By the end of the three terms we had established what became an unofficial cohort and started developing what evolved into a deep and lasting interpersonal commitment.

Similarly, Cyd said:

> Tia and I had extensive math and statistics backgrounds…[the others]…did not. Connecting was alien to me. I wasn't a "group" kind of gal. Even so, we partnered up, and alternately Tia and I began tutoring the others. From that start grew a collaborative, supportive bond of trust, mutual respect, and friendship.

Don remembers the research course experience and how the Sisters rallied around her in an act of solidarity and collective voice:

> One of my strongest memories was a midterm statistics test. I studied every night. I did flash cards. I got tutoring help from the Sisters (at that point we were not the Sisters, we were classmates). The night of the test I opened it and froze. I couldn't answer the questions. It was a nine page blur of numbers and equations. I left the room and ran to the bathroom sobbing. I remember thinking: "Okay, that's it. You have been found out. You don't belong here. Someone like you does not get a doctorate." All of my old self-doubt returned. Then I heard people coming and went into a stall. It was two of my soon to be sisters and they were fuming! I remember hearing: "It's not fair for him to test on material he has not covered!" Then I heard them say: "Let's go confront him" and they left. I slowly walked out and dried my tears. I walked

> into the class just in time to hear that the test was being thrown out.

From that shared first-year course experience, the Sisters bond took root and became a source of comfort, connection, and motivation, supporting each of the women through the completion of the doctoral program requirements (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989 as cited in Barnett & Muse, 1993; Dorn et al., 1997; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Miller, 2007). According to Don, "when people have an experience together that is out of the norm, they bond more deeply. For me it started with the trauma of statistics…for us more broadly I think it was the comps and the dissertation." She went on to say:

> With the Sisters help, I made it through the research sequence and then together we faced the comprehensive exams. We made a pact to support each other through the comps. We formed study-buddies, had dinners, and went on walks with flashcards. Each pair of Sisters took a particular area that we would be tested on and did a comprehensive overview of the material. Then we met to share what we had learned.

Mo, like Don, reflected on comprehensive exams and the powerful role the Sisters, as comrades, friends, and community contributors, (Zhao et al., 2002) played. According to Mo:

> The doctoral program comprehensive examinations provided a challenge we all faced. We formed study teams to help each other. The study teams worked. We all passed the comprehensive exams, a pass rate (100%) not at all common in doctoral work.

Preparing for and taking the comprehensive exams proved to be a turning point in the emergence of the Sisters cohort. From that point on, the women labeled their togetherness and began to self-identify (Hill Collins, 1997) as the "Seven Sisters for Success" extending their mutual promise of support.

> [Having passed comps]…we extended our pact of support to include completion of the dissertation. We met for dinner and gave progress reports on how we were doing. We shared our lives and how hard it was to deal with work, families and trying to complete. (Don)

As the aforementioned makes clear, for these women, key junctures in their doctoral journey provided space and opportunity for seeding and sustaining peer relationships grounded in meaningful personal and professional connections (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989 as cited in Barnett & Muse, 1993; Dorn et al., 1997; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2005; Miller, 2007). Establishing, as per Bennett and Shayner (1998, cited in Madsen, 2008),

> …an educational environment that [was] simultaneously supportive and challenging, demand[ing] the intellectual rigor necessary to develop the capacity for value formation and commitment, and provid[ing] the structures that encourage independence, strength, self-confidence, and autonomy, as well as caring and interdependence. (p. 91)

These junctures included the year-long research course sequence, which took place during their first academic year of course work, the comprehensive exams, and the dissertation.

Social and cultural processes and engagement. The Sisters reflections on various social and cultural events provide powerful evidence of individual and group growth, exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives, and bonding solidified through these experiences (Horn, 2001; Maher, 2001, 2005; McPhail, 2000; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Yerkes et al., 1995). According to Ell, "Early adventures to exotic restaurants and one another's homes turned in time to long sessions of deep dialogue about anything and everything. Their opinions and passions broadened my own, and had a powerful impact on my life." Similarly, Mo said:

> I remember conversations about how diverse our group was and how that diversity provided a richness and appreciation of different perspectives. Although our differences were in many ways wonderful, it was because we were, and are so different that it took a conscious effort one everyone's part to make the group work.

Mo went on to say, "We built the relationships by working together and socializing. We shared life's tragedies and challenges, and deepened our relationship and commitment to each other."

Tia recalled:

> The Sisters were an amazing and timely gift from life. It was like finding "home" in a foreign land. The Sisters were a source of unlimited emotional support, and for a long time the source of energy that fueled my determination to finish my Doctorate.

Likewise, Wan reflected on the pull of social connection across cultural divide:

> Given where I was coming from, I felt very much like an outsider, constantly asking myself "can I really fit?" The Sisters pulled me…sometimes with the force of muscle, drawing me in and drawing me out. Engaging me in class projects, research and study; engaging me interpersonally in the lives we were leading. Reluctantly, I gave in and gave over, because of wanting to be human.

And, similarly, Cyd commented on the transformative power of social connection and cultural processes shared among women: "Through the Sisters, contrary to what I have believed much of my life, I came to learn, live, and appreciate the bonds woven through experiences shared among women. I came to really value women…and my world view changed."

Barnett and Caffarella (1992) pointed out that cohorts provide powerful venues through which members can and often do gain insights about diversity issues. This benefit was experienced by these women, as were benefits associated with positive connections and pro-social bonding, nurturance, and support (Basom et al., 1995; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Horn, 2001; Jones, 2003; Maher, 2001, 2005; McPhail, 2000; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Yerkes et al., 1995).

Mutuality of purpose. Finally, as evidenced by their individual and collective persistence and 100% degree completion success, Ell's comment, noting what she called "mutuality of purpose," highlights the culminating cohort definitional element: a mutual commitment to an educational goal (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Bratlien et al., 1992; Dorn et al., 1997; Hampton et al., 1996; Harris, 2006-2007; Lawrence, 2002; Maher, 2001, 2005; Miller, 2007; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Reynolds 1997; Reynolds & Herbert, 1995; Teitel, 1997) as evidenced through these women's experience: "I think it was less about immediate chemistry and more about shared experience and mutuality of purpose" (Ell). Wan recounts the Sisters presence in the moment of her goal attainment:

> The day of my dissertation defense was a big event. I remember being in a room, hearing my own voice as if it belonged to someone else. Although I was not at all comfortable, I knew I was in a safe place, that I would not be criticized, and that any input I received would be constructive. There were many supportive faces in the room, the Sisters among them. Through their soothing, supporting, smiling faces, the Sisters made me feel secure, able and proud; and I began to feel calm and confident, my voice gaining strength and momentum.

Discussion and Implications for Action

Lived Experience/Educational Journey

Virginia Woolf's original lecture on women and fiction, *A Room of One's Own,* targeted women of genius and the central thesis: "All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own…and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman…unsolved" (Woolf, 1929, p. 4). Although Woolf's lecture focused on the ability to write fiction, the broader implication suggests that having surplus resources in terms of exceeding the basic needs of living, and creating time and space to nurture

creativity and indulge self-development are luxuries quite often beyond the scope of women's lived experience. The findings in this study contemporize and validate Woolf's thesis and mirror the journeys of many women as they demonstrate resiliency, navigating, and coping with a life not only characterized by competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours (Astin & Leland, 1991; Faludi, 1991; Furchtgott-Roth & Stolba, 2001; Lerner, 1992; Madsen, 2008; Margolies-Mezvinsky & Feinman, 1994; Richards-Hope, 2003; Simon Rosenthal, 1998; Woods, 2001) but articulated within organizational (e.g., educational) structures that, by design, reinforce the experiences and lived realities of the "ruling gender" (Harding, 1987, p. 185). The life-histories shared lay bare the realities of overly occupied lives, with time and space for educational advancement fit in around the margins (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Jones, 2003).

The Emergent Sisters Cohort

According to Basom et al. (1996), "Because a successful cohort takes on the features of an effective learning group, common purpose, social interaction, and individual and group development become important issues for faculty preparing school leaders using that approach…. Such a group does not develop accidentally" (p. 101). Or can it? These findings indicate that not only can a cohort emerge naturally as an effective learning group, but that cohort connections born of relationships of choice, with group membership exercised through and demonstrative of "rights of mobility" (absent rigid lock-step curricular programming and dictate) can be, and is, especially for women, empowering and sustaining (Hill Collins, 1997, p. 375).

Although not yet self-identified as the Sisters, Don's description of shared experiences and collective efforts associated with the research course sequence portrayed the beginnings of increased voice and empowerment, noted in the literature as typified by cohort students (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Basom et al., 1996; Maher, 2001, 2005); further, like the cohort experiences noted in the literature, the Sisters relationship seemed to grow and gain strength not only through experiences and efforts associated with the doctoral program, but through interpersonal social and cultural processes and engagements reaching beyond the academic arena (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Horn, 2001; Norris & Barnett, 1994).

Similarly, consistent with the work cited, the Sister's camaraderie and interpersonal connection became an increasingly important and sustaining source of peer support and motivation, a driving force and binding glue, in terms of goal commitment and attainment (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Bratlien et al., 1992; Cesari, 1990; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Dorn et al., 1997; Harris, 2006-2007; Jones, 2003; Lawrence, 2002; Milstein & Henry, 2000, 2008; Morris, Rogers, & Ketelhut, 2004; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995). "The Sisters have been and are important. Watching folks

complete and thinking, I can do this, I need to do this. I can be next, was a powerful motivator" (Mo).

These data indicate that the natural cohort that emerged afforded these women many of the cohort benefits noted in the literature, that is, enhanced feelings of motivation, support, empowerment, and voice (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Bratlien et al., 1992; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Jones, 2003; Maher, 2001, 2005; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Reynolds, 1997; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995), exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives, as well as interpersonal and professional networking and connection (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Horn, 2001; McPhail, 2000), and most notably 100% doctoral program persistence and completion. In contrast to the literature, however, drawbacks, including the impact of personal issues on group morale and performance, pressure to perform, competition and jealously between cohort and non-cohort students (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Barnett et al., 2000; Hampton et al., 1996; Teitel, 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995) were not things these women noticed or experienced. The authors' suggest that it was the nature of the Sisters cohort as a membership affiliation based on choice that distinguished it from more rigidly prescribed closed-cohort structures in terms of drawbacks, as well as in terms of contributing to these women's success (i.e., persistence and pass-rate).

Implications for Action—What Went Wrong?

The life-history narratives revealed complex and often convoluted life and education journeys characterized by competing priorities, interruptions, distractions, and detours, or, as Christman and McClellan (2008) put it, "women living lives on the barbed wires" (p. 3). As such, the emergent narrative themes tell a story of resiliency among women who transformed their lives through their "ability[ies] to bounce back from adversity, learn new skills, develop creative ways of coping, and become stronger" (Milstein & Henry, 2008, p. 18), and, as a result, persevered to completion of a doctoral degree. Their naturally emergent cohort experience not only demonstrated the key elements of a successful cohort structure (e.g., group diversity, interactive activities and a resultant climate of trust and support, program goal pursuit flexibility, evolution of long-term connections among members—despite varied completion timelines, and responsive cohort member support in terms of adult learner characteristics), as espoused by Barnett and Caffarella (1992), but also enhanced "protective factors" (Werner & Smith, 1992 in Jones, 2003) and supported the creation and sustenance of an educational culture of resiliency in terms of (a) positive connections and pro-social bonding, (b) nurturance and support, (c) purposes and expectations, and (d) meaningful participation (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Jones, 2003; Milstein & Henry, 2008).

As such, perhaps for these women, if not adult students more generally, these findings imply that the overly occupied lives lead, often embedded within contexts of personal and professional marginalization (Lyman et al., 2005), are incompatible with the programmatic and curricular rigidity that often typifies lock-step, closed-cohort models (Maher, 2005). Because of this, these findings suggest and support a reframing of the problem away from the adult students pursing educational attainment and the assertions of their "idiosyncratic or patterned individual shortcomings" (Barnett & Muth, 2008, p. 2) and toward conceptions of educational leadership programming design and practice (i.e., rigid/lock-step cohort models). Blackmore (2002), cited in Lyman et al. (2005), troubles this notion in the following: "Mainstream discourses continue to construct women as a problem for educational leadership rather than problematizing the concept of leadership itself, relative to dominate power and gender relations" (p. 23). We concur, and assert that when considered relative to educational leadership programs, the apparent failure presented in the opening scenario derived from the structure of the cohort programming employed.

These data lend support to the value of cohorts and show the power of connections forged and sustained through shared experience, collective efforts, and social and cultural processes, as well as the tangible benefits, in terms of program persistence and completion, associated with peer connection and support, as experienced in, through, and perhaps because of, the natural cohort that emerged. For these women, the shared class experiences and educational milestones (i.e., comprehensive exams and dissertation work) provided the opportunity for connection through proximity and mutuality of purpose within a curricular program of study characterized by openness and flexibility in terms of admission, course sequence, and full-time/part-time registration requirements—elements put forth by Barnett and Caffarella (1992) as key to successful cohort design and practice, and contrary to the lock-step rigidity typical of closed-cohort models (Milstein, 1992).

With the above in mind, regarding the benefits that can derive from cohort model educational structures/programming, the apparent incompatibility—perhaps even marginalization—institutionalized through rigid/closed-cohort structures, and the adult students (male and female) who engage educational leadership programs within them, the authors assert that while in this instance the emergent Sisters cohort functioned to support member success, we cannot afford to leave the possibility of successful cohort/learning community emergence to chance., especially given the dynamic that groups, by their definitional nature, delimit inclusion and exclusion, and with that carry the potential to marginalize some while empowering others. That said, the question becomes: How might potentially compatible emergent cohort

connections be purposefully designed and implemented?

These data revealed key junctures of connection among and between members of the Sisters cohort: the year-long research course sequence, which took place during their first academic year of course work, the comprehensive exams, and the dissertation. With this in mind, these findings suggest the need for graduate programs to modify and broaden cohort structures and strategically create space and opportunity for student connection and engagement at the three critical points in time, identified by Tinto (1993) as cited in Tokuno (2008) as:

> (a) transition, which occurs in the first year and involves the student establishing membership in the academic and social communities of their doctoral program; (b) candidacy, which involves the acquisition of knowledge with a culmination in the comprehensive examinations; and (c) dissertation, which requires completion and defense of the dissertation. (p. 36)

Applying Tinto's model to these data, programmatically seeding and nurturing cohort emergence might be facilitated through the creation of a three-part seminar series strategically scheduled during the first year of course work (i.e., transition), the semester/term prior to comprehensive examinations (candidacy), and during the first semester/term of dissertation work (dissertation). This seminar series could and should be synchronized by and with individual student program progress, and not restricted to artificial group admission/enrollment collectives (i.e., cohorts). The design and implementation of a recurring seminar series, characterized by fluid enrollment boundaries and aligned with actual student progress, would create space, opportunity, and mutuality of purpose—seemingly necessary ingredients for successful cohort design and natural cohort emergence. To that end, seminar curricula might be organized as follows:

First year transition. This first seminar course could be designed to serve as an initiation or orientation into doctoral study generally and educational leadership specifically. Assignments might focus on selected readings, guided reflections, and dialogue, with special attention paid to social justice awareness, advocacy, and service learning as education mediums to increase community connection, enhance academic learning, and facilitate education for democratic citizenship (Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, & Associates, 2005).

Candidacy. The second seminar course could be designed to support and facilitate the comprehensive examination preparation and dissertation initiation processes. Assignments might include: (a) preparing a comprehensive examination study plan, with associated text references, to guide the comprehensive exam preparation process; and (b) creating a dissertation timeline map, in coordination with the student's advisor,

outlining her or his anticipated dissertation process from inception to defense. Map benchmarks might include anticipated proposal presentation (semester/month), research procedures (flow-chart and time-line), and anticipated defense (semester/month).

Dissertation. The third and final seminar course could serve to support students engaged in dissertation research and defense preparation. Assignments might focus on dissertation benchmarks (i.e., proposal preparation, human subjects, conducting research, and dissertation defense preparation), with students encouraged to self-select into small groups with designated meeting times both during and outside of regularly scheduled classes.

Concluding Thoughts

The findings that emerged regarding these women's educational journeys and their unlikely arrival at the same place and time in pursuit of a doctoral degree in educational leadership:

- Support the cohort structural elements espoused by Barnett and Caffarella (1992) and suggest an alternative to educational cohort structuring away from closed-cohort, lock-step curricular programming and toward a more open and flexible model, wherein connection opportunities are facilitated via proximity and mutuality of purpose, absent rigid group admission/enrollment, and course sequencing requirements; and
- Contribute to increasing our understanding of women's life experiences individually and collectively, particularly as these experiences impact and often interfere with their pursuit of graduate education.

As such, these findings have the potential to help inform educational leadership programming with regard to the value, role, design, and implementation of educational cohort models.

According to Wisker (1996) as cited in Madsen (2008): "The knitting of life and study are essential in many women students' lives. The cohesion and coherence of the two helps produce a framework for learning and development" (p. 118). Cohort model education programming is especially well suited to provide options and opportunities to knit life and study. Overly occupied lives, rife with competing priorities, distractions, and detours are not likely to become less so. Increasingly, the socio-cultural personal and professional fabric within which individuals and organizations weave their existence is likely to become more, not less complex. As such, it is and will become even more important for cohort model programs to maintain a degree of freedom, and be (a) structurally designed around, and purposefully make use of, key junctures in the

doctoral program journey (Tinto, 1993); (b) centered around activities and themes that are meaningful to cohort members—students and faculty (Barnett & Muth, 2008); and (c) orchestrated to "harness the power of the cohort model …[by rethinking]… organizational structures, the preparation and support we give to students and faculty, the balance of power and authority between students and faculty, and the very meaning of leadership and community" (Teitel, 1997, p. 13).

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