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First-Generation Doctoral Male Students' Experiences of Doctoral-level Online Courses

Terry Richard Farris
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Terry Farris

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Walden University

2016

Abstract

First-Generation Doctoral Male Students' Experiences of Doctoral-level Online Courses

by

Terry R. Farris

MBA, Colorado Technical University Online, 2005

B.S., Fairmont State University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

February 2016

Abstract

Recent research suggests a lack of information about the experiences of first-generation doctoral men who have moved from ground-based education to online education, which can negatively impact program completion for this group. This collective case study investigated the experiences of a group of first-generation doctoral male students attempting doctoral-level online education for the first time, in particular, to identify and develop a deep understanding of their experiences in interacting, participating, communicating, and relating with colleagues and instructors. The conceptual frameworks of the study were connectivism, experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and constructionism. Data were collected through participant questionnaires, Skype interviews, and blogs, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, Quicktime software, and NVivo to develop themes and codes that were intuitively constructed by the researcher. The study results provided evidence of limited interaction, participation, communication, group work or collaboration, and personal relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education at the university. Study findings suggest needed areas of improvement for universities, especially as they relate to students feeling more connected to their colleagues and instructors. The study findings can inform the design of practice that impacts retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students who have transitioned from ground-based education to online education.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Terry R. Farris, Sr., and my grandmother, Betty Farris. My father was not able to see the man I have become; however, I know he would have been proud. My grandmother played an important role in my life, one that I cannot express in one or two short sentences. It was her ability to see the good in individuals and her honesty that helped build my character. I love them and miss them, and to them say thank you for looking down on me from above.

Also, I cannot forget my wife, Kelli Farris, and children Alex, Sarah, and Abby. They have continued to stick by me through this journey. There have been times where I was up and down, suffered trials and tribulations, and had periods of doubt that I could complete this educational journey. Regardless of those times, the ladies in my life kept pushing me forward, not allowing me to quit. I love these ladies and do not know where I would be without them in my life.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	5
Problem Statement	7
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions.....	11
Conceptual Framework.....	12
Connectivism	12
Experiential Learning.....	13
Symbolic Interactionism	14
Constructionism	15
Nature of the Study	15
Definitions.....	16
Assumptions.....	22
Scope and Delimitations	23
Limitations	24
Significance.....	25
Summary.....	26
Chapter 2: Literature review	28

Literature Search Strategy.....	29
Conceptual Framework.....	31
Connectivism	31
Experiential Learning.....	35
Symbolic Interactionism	37
Constructionism	38
A Collective Case Study	39
Online Learning	41
First-Generation Students	44
Definition and Description.....	45
Challenges for First-Generation Students.....	46
Adult Learners	48
Challenges to Persist in Degree Attainment	49
Ground-Based Versus Online Success and Academic Achievement	51
Blending of Online and Ground-Based Education	52
Interaction	53
Interaction with Colleagues	55
Interaction with Instructors	56
Interaction with the Instructor Improves Learning	58
Participation	59
Participation with Colleagues	61
Participations with Instructors	61

Communication.....	63
Communication with Colleagues.....	64
Communications with Instructors.....	64
Relationships.....	66
Relationships with Colleagues.....	67
Relationships with Instructors.....	67
Summary and Conclusion.....	68
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	71
Research Design and Rationale.....	73
Qualitative Approaches Considered.....	76
Role of the Researcher.....	79
Methodology.....	82
Participant Selection Logic.....	83
Instrumentation.....	85
Researcher-Developed Instruments.....	89
Recruitment, Participation, and Two-Step Data Collection Process.....	92
Data Analysis.....	95
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	99
Ethical Procedures.....	100
Summary.....	102
Chapter 4: Results.....	103
Setting.....	104

Demographics	105
Data collection	106
Participant Selection	106
Solicitation Procedure	106
Instrumentation	107
Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire	107
Blog Entry	107
Skype Interview	108
Experience with Instructors Questionnaire	108
Data Analysis	108
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	110
Results.....	110
Results from Initial Data Collection	111
John.....	112
Interaction with Colleagues	117
Interaction with Instructors	116
Communication Differences - Online Versus Ground-Based	119
Communication with Colleagues	120
Communication with Instructors.....	121
Participation with Colleagues	123
Participation with Instructors	124
Relationships with Colleagues	125

Relationships with Instructors.....	127
Jacob	128
Interaction with Colleagues	129
Interaction with Instructors	131
Communication Differences - Online Versus Ground-Based	132
Communication with Colleagues	133
Communication with Instructors.....	134
Participation with Colleagues	135
Participation with Instructors	135
Relationships with Colleagues	136
Relationships with Instructors.....	137
James.....	138
Interaction with Colleagues	139
Interaction with Instructors	141
Communication Differences - Online Versus Ground-Based	143
Communication with Colleagues	144
Communication with Instructors.....	145
Participation with Colleagues	146
Participation with Instructors	146
Relationships with Colleagues	148
Relationships with Instructors.....	149
Joseph.....	150

Communication Differences - Online Versus Ground-Based	151
Communication with Colleagues	152
Communication with Instructors.....	153
Results from Follow-Up Data Collection	153
Follow-Up Email Questions	154
Follow-Up Skype	
Interview.....	155
First-Generation Doctoral Male	155
Learning Style.....	157
Educational Environment.....	159
Collaborative Experiences	160
Interaction	162
Lack of Interaction with Colleagues and Instructors	163
Differences in Interaction Between Online and	
Ground-Based Education	165
Participation	166
Limited Participation with Colleagues and Instructors.....	167
Differences in Participation Between Online and	
Ground-Based Education	169
Communication.....	171
Lag in Communication with Colleagues and Instructors.....	172
Relationships.....	174

Limited Relationships with Colleagues and Instructors	175
Differences in Collaborative Experiences Between Ground-Based and Online Education	178
Frustrations in Online Education as a First-Generation Doctoral Male	180
Review on the Conceptual Framework of the Study as it Relates to the Findings.....	181
Connectivism	181
Experiential Learning.....	183
Symbolic Interactionism	185
Constructionism	185
Summary	186
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	195
Interpretations of the Findings	201
Limitations of the Study.....	202
Recommendations.....	203
Implications.....	205
Conclusion	207
References.....	210
Appendix A: Consent Form	253
Appendix B: Experiences with Colleagues Questionnaire	256
Appendix C: Weekly Blog Questions.....	261
Appendix D: Skype Interview	262

Appendix E: Experiences with Instructors Questionnaire	263
Appendix F: Additional Questions Sent to Participants Via Email.....	267
Appendix G: Follow-Up Skype Interview	269
Appendix H: Detailed Outline of the Research Questions and the Triangulation Points Associated with the Research	271
Appendix I: Microsoft Excel Field Notes – How I Planned to Capture Information from Participants in Microsoft Excel.....	275

List of Tables

Table 1. Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, 2002-2013.....	10
Table 2. Information Collected Through Each Method Chosen for Triangulation (Primary Research Question).....	90
Table 3. Information Collected Through Each Method Chosen for Triangulation (Online versus Ground-Based)	91
Table 4. Information Collected about Collaboration (Online versus Ground-Based)	92
Table 5. Characteristics of Participants	105

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Correlations of Interaction, Participation, Communication, and Relationships in Online Education – Farris Model.....	70
Figure 3.1 Research Questions Compared to Questions in Questionnaires, Blog, and Skype Interview	88
Figure 4.1 Interaction and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study	165
Figure 4.2 Participation and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study	171
Figure 4.3 Communication and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study	174
Figure 4.4 Relationships and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study	177

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As a first-generation doctoral male student moving to online education, I found my online education lacked interaction, communication, participation, and relationships with colleagues and instructors. I conducted this study to review the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students who moved from ground-based education to online learning to finish their educational journey. The research conducted aimed to provide information about the impact that other first-generation doctoral male students experienced in relation to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. Additionally, I examined the differences in these experiences versus previous ground-based educational experiences. It was important to understand how these experiences affect first-generation doctoral male students so that faculty, administrators, and researchers can make adjustments to the educational process for this group, as well as others with similar backgrounds.

For the purposes of this study, it was important to choose a cohort that I could relate to, so I chose first-generation doctoral male students. I defined first-generation doctoral male students as individuals from whom neither parent has completed an advanced college degree or shared the same experiences in a doctoral level program (Choy, 2001; Forbus, et al., 2011). Research collected suggests that first-generation students take a more pragmatic, serious approach to college education (Cole & Barber, 2003; Forbus, et al., 2011). When compared to continuing-generation students, they are less likely to envision graduate school and they are less equipped to undertake graduate

education in face-to-face or online education compared to continuing-generation students (Cole & Barber, 2003; Forbus, et al., 2011). Jaeger, Tuchmayer, and Morin (2014) suggested that doctoral level education must contain instructor support to help students build a sense of community and not be solitary. The cohort chosen for this study falls within the information mentioned above. Because online learning was a significant part of this study, it was important to understand why the participants chose to move to online education.

The population for this study was comprised of men who made the decision to move from ground-based education to online education to complete a doctorate. Online learning allows instructors and developers to design a space where students can collaborate, learn skills and develop patterns in a virtual environment to gain knowledge and complete his/her education (Garrison, 2009). However, the online environment has not been a positive experience for some men. According to Young and McSparran (2001), male students have expressed feelings of difficulty with the self-paced study of online learning, which may suggest that the format for online learning is not conducive to the learning styles of men. The information gathered from this research provided insight about first-generation doctoral male students and how this cohort interacted, participated, communicated, and related with colleagues and instructors in an online learning environment. The research also provided insight on how the experiences of the participants differed from their previous ground-based educational experiences.

Paloff and Pratt (2007), and the University of Louisville (2011), suggested that students in online education are open-minded about sharing life, work, and educational

experiences as part of the learning process, able to communicate through writing, are self-motivated and self-disciplined, and are able and willing to commit four to fifteen hours per week, per course; however, they must have the outlet to communicate with others to help the process along. Gibbings, Lidstone, and Bruce (2010) suggested that students expect to learn some technical skills; however, they expect to be exposed to learning experiences that provide opportunities to discover information about how to learn. Participants in this study reflected on experiences in their online endeavor compared to their ground-based educational experiences.

Sullivan (2001) conducted a study on gender differences in the online classroom. His research suggested male students like the flexibility offered through online coursework. Findings also suggested significant differences between the way male students and female students identified strengths and weaknesses in online learning including flexibility, face-to-face interaction, discipline, and motivation (Sullivan, 2001). Weaver-Hightower (2010) found that a male's perspective is needed to help build college communities and build diversity. Evidence gathered in this study has suggested that online learning hasn't been able to answer, or provide evidence that supports the notion that men are receiving the support necessary to be successful in online learning. The information included within this research provided information to members of the online community about online learning versus ground-based learning for this cohort of first-generation doctoral male students. Allen & Seaman (2008) suggested that online learning is a lasting form of education that will endure time. Jones, Kupczynski, and Marshall (2011) also suggested that there has been a broad movement toward online instruction.

Developments in delivery methods have allowed members of leadership at online and ground-based institutions to consider methods and strategies to meet the growing need for online instruction (Jones, Kupczynski, & Marshall, 2011). Although literature research has suggested a need for additional online instructors because of the success of online learning, it did not change the results of this study, which suggested that limited and lacking interaction between this cohort with colleagues and instructors, among other items studied, could hinder the success and continued attendance of first-generation doctoral male students in online education.

This research touched on one aspect of online education and one population, first-generation doctoral male students, of students and was intended to seek additional knowledge about the population, particularly how they described their experiences with interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors online. Researchers can use the material gathered in this study to seek additional knowledge about how men can succeed in online learning, especially if changes are made to the processes mentioned in the preceding sentence. Additionally, researchers can use the information collected to understand how first-generation doctoral male students online experiences differed from ground-based education in order to make a concerted effort to improve the transition from ground-based education to online education, or build features into the online classroom that simulate ground-based learning (i.e. adding Skype or video tutorials to classes).

The problem viewed in this study was a lack of information about first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education

and the practices used in the online classroom. The chapter then transitioned into the purpose and nature of the study. I established research questions, along with the conceptual framework(s) of connectivism, experiential learning, symbolic interaction, and constructionism. There were sections devoted to the assumptions, definitions, scope and delimitations, and significance of the study on first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education. Finally, the chapter ended with a summary of the ideas presented in chapter 1, and an introduction to chapter 2.

Background

Because this study examined the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned to online education from ground-based education, it was important to review evidence that was written about the delivery models. For example, Bristow, Shepherd, Humphreys, and Ziebell (2011) provided a questionnaire to 800 students to assess student self-ratings of their experiences with online courses and perceptions of these courses. Findings suggested there were neutral feelings toward online course experiences (Bristow, et al., 2011). Men that responded to the study suggested that online courses were less difficult than traditional courses (Bristow, et al., 2011). Interestingly, 32% of the participants in the study believed online courses did not provide a good learning opportunity, and online learning was not a good educational choice (Bristow, et al., 2011).

Holmberg-Wright and Wright (2012) completed a quantitative study on undergraduate and Masters in Business Administration students' perceptions of online

learning versus ground-based learning using a series of survey questions. When given the option, students that had taken online courses stated they prefer ground-based courses, rather than online courses. However, these students still considered taking online courses (Holmberg-Wright & Wright, 2012). In a related point, Holmberg-Wright and Wright (2012) suggested that students viewed interaction with their instructors and classmates as an important part of the learning experience in an online and ground-based environment.

Pentina and Neely (2007) found that students taking ground-based courses have a higher perception of their performance, and a higher sense of social character, than students taking online courses. Additional results from the study reported the following dynamics with online and traditional students, that educational methods are based on their needs and strengths (Pentina & Neely, 2007). Zacharis' study (2010) produced similar findings, and it was noted, students chose between online or ground-based classes on needs (e.g. job schedules, family obligations, learning and studying preferences, and technologies understood).

In 2013, Kuo, Walker, Belland, and Schroder conducted a study, using a sample consisting of undergraduate and graduate students, to determine student satisfaction in an online learning environment. The study looked at student satisfaction about interaction and other predictors. Findings from the study suggested that two types of interaction, learner-instructor interaction and learner-content interaction significantly impacted student satisfaction (Kuo, et al., 2013).

The examples mentioned in the preceding paragraphs provided information from studies that were conducted in online education and ground-based education. Although

there was evidence found that is related to various aspects of online education and ground-based education, there was limited research on first-generation doctoral students that are male. This study provides material about a specific group, first-generation doctoral male students that chose online education over their previous ground-based educational experiences. The preceding examples discussed the views of students who completed education up to a Master's degree. The information gathered did not provide viewpoints of students enrolled in Doctoral level programs, which was the population chosen for this study. There was little information located that specifically targeted first-generation doctoral male students that moved from ground-based education to online education. The lack of information mentioned in the preceding paragraphs assisted with the development of the problem statement, which is described in the following section.

Problem Statement

Literature suggested that there have been studies conducted using first-generation students and men in online education. There have also been studies describing the experiences of students within online education. However, there was a lack of research about the population chosen for this study. There was a gap in the literature that explored how first-generation doctoral male students note their experiences; through interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors, in online education. Additionally, there was a gap in the literature that explores the preceding areas versus previous ground-based education. With the increased popularity of online education, from the instructional and administrative perspectives, there was information

gathered in this study that suggested why this population chose this method of learning, and how educational processes can improve for this population.

When men and/or first-generation students decide to attend online courses, there are factors that may assist with understanding why they chose online education. Additionally, there are factors that may assist with understanding how they interact, participate, communicate, and create relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. For example, Speirs Neumeister and Hebert (2003) reported on the perspectives of a gifted student that had originally been labeled an underachiever. Through this research, the student was goal-directed; self-regulated, and liked to do things his way (Hebert & Schreiber, 2010). Studies have shown that men have more positive attitudes, higher ability, and use computers more often than women; however, external motivation, lack of teacher involvement, and multiple levels of community keep men from succeeding and doing as well in online education, compared to their female counterparts (Howard, 2010; Kay & Lauricella, 2011). Greener (2008) suggested that although online education offers a different course delivery model, monitoring and assessment are still necessary. In addition, little is known about the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time in comparison to previous ground-based education experiences. With the gap in literature, additional information collected within the study added to existing knowledge about the experiences and perceptions of the population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this collective case study was to research the experiences of a group of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time, versus previous ground-based education, and to describe and develop a rich understanding of their experiences in relation to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships, with colleagues and instructors. In 2010, Brian Howard conducted research on the experiences of women in a virtual learning environment. His findings suggested participants wanted an appropriate amount of external motivation, teacher involvement, and multiple levels of the community. The experiences of the women within Howard's study prompted the idea to research a specific group, first-generation doctoral male students that moved from ground-based education to online education. With the increased popularity of online education, from the instructional and administrative perspectives, there was information gathered from this population that can be used to improve the educational process for individuals that move from ground-based education to online education. Through the research conducted, it was determined that online learning continues to increase in popularity and as a valuable education model.

Gubernick and Ebeling (1997) suggested that 15% of U.S. Institutions of higher learning offered online courses in 1996. As of 2001, just five years later, 56% of colleges and universities offered online courses (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). An Online Learning Consortium report reviewed 2,500 U.S. colleges and universities between 2002 and 2013 found that enrollment in online courses increased from 1.6

million enrollments in 2002 to 6.1 million enrollments in 2010 (an increase of almost 5 million enrollments) to 7.1 million enrollments in 2012 (see Table 1). However, in 2013, the overall increase in online enrollments was only 3.7 percent year over year (due to a 7.9 percent decrease in Private For-Profit online enrollment). 2013 was the first year that a decrease in online enrollment occurred since tracking this data.

Table 1

Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions (Including Online Courses)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Enrollment</u>	<u>Annual growth rate total enrollment</u>	<u>Students taking at least one online course</u>	<u>Online enrollment increase over previous year</u>	<u>Annual online enrollment growth rate</u>	<u>Online enrollment as % of total enrollment</u>
Fall 2002	16,611,710	NA	1,602,970	NA	NA	9.6%
Fall 2003	16,911,481	1.8%	1,971,397	368,427	23.0%	11.7%
Fall 2004	17,272,043	2.1%	2,329,783	358,386	18.2%	13.5%
Fall 2005	17,487,481	1.2%	3,180,050	850,267	36.5%	18.2%
Fall 2006	17,758,872	1.6%	3,488,381	308,331	9.7%	19.6%
Fall 2007	18,248,133	2.8%	3,938,111	449,730	12.9%	21.6%
Fall 2008	19,102,811	4.7%	4,606,353	668,242	16.9%	24.1%
Fall 2009	19,524,750	2.2%	5,579,022	972,669	21.1%	28.6%
Fall 2010	19,641,140	0.6%	6,142,280	563,258	10.1%	31.3%
Fall 2011	20,994,113	-0.1%	6,714,792	572,512	9.3%	32.0%
Fall 2012	21,253,086	1.2%	7,126,549	411,757	6.1%	33.5%
Fall 2013	22,039,450	-6.7%	7,390,231	263,682	3.7%	37.2%

Note. Adapted from Allen, I. and Seaman, J., 2015, Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States. Online Learning Consortium and Babson Survey Research Group, p. 12. Retrieved from: <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradelevel.pdf>

Allen and Seaman (2010) noted that more than 50% of institutions offering online courses witnessed an increase in online enrollment. To further demonstrate the popularity, and necessity, of online learning, Allen and Seaman (2010, p. 2) reported that 63% of institutions interviewed stated that online learning is a critical part of their institution's long-term strategy and strategic plan. The preceding examples offered similar, yet differing, views on the subject of online education. If online education is so popular, why was there a decrease in online enrollment in 2013? Could the decrease be because of the online set up, or have individuals decided that online education is not the model for them? These questions, along with my initial research, provided the foundation for the research questions of this study.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: The primary research question: How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?

Secondary research questions were as follows:

RQ2: How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues

and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?

RQ3: How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?

Conceptual Framework

I shaped the research study by developing goals and research questions. I also took others' theories into consideration. These theories contributed to building the conceptual framework(s) for this study. This framework is described as simplifying one aspect of a particular subject matter that the researcher plans to study, and what is going on with those things and why (Maxwell, 2013). Research has been defined many ways; however, it has been suggested that it is important in any discipline to enhance the understanding for those involved within the discipline (Craighead, Hanna, Gibson, and Meredith, 2007). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) described research as an exploration in collected data where information is analyzed and interpreted to develop, understand, describe, predict, and control an educational or psychological phenomenon. Mertens (2005) argued that a researcher's conceptual framework influences the definition of research.

A conceptual framework, also referred to as a paradigm, guided how the subject matter was studied, analyzed, and interpreted (Glesne, 2011). Creswell (2009) noted that a paradigm is one's worldview, or beliefs that guide action. The primary conceptual framework for this qualitative study was based on the theory of connectivism; although

other theoretical perspectives including experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and constructionism provided foundations for the study.

Connectivism

The theory of connectivism suggests learning as a continuous process that requires individuals to possess the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their experiences with colleagues using technology (Siemens, 2004). Theo Hug (2007) included information presented by Stephen Downes, which suggested that, in a networked society, every person is a member of the network where knowledge is understood and spreads across entities (Hug, 2007). This study portrayed the views of individuals that moved to online learning, and asked the participants to discuss how they, using various technologies, communicated with colleagues and instructors. Information from the study provided insight into how the population was able to discern pertinent information for knowledge through the use of technology.

Students may draw inferences from the continuous learning process, and develop knowledge through the experiences witnessed and through these experiences, individuals observe, gain knowledge, and make judgments (Beard & Wilson, 2006). The participants in this study transitioned from ground-based education to online education. This study seeks to understand how the population used technology available to build connections with colleagues and instructors, and to reduce the academic achievement gap for male students in online education. This study also sought to understand how the participants in

this study described their experiences in the online environment and ground-based environment.

Experiential Learning Theory

The Experiential Learning Theory, as described by David Kolb (1984), has suggested that individuals use experiences to develop a link to work, education, and personal development. For example, Rosenstein, Sweeney, and Gupta (2012) found that department chairs had instructors use experiential learning with students because they believe it allows students to learn by doing, which would entertain the ideas presented by Kolb. Thus, Kolb's experiential approach might prove to be an efficient and substantial means by which to reveal a relationship between first-generation doctoral male students. Also, the study looked at how the knowledge created through the participant's experiences differed from previous ground-based education and the online environment. The study sought to find how the experiences of the participant's helped them build a symbolic bond with colleagues and instructors through interaction, communication, participation, and relationships.

Symbolic Interactionism

Herman (1994) stated that society lives in the minds of members constituting a social unit. This "unit" is very real for the members (Herman, 1994). Barnett (2011) noted that economic and socio-demographics have brought change to systems in higher education. Although experiences may lead to the knowledge, there is a belief that humans act toward things that have meaning for them (Blumer, 1969). Also, humans gain meaning about the world through interaction (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). Holding onto the

symbolic interaction theory that individuals create meaning through interactions with others (Barnett, 2011; Mead, 1934), evidence is available through this research to support additional opportunities for online education and symbolic interaction. Within this research, information was sought to determine how the participants were able to construct knowledge with colleagues and instructors through the connections made.

Constructionism

Similar to experiential learning, constructionism views learning as a process where individuals construct and reconstruct knowledge out of experiences in the world (Kafai & Resnick, 1996). In an online environment and ground-based environment, students build relationships and knowledge through similar experiences and ideas with colleagues and instructors. The study gathered the information that suggests that the population of this study constructed knowledge differently in ground-based education versus online education.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative collective case study. A collective case study is an exploration of a system that involves more than one case bounded by time and place; it is the preferred research strategy when explanatory how and why questions are being asked, each unit is studied as part of a collection, and when research is carried out in real life context (Kane, 2013; Yin, 2009). The study focused on a particular group, events, programs, and phenomena; and further analyzed specific statements and themes to determine if there are possible meanings (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The study reviewed the perceptions of the first-generation adult men,

who are experiencing graduate level studies at a predominately online university for the first time, and comparing those experiences to their previous ground-based educational experiences. The information collected from each individual has been combined into one case and the data collected provides information from their point of view, and drew on their experiences and philosophies.

The study considered the views of four first-generation doctoral male students that are enrolled in a predominately Online University. The male students chosen had completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based education. Each member of the population for this study was asked to note his experiences through a blog, which provided information about the participant's interaction with colleagues and instructors. Also, each participant was asked to describe the type of interaction method used involved participation, communication, as well as relationships formed with both colleagues and instructors. Participants completed a questionnaire to describe experiences through interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, their relationship with colleagues and instructors, and how the preceding differ online versus previous ground-based education. A literature review was completed to provide insight into similar studies that, although not directly related, provide a foundation for this research.

Finally, each participant was asked to complete in-depth interview(s). I conducted the interviews via Skype and recorded the interviews for recall, analysis, and information dissemination. The information collected within this study acknowledges the experiences

of the participants through communication in both online education and ground-based education, and the philosophies the participants have developed about communication.

Definitions

The following is a list of operational definitions used in this study:

Adult Learner: Also referred to as adult students, A student that delays enrollment in college after high school, attends college part-time to meet other outside obligations, and is financially independent, and falls between the ages of 25 and 50 (Horn & Carroll, 1996; Methvin, 2012; Park & Hee, 2009). The participants in this study have completed their undergraduate and initial graduate level education earlier in life and have now returned to complete his doctoral level education.

Colleagues: An associate in a profession and someone with whom there is a deeper connection (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Weis, 2014). In this study, colleagues are the individuals that have taken courses, or attended residencies, with the participants of this study.

Collective Case Study: A case study that presents information from several case narratives at one university, which uniquely portrays the data through the description and interpretation of others (Shekedi, 2005; Stake 1995). For this study, the collective case study represents the experiences provided by each of the participants, examined as one case, regarding their interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors in online doctoral level coursework, and how this information differed from ground-based education.

Communication: In this study, the participants and colleagues and instructors formed the definition of communication, which was the transferred thoughts and ideas that occurred through verbal, written, and electronic transactions during online education, including how communication differed with ground-based education (Rousseau, 2007; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012).

Connectivism: The theory that defines this study, connectivism is built around the premise that individuals' connect through today's technology and that learning is a continuous process that requires individuals to have the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their experiences with colleagues (Siemens, 2008). This study sought to determine how the participants built a connection using technology and drew distinctions and knowledge with colleagues and instructors in the online environment and how this connection differed in ground-based education.

Consensus: The state in which the results of a questionnaire are "acceptable to every member" (Reid, 1988, as cited in Williams & Webb, 1994; Wagner, 2008). In this study, a consensus was drawn from the data collected from the participants in relation to interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors in online education, and how the data collected differed in ground-based education.

Constructionism: The theory that people create reality (construct and reconstruct knowledge) over time through social interaction with others in the world (Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Walker, 2012). Within this study, the experiences of the participants

sought to provide evidence of how the participants created a reality around interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration in the online environment, and how this differed in ground-based education.

Digital Immigrant: Individuals that have had to adapt to using technology (Prensky, 2001). In this study, it was assumed that the participants were not digital immigrants and that they had some understanding of technology and how it worked in the online environment. Data collected from this study suggests that even in online education there are individuals that attempt online education that may be considered digital immigrants (i.e. do not have an understanding for how to use products like Skype).

Discussion Board: Online tools used for question and answer sessions with students and faculty. In this study, the participants described their communication, participation, interaction, relationships through discussion boards in the online classroom.

Distance Education: Credit-granting education delivered in remote locations using audio, video, computer technology, and the Internet (Anderson, 2003; U.S. News Staff, 2010). The participants in this study chose to complete their doctoral level education through distance education (online learning).

E-Learning: Or online learning, term that covers a wide set of applications and processes including Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration (Barcelona, 2009; U.S. News Staff, 2010). The participants in this study were completing their education through e-learning.

Experiential Learning: The theory that individuals build knowledge through experiences over time, or learning by doing (Kolb, 1984; Rosenstein, Sweeney, and

Gupta, 2012). This study sought to determine how the participants experienced online learning in relation to interaction, communication, participation, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors in doctoral level online learning, and how the experiences differed with ground-based education.

Face-to-Face (F2F): Terminology used to distinguish a classroom-learning environment where instructors and students located in the same facility (Distance Learning, 2009). This study sought to find out how the participants described their experiences in online education in comparison to face-to-face ground-based education.

First-generation: Individuals that are the first within the immediate family to attend college; they may be older, may come from minority backgrounds, may be immigrants and non-native English speakers, may be single parents, will be financially independent of parents and may have disabilities (Bui, 2002; Hertel, 1992; Stebleton, 2012). I am a first-generation student and felt it was important to discuss how first-generation students can be impacted by online education.

First-generation doctoral male: The first male in the family to complete doctoral level coursework. Family members may have completed some type of post-secondary education; however, have not ventured into doctoral level education and therefore may lack the knowledge and guidance to support the male individuals' educational journey.

First-generation doctoral student: Individuals that are the first within the immediate family to attempt doctoral level education. These individuals may have family members that completed some type of post-secondary education; however, have not ventured into doctoral level studies. Therefore, these family members do not have the

knowledge related to doctoral level studies to assist with the individuals' educational journey.

Ground-Based Education: Education that was completed at a brick and mortar institution (Holmberg-Wright & Wright, 2012). This study sought to find information related to how the participants experiences differed between online education and ground-based education.

Interaction: Communication between individuals that have similar interests Rovai (2001). This study sought to find how the participants experienced interaction in online education with colleagues and instructors, and how the experiences differed from ground-based education.

Learning: The act of gaining knowledge (Sener, 2010). This student sought to understand how the participants described learning in online education and how it differed from ground-based education.

Online Education: A web-based endeavor where students and instructors interact in a digital platform through credit-granting courses or educational training and transfer knowledge through digital mediums and dialogue occurs synchronously and asynchronously (Calvin & Freeburg, 2010; Moore & Kearsley, 2012; U.S. News Staff, 2010). The participants in this study are/were enrolled in online courses through a major online university.

Online Instructor: One who teaches primarily online (York & Richardson, 2012). This study sought to gather information about the experiences of the participants in relation to interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with

instructors in online education and how those experiences differed from ground-based education.

Online Learning: The use of online technologies in formal higher education for teaching and learning (Sener, 2010). The participants in this study are/were enrolled in online courses through a major online university.

Persistence: Students behavior to complete academic goals (Berger & Lyons, 2005; Phillips, 2013). This study sought to understand why/how the participants in this study have been persistent in obtain an online doctorate when all previous forms of education have been completed through ground-based education.

Retention: Retaining student populations until all academic goals are met (Berger & Lyons, 2005). This study sought to understand why/how the participants in this study have continued an online doctorate when all previous forms of education have been completed through ground-based education.

Symbolic Interactionism: The theory that individuals develop meaning and knowledge through social interaction (Mead, 1934). This study sought to find how the participants developed meaning and knowledge through their interaction with colleagues and instructors in online education and how those experiences differed from ground-based education.

Assumptions

A case study can explore an individual case or multiple cases that address issues of general public interest or national importance (Kane, 2015; Yin, 2009). As a first-generation student, I chose this study because of my personal interest in understanding

how others with a similar background to mine would explain his experiences in online education, especially after completing other educational levels through ground-based education. I collected the data from multiple individuals with the assumption that their individual experiences would collectively provide the case that I was studying. I assumed that participants would be truthful with sharing their experiences as first-generation doctoral male students who have moved, from ground-based education to online education. The study assumed the participants would communicate their experiences and perceptions of the differences between their ground-based education and the online educational process. Participants responded to questions that directly relate to learning outcomes; however, individual backgrounds and learning outcomes from their ground-based education were not being investigated. There was an assumption that accrediting processes from the participant's ground-based education and online education are equivalent, which was necessary to make comparisons, and to draw inferences between the two. It was assumed that the ground-based programs, completed by the participants, have equivalent learning outcomes from their online programs. Lastly, I assumed the chosen participants would each provide enough detailed information to support the study.

Scope and Delimitations

I limited the scope of this study to four first-generation doctoral male students that enrolled at a predominately online, regionally accredited, University. I chose the participants from multiple programs of study. I chose the participants from a single university without consideration for other universities. The first-generation doctoral male

students chosen completed all previous levels of education through ground-based education. I limited participation to individuals that are enrolled in programs delivered wholly online. The results collected from the study are not intended for use with populations outside of the scope selected; however when possible may provide support for future studies.

Limitations

The project was originally meant to gather input from 10-12 participants; however, only four individuals from the university's participant pool responded to the request to participate in the study. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) and Mason (2010) suggested there was no correlation in qualitative research in relation to the sample size, rather, the correlation of the research was based on the cultural setting of the research. Additionally, it was suggested if the sample is too large, data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot, 2013; Mason, 2010). The study included only first-generation doctoral male students, which represents only a small portion of students that have transitioned, from ground-based education to online education at major online Universities. This study did not consider the perspectives of other adult learners, including myself as an adult learner, on how experiences, communications, relationships, and other factors might affect their transition from ground-based education to online education.

The study was an exploratory study involving four subjects; however, as a collective case study, the information gathered provided information that was relevant to the study. As a collective case study, the information collected involved more than one case, which

may or may not be physically collocated with other cases. This study was conducted at one site (a major online) by examining a specific group at one site. The findings were studied as part of a collection. Other methodologies might have resulted in different findings; however, the method chosen for this study provided the information initially sought, which was to gather the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students in relation to interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors in online education and how those experiences differed from ground-based education. Additionally, the information gathered, whether from four participants or more would most likely would have resulted in similar findings. I conducted the study with the mediation of technology, so I was not able to meet physically with the subjects and needed to rely on the ways in which they presented themselves online. There was limited time to interact with participants because of a host of factors, which may have provided a different view had extended time and settings been different. Nevertheless, the study does give one important perspective, namely, how these subjects represented themselves in a mediated context.

Significance

Data provided by the participants in the study and analysis provided a better understanding of how first-generation doctoral male students experienced interaction, participation, communication, and relationship with colleagues and instructors in online education when compared to previous ground-based educational experiences. The research provides insight for instructors, administrators, and researchers into how the participants experienced a lack of interaction with colleagues and instructors, limited

participation with colleagues and instructors, a lag in communication with colleagues and instructors, and formed limited relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education versus ground-based education.

Data collected from the participants in this study indicated patterns related to their experiences that educators could use to promote changes to the online educational process (i.e. add Skype to simulate face-to-face communication). Knowledge gained from this study provided solutions for colleges/universities to adjust interaction methods with students, especially male, first-generation doctoral students; and make adjustments to the educational process. Addressing factors that promote and hinder academic success is a component of creating a productive society (Inge, 2012). Study findings suggested needed areas of improvement for universities, especially as they relate to students feeling more connected to their colleagues and instructors. The study findings can inform the design of practice that impact retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students who have transitioned from ground-based education to online education.

Summary

In summary, I have suggested that there is a gap in the literature on the impact that online education has on first-generation doctoral male students enrolled in online doctoral studies, more specifically men that have completed all preceding levels of education through ground-based learning environments. Information collected through this research garnered insight from the participants' points of view and gave various perspectives on how first-generation doctoral male students perceive online education

(Creswell, 2009). I have sketched a background to the study, provided operational definitions for this study, provided research questions that guide the study, introduced the framework(s) established for the study, and introduced the methodological approach used for the study. Chapter 2 explored literature related to the conceptual framework of the study, online learning, first-generation college students, the adult learner, and interaction in learning, communication and relationships between students and instructors, and experiences of students using online resources. Information gathered from the literature review was used to provide a basis for the research, and to highlight gaps in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aimed to depict how a particular group, first-generation doctoral male students, transitioned from ground-based education, to online education, and to see how their experiences differed between the two delivery models, more particularly when it comes to interaction, both with colleagues and instructors. Also, the study sought to characterize their experiences through participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors.

Accordingly, this chapter delivered information about the cohort chosen for this study through literature and research. This literature review examines research conducted on men in online education with specific emphasis on the issue that men are entering online education; however, there are factors, such as a lack of interaction, limited participation and communication, which may keep men from succeeding in online education. This literature review presents information about men in online education and provides evidence that suggests the need for this study. Topics covered in this review include online learning, first-generation students, adult learners, ground-based and online success, blending environments, interaction, participation, communication, and relationships.

Online education has seen tremendous growth over the years (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008; Varvel, 2007; and Wolfe, 2006); however, Table 1 in chapter 1 suggested that, for the first time in years (2013), a decline in online enrollment has occurred. The decline in enrollment could suggest that online education has matured and that less students are now inclined, or less excited, to enroll in online courses.

However, the suggested decline in online enrollment does not align with what Allen and Seaman (2015) suggested, which is the proportion of academic leaders who report that online learning is critical to their institution's long-term strategy and has grown to 70.8% in 2015, which is up from 48.8% in 2002. So, leaders believe there is a need to have a long term plan for online learning, yet online populations have decreased. As more individuals move toward online learning, there is an ever-changing population of students, and a necessity to learn as much about the different subcultures as possible. Universities are moving beyond education through the ground-based classroom to online learning (Maddix, 2012). Again, this would suggest that leaders believe that learning populations want online learning. Within my study, I have taken the approach that additional research is needed to understand the student populations and to acknowledge the differences that each cohort experiences. Greener (2008) commented that some researchers believe that students are the most important stakeholders in online education. Others have argued that faculty expertise and dedication is the most important part of online education (Rodriguez, Ooms, and Montanez, 2008). So, who is correct, the leaders that build the courses, or the learners, whom the classes are built to assist? The literature conducted in the following sections guided the research of this study to gain a better understanding of what has been written about various topics related to this study.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature was gathered through online resources including Google Scholar, Google Books, and Walden University's Library. Through Walden University, multi-disciplinary databases (EBSCO databases: Academic Search Complete, Academic Search

Premier, Education Research Complete; Sage Journals; and Dissertations) were researched to obtain articles associated with the topic of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time versus previous ground-based education and to identify and develop a deep understanding of the experiences through interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors.

Relevant keywords searched included the following: *online learning, first-generation students, online education versus ground-based education, experiences of students in online education and ground-based education, interaction with colleagues, interaction with instructors, participation with colleagues, participation with instructors, communication with colleagues, communication with instructors, relationships with colleagues, and relationships with instructors*, as well as various combinations of the preceding terms.

The keyword search provided numerous articles. I used peer-reviewed journals and texts for this research and limitations were also used to select scholarly material. When using Google as a research tool, articles and information were limited to items located within Google Scholar and university websites. Articles were uploaded to a separate portable document storage device and stored on Google drive for later use, and an annotated bibliography was created to maintain accurate APA style references. Also, EndNote X4 for Mac was employed to increase the accuracy of the cited material and to assist with an tracking documentation related to research articles found through Walden

University's Library, Google, and in books. Within the literature search, I also researched the theoretical framework(s) used for the study.

Conceptual Framework

This study researched how first-generation doctoral male students experience interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education versus previous ground-based experiences. The framework simplified one aspect of the subject matter that I planned to study (Maxwell, 2013), the participants experiences in relation to interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors online and how the experiences differed from ground-based education. The conceptual framework(s) chosen for this study acknowledged the differences in experiences of first-generation doctoral male students, and the concepts reviewed in this study included; 1) connectivism (how participants connected with others through technology), 2) experiential learning (how the participants gained knowledge through their experiences with others), 3) symbolic interactionism (how the interactions that occurred allowed the participants to develop meaning and knowledge), and 4) constructionism (how the participants built knowledge through their connections with others).

Connectivism

I wanted to understand how the participants connected with their colleagues and instructors in online education and how these connections differed from ground-based education. In 1971, Ivan Illich suggested that educational systems should not be

organizations built on school objectives and content, rather, constructed as a network of relations where every learner can access the information he/she needs to learn at any time (Clara & Barbera, 2014). Online learning provides individuals this opportunity to access educational material at any time, and to connect with others when it is convenient for him/her. Connectivism takes the concept of online learning one step further by suggesting that it is a theory for conceptualizing learning in the digital age where individuals connect through a hyper-connected global network (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Rousseau, 2007; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). It was suggested that Siemen's theory of connectivism is a successor to behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Bell, 2011). Rousseau (2007) suggested that Siemen's theory challenges twenty-first century educators because interconnectivity and access have created new challenges for business, industry, and educators because individuals can obtain knowledge any time they have access to online information.

There are four key concepts to connectivism including; autonomy, connectedness, diversity, and openness (Downes, 2010; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). All learning starts with a connection that is meant to shrink the distances between sectors through interconnectivity and information-rich resources which calls for thinking inventively to solve problems (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2008; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). Learning influenced, aided, and enhanced through socialization, technology, diversity, strength of ties, and the context of the occurrence; and it takes place outside of the formal classroom (Rousseau, 2007; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). Additional features of connectivism

include (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005):

1. Learners connect to a learning community and benefit from it while also feeding it information. Groups learn together through continuous communication due to similar interests.
2. The community is a small group of individuals that are part of a larger group of individuals.
3. Knowledge does not reside in the mind of an individual or one location; rather, it is distributed across a network through multiple individuals. Learning and knowledge creation are dependent on different views and opinions, and on access to various information centers.
4. Information is always changing, and there is a need to evaluate the validity and accuracy based on new information.
5. There is an inter-disciplinary connection with the creation of knowledge, particularly on the Internet because of the dispersed nature of information.

According to Siemens' theory of learning, connectivism is the promotion of speaking, listening, questioning, reading, writing, discussing, publishing, and creating multimedia to connect with others in the digital age (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2004). For individuals to survive the digital age, students must gain instruction in digital research skills, and students must be able to formulate an opinion or decision from experiences gathered (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2004).

A connectivism perspective of the participants within this study begins with the idea that first-generation doctoral male students will develop meaning and knowledge through the connections made with colleagues and instructors. Also, these connections will be made using today's technologies (i.e. email, discussion boards, Skype, etc.). Baggaley (2012) suggested that, in the world that is becoming technologically complex, teachers and students would interact more directly. Bell (2011) suggested that Internet users are learning while searching the web and that this learning enhances conversations with others in face-to-face and virtual discussion. Between 2000-2008 the numbers of individuals using the Internet has grown 336% (Bell, 2011); and the number of students taking at least one online course has grown from 9.6% in Fall 2002 to 37.2% in Fall 2013 (Allen and Seaman, 2015).

Kennedy, G., Judd, T., Churchward, A., & Gray, K. (2008) prepared a study using over 2,000 first year university students to see what technologies the students had access to in order to connect with each other, the campus, and instructors. 70.5% of the students had access to a laptop and desktop computer (Kennedy, et al., 2008). Over 85% of the students in the Kennedy, et al. (2008) study have used the web for study purposes, to gather general information, to send and receive email, and for instant messaging. Digital students depend on technology for spell checks, grammar checks, research, and other tools (Dabney, 2012).

Participants in this study were required to use online tools in the online environment to communicate and to aid their studies. The study provided insight into the online learning process of the participants through the connections made with colleagues

and instructors using online resources, and the academic achievement they developed using technology. However, I did not believe that one theoretical framework could guide the entire study. I also wanted to determine if the experiences the participants described through their “connections” in online education provided them with the knowledge to be successful in online learning and how it differed with ground-based education. Therefore, the concept of experiential learning was studied.

Experiential Learning

Some would argue, that students gain knowledge through the experiences that may arise through the connected environment. For example, Kolb (1984) stated learning is the “creation of knowledge” through experiences in the world, and meaning is made through a compilation of these experiences (Peters, 2012). Essentially, the individual takes the experiences, develops perceptions of the experiences, and converts the information into knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). Experiential learning involves the transformation of new experiences into knowledge while combining that knowledge with previous experiential knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). There are six schemes to experiential learning including the process of relearning, integration of new conditions, conflict resolution, cooperative interaction, and acquisition of knowledge through external experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Peters, 2012). Knowledge is developed when individuals’ connect the experiences and convert the experiences into information (Kolb, 1984). Participants were chosen for this study based on their transition from ground-based education to online education. Information gathered from the study alluded to the participant’s experiences from ground-based education and connected it to their current

educational experiences in online learning. The participants provided suggestions related to their experiences in ground-based education and online education that will be used for future research on experiences and experiential learning.

Learning is internal and external and developed in various social settings including school, at home, and through other social events (Dewey, 1938, 1998; Peters, 2012). Learning is a cognitive process that involves constant adaptation and engagement within ones' environment (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010; Peters, 2012).

Educators must take into account the differences of each student because each student will have a different quality of experience and, therefore, must provide experiences where students' can learn without authoritarian instruction (Dewey, 1938, 1998; Peters, 2012).

Kolb (1984) suggested that adult education models have fallen victim to teacher-centered models versus models that allow students' to learn through experiences (Peters, 2012).

Dewey's beliefs of education suggested that learning must be based on a clear theory of experiences that includes structure and order (Dewey, 1938, 1998; Peters, 2012). The participants in this study had backgrounds that created the need to move, from ground-based education to online education, or they were looking for the freedom to learn in an asynchronous environment. Information obtained from this study provided additional data to support how the experiences gathered in the online and ground-based environment correlated. The participants of this study not only, but also, used experiences from the virtual classroom to gain knowledge, and developed relationships with colleagues and instructors to garner additional perspectives and thought processes. Through this "symbolic interaction", additional knowledge arose.

Symbolic Interactionism

Connectivism suggested that individuals use connections through technology to build knowledge and experiential learning suggested that learning occurs when individuals have similar experiences with others. Symbolic Interactionism suggests that successful learning takes place in an environment where individuals can construct ideas and meaning as the result of social interaction and collaboration with others (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction of individuals in a learning community where meaning is developed and moved into actions (Blumer, 1969). The theory of social interactionism is not focused solely on symbols; rather, it focuses on the meaning that individuals assign to something (Prasad, 1993). People act toward others and objects in a manner based on the meaning that people and objects have with them (Blumer, 1969). Information collected in this study depicted similar reasons that the participants chose to move from ground-based education to online education.

There are three basic principles to symbolic interactionism including a) a person's actions toward something is motivated by the meaning they have assigned, b) meaning for things is associated with social interaction within a group, and c) people create interpretations through social encounters they experience (Blumer, 1969). Using past experiences, individuals will interpret a situation and choose their actions based on those experiences (Blumer, 1969). Information provided by the participants suggested the participant's constructed meaning within the assignments with their colleagues and

instructors in ground-based education; however, they did not construct new meanings with colleagues and instructors in online education.

Constructionism

It is not enough to believe that individuals can build knowledge through a connection to others, through experiences they have with others, or symbolic interaction with others. Individuals have to be able to do something with that information they have built a connection with, or better yet, they have to be able to take that connection and then construct that knowledge into meaning.

The theory of constructionism suggests that individuals choose to build a reality and formulate knowledge over time through social interaction with others (Walker, 2012). Burr (1995) suggested that individuals construct views of the world through social influences. Reality is based on tradition; however, as new ideas surface and beliefs change, a person's reality can change (Gergen & Gergan, 2008; Gergen, 2001; Searle, 1995; Walker, 2012). Walker (2012) noted that Searle's perspective of constructionism suggests that, before humans, there were facts that occurred autonomously from people's beliefs. Participants in this study may have alluded to the experiences they constructed with colleagues and students through interaction on discussions boards, and through the communication efforts outside of the classroom through the questionnaires, blog, and interview they completed as part of the study.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Smith (2012) suggested constructionism is concerned with the relationships between human thought and the social context within which it arises. Vygotsky believed that social interaction is a major component of

teaching and learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Smith, 2012). For research, constructionism has been associated with how participants view events they have experienced and how the events are interpreted (Smith, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Williamson, 2006). This study interpreted the experiences the participants illustrated through interaction with colleagues and instructors. I had established the conceptual framework(s) for this study; however, it was important to find the correct methodology that would garner rich information about the population chosen for the study.

A Collective Case Study

Quantitative research was considered because it focuses on quantity (how much, how many), and it would have allowed me to predict, control, describe, confirm and test a hypothesis; which would have led to precise numerical findings (Merriam, 2009).

However, qualitative was also considered because it can reveal how all the parts of a study work together to form a whole picture (Merriam, 2009, p. 6). Additionally, qualitative research provides the researcher information that explores programs, events, activities, processes, or one or more individuals in depth (Stake, 2000). Another comparison, from Creswell (2009), suggested that within a qualitative study, the research question starts with “how” or “what” in order to describe what is going on, whereas, in quantitative research the question asks “why” and looks for comparative features of the group being studied. The preceding information provided a summarized view of the difference between quantitative and qualitative research and why each was considered.

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because I wanted to understand “why” and “how” the participants of this study provided their experiences. Additionally,

there have been similar quantitative studies conducted on the subject of online learning. Also, Merriam's depiction of qualitative research suggests that it is focused on quality, with a goal of understanding, describing, discovering, developing meaning, and generating a hypothesis, than a depiction of quantity (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). Samples used within a qualitative study are usually small, random, purposeful, and theoretical; and produce findings that are comprehensive, holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive (Howard, 2010).

Qualitative research is described as research that produces findings that are not created through statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that to provide a product that others might understand, present it in a manner allowing them to "experience it."

Maxwell (2013) suggested that research should have five components:

1. *Goal*. Why is the study worth conducting?
2. *Conceptual framework*. What is going on with the people you plan to study?
3. *Research Questions*. What do you want to understand about the participants being studied?
4. *Methods*. What will you do in conducting the study?
5. *Validity*. Why should the results be believed?

According to Yin (2003), the case study design employs various data collection methods to ensure trustworthiness of the data collected. Multiple data sources promote a clearer understanding of the case being studied (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Nwankwo, 2015). In a case

study, the researcher builds an in-depth picture of a case (Kane, 2015). When a case study explores a system, the case may not always be about an individual (Kane, 2015).

Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009) have suggested that seeking a greater variation through multiple cases with a group of individuals, a program, an event, or an activity will yield a more compelling interpretation of the data. Thus far, I have provided literature to support the framework of the study and the methodology chosen, I wanted to provide literature that supports various operational definitions of the study. The first topic that was important to research, in relation to literature, was online learning. The participants of this study chose to move to online education, so I wanted to understand why the participants considered moving to online learning, especially when they completed their previous education through ground-based education.

Online Learning

In the last 10 years, changes have occurred in online learning where at least one in four students, in higher education, now takes at least one course online (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Howard, 2010; Paloff & Pratt, 2007). Advancements in technology affect lives, social environments, and the modes through which people communicate, causing members of society to seek different learning strategies to obtain knowledge (Daghan & Akkoyunlu, 2012). Ally (2004) and Oshea, Stone, and Delahunty (2015) described online learning as the environment where individuals can access materials online to promote interaction, construct knowledge, and communicate with instructors and students.

In a study conducted by Allen and Seaman (2015), 1.6 million students were taking at least one online course in the fall of 2002; however, that number has now

increased to 7.4 million students during the fall of 2013. Allen and Seaman (2015) and Sener (2010) believe online higher education will be fully adopted by the masses within the next 5 to 10 years. Also, practically all higher education students will experience online education in some form during his/her college career (Allen and Seaman, 2015; Sener, 2010).

Research has shown that online courses can prove to be equal to face-to-face instruction, less intimidating, and students can experience a sense of flexibility from overwhelming daily challenges, such as work and family (Barcelona, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; Zhou & Zhang, 2008). Online learning, compared to face-to-face learning, provides more opportunities for learning time, additional access to learning materials, and opportunities for collaboration (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Individuals can educate themselves through strong online learning communities (Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson, and Young, 2014; Huang, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Learners are able to build positive learning experiences while arranging education without the constraint of time and place (Clarke & Kinne, 2012; Howard, 2010; Sadera, Robertson, Song, & Midon, 2009). Students involved in online learning appreciate instructor interaction and the perceived learning that can occur (Holzweiss, et al., 2014; Frederickson, Pickett, & Shea, 2006). Research has suggested that attrition rates among online learners exceed those of their colleagues in a traditional classroom setting (Barcelona, 2009; Diaz & Cartnal, 2006; Holzweiss, et al., 2014; Patterson & McFadden, 2009). Additional advantages of online learning include, availability of courses 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, no geographic barriers, savings in commuting costs, and savings

in child care costs (Holmberg-Wright & Wright, 2012). Finally, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) suggested that online learning, compared to ground-based education, provides additional opportunities for learning time, access to learning materials, and increased opportunities to collaborate (Barcelona, 2009).

Characteristics of online students suggest that online education appeals to a different student body than ground-based education (Sloan Consortium, 2006). For example, men in online education do not report a higher sense of community than female counterparts, but they interact more often in an online learning environment; however, women tend to be more successful academically (Howard, 2010). Individuals that enter online education that are first-generation students are more likely to have lower graduation rates than non-first-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). The preceding information describes the participants in this study, first-generation men that have decided to move to online education.

The information collected in this study provided information from the participant's perspectives that will assist with improving outcomes for male students that move to online education. For example, with the increased popularity of online learning, it has become important to improve the quality of classes and programs for members of the learning community (Dietrich, 2011; Holzweiss, et al. 2014). Instructors, a critical component of the online environment, have created learning communities to help individuals come together for the purpose of learning, to promote critical thinking skills and to facilitate the achievement of learning goals (Phelan, 2012; Howard, 2010; Dawson, 2006).

The preceding literature suggested that individuals have moved to online education because of advancements in technology and also because of the increased availability of online courses. The participants in this study chose online education for reasons similar to those described in the literature. The participants in this study were not only moving to online education for the first time; however, they were also the first person in their family to complete a doctoral program. The following section discussed the literature that has been gathered in relation to first-generation students.

First-Generation Students

First-generation students are enrolling in online courses in record numbers (Berkner and Choy, 2008; Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Methvin, 2012). The focus of this study, first-generation doctoral male students, were considered unique college students because they face challenges related to academic obstacles in higher education, especially when pursuing graduate education (Lunceford, 2012; Stebleton, 2012). The participants for this study were older, or non-traditional, came from minority backgrounds, and are financially independent, compared to other students in online education (Bui, 2002; Hertel, 1992; Stebleton, 2012). Although this group is/was working toward a doctoral degree, they may have no one in their families that have faced this educational model, and they are employed while attending school (Jehangir, 2010; Stebleton, 2012).

The preceding information provided an informal introduction into what constitutes a first-generation student, and in this case, a first-generation doctoral student. The following paragraphs have been established to provide a definition and description of first-generation students.

Definition and Description

The traditional definition for a first-generation student is one from whom neither parent had completed a college degree, or advanced degree, and no parent had any postsecondary education (Choy, 2001; Forbus, et al., 2011). This student group often does not use high school to prepare for college (Forbus, et al., 2011; Horn & Bobbitt, 2000). First-generation students often have lower career ambitions, lack of administrative and peer support, anxiety over the college environment, and poor study skills (Forbus, et al., 2011; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). First-generation students take a more pragmatic, serious approach to college education, compared to continuing-generation students; and take more pride in the school they choose to attend (Forbus, et al., 2011). First-generation students that choose to continue their education experience the same economic benefits from education as their peers (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2003; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Methvin, 2012; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Orbe, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Thayer, 2000). Some first-generation college students enter academic settings with minimal understanding of what to expect and do not understand what is necessary to meet familial expectations while attending school (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

Descriptors of first-generation college students suggest they are more likely to be married, have children, have lower incomes than their peers, they are older, and a higher percentage tend to be female (Methvin, 2012; Nomi, 2005; Nunez & Cuccaro-Almin, 1998). First-generation students are less likely to have financial support from parents, are more likely to be enrolled part time, have more outside obligations, and depend heavily

on financial aid (Engle, Tinto, & Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher, 2008; McConnell, 2000; Methvin, 2012; Nomi, 2005). Finally, most first-generation students come from various ethnic and minority backgrounds (Engle, et al., 2008; Methvin, 2012).

The preceding examples provided a general definition of a first-generation student. For the purpose of this study, the definition has been developed more in depth. A first-generation doctoral student has been developed to define an individual that is the first within the immediate family to attempt doctoral level education. These individuals may have family members that completed some type of post-secondary education; however, have not ventured into doctoral level studies. Therefore, these family members do not have the knowledge related to doctoral level studies to assist with the individuals' educational journey. To take this one step further, for this study, a first-generation doctoral male is the first male in the family to complete doctoral level coursework. Family members may have completed some type of post-secondary education; however, have not ventured into doctoral level education and therefore may lack the knowledge and guidance to support the male individuals educational journey. The participants in this study provided feedback during the study that suggested they had no support from others during their educational journey because they are the first individuals to attempt doctoral level coursework. Additionally, the participants had a reason to continue their education and were financially independent from parents and other family members. First-generation students face challenges that others completing an education do not face.

Challenges for First-Generation Students

It was not enough to define and describe what makes up a first-generation student. It was important to understand what challenges this type of student is faced with when attempting post-secondary education, more importantly, doctoral level education. For example, Lightweis (2014) suggested that 34% of college and university freshman are first-generation students; and approximately only 73% of the same group return for the second year. Although the participants in this study are working toward their doctorate, it is important to understand how the preceding information impacts a majority of first-generation students. For example, although first-generation students are less likely to work toward a degree completion than non-first-generation peers, those who complete a bachelor's degree experience similar employment and economic benefits from their education (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2003; Lightweis, 2014; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Methvin, 2012; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Orbe, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Thayer, 2000). Therefore, the participants in this study may see similar financial outcomes as their peers that are non-first-generation doctoral male students.

Some believe first-generation doctoral male students must possess unique strength and ability (Engle et al., 2008; Lightweis, 2014) to succeed in their educational endeavors; however, some believe that first-generation students, regardless of the education level, will not be successful in learning (Methvin, 2012; Porchea et al., 2010; Prospero Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Allen and Lavin (2007) noted that first-generation students often take longer to obtain a degree, but their success is important and has an impact on society. Colleges and universities should continue to embrace the value of post-secondary

education for all students and design programs that support services to ensure that all students, first-generation students included, can develop educational skills to their fullest potential (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Methvin, 2012).

Information about first-generation students was important to this study because it shows the challenges that first-generation doctoral male students have faced at this educational level. It also suggested why the participants of this study were persistent in their previous educational experiences to gain knowledge, abilities, and skills learned to guide them in this online educational journey. The participants in this study were not only the first individual in their family to complete an advanced degree, they were also individuals that were considered non-traditional, or individuals that have been out of school for a period of time.

Adult Learners

Individuals are moving to online education in increasing numbers, first-generation students are increasing in numbers, and the participants in this study fell into these categories. Another factor to take into consideration is many of the learners moving into online education are adult learners. Methvin (2012) and Philibert, Allen, and Elleven, (2008) noted that adult learners, which equates to approximately 73% of the population in education, are considered different from the “traditional” college student. Adult learners have experienced life and have external responsibilities and situations that a “traditional” student does not experience (Cercione, 2008; Mohamad, Hussin, and Shaharuddin, 2015). Kasworm (2005), Kim (2002), and Methvin (2012) suggested that an adult learner is an individual that begins college at or after the age of 24 or 25. Age, however, is not always

the determining factor of an adult learner. For example, students younger than 25 may have experienced complexities in life that help categorize the individual as an adult learner (Methvin, 2012). Education is established around life and the challenges of meeting obligations that occur outside of the classroom (Cercone, 2008). According to Methvin (2012) and Zafft (2008) colleges and universities need to focus on the adult learner, and need to design support systems to service this group.

Adult learners reenter college for several reasons including career goals, desire for self-improvement, and family motivation (Bauman, Wang, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez, & Lindsey, 2004; Methvin, 2012). At times, adult learners enter college because of significant life changes like the loss of a job (Genco, 2007; Methvin, 2012). Information collected during the research of this study provided information about the first-generation doctoral male students and why they chose to return to school. First-generation students are not the only individuals that experience challenges that may keep them from succeeding in their educational endeavors. Additionally, it is important to know more about adult learners, not just what constitutes an adult learner.

Challenges to Persist in Degree Attainment

Adult learners have challenges that put their ambitions to obtain a degree at risk including a need to work full time, family responsibilities, and academic under preparation (Hardin, 2008; Methvin, 2012). Methvin (2012) and Rowan-Kenyon (2007) suggested that lack of preparation for college is often a predictor for delayed enrollment in education. Also, adult learners are often enrolled part-time, which can lead to delayed degree completion (Askham, 2008; Barrett, 2005; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008;

Methvin, 2012; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Other factors, such as financial concerns, can lead to anxiety and stress, which may lead to delayed enrollment (Askham, 2008; Barrett, 2005; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Methvin, 2012; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). The stress caused by outside factors like work sometimes leads to adult learners dropping out (Capps; 2010; Giancola, Grawich, & Borchert, 2009; Methvin, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Role conflicts, including the demands of being a student, family member, and parent, also contribute to stress for the adult learner and exacerbates conflicts of home and school expectations (Carney-Compton & Tan, 2002; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Giancola et al., 2009; Methvin, 2012). Lastly, adult learners can experience uncertainty and anxiety from the technology used in learning (Methvin, 2012; Zafft, 2008).

Although the complexities of life create challenges for the adult learner, studies have found that many students can garner strength from experience and situations to outperform traditional students (Methvin, 2012). Maddox (2006) suggested that adult learners have a broader range of maturity, which provides an edge over the traditional college age student. Mott (2008) noted that, as the population of the US continues to age and as workers are required to seek to train to maintain employment in the field, it is assumed that the age of college students will continue to rise, and the definition of the adult learner will change. The information collected from the participants suggested that they had reasons to move to online education, including increased training to maintain employment in their field of employment. Current research about adult learners informed this study because it pointed out many factors that adult learner(s) face and how it

impacts their education. A review of the literature revealed several studies about adult learners and showed similarities between adult learners and first-generation students; however, very little information was found about the cohort chosen for this study, first-generation doctoral male students. Another important aspect of this study is the fact that the participants in this study have chosen to move from ground-based education to online education. The question is, “why”?

Ground-Based versus Online Success and Academic Achievement

If the participants in this study were able to succeed in ground-based education, why did they proceed to move into a new educational model to complete an advanced degree? The following information provides insight into viewed differences in academic achievement between ground-based and online courses. For example, Wilson and Allen (2011) conducted a study at a historically black university to determine if there was a correlation surrounding the success of students in online courses versus face-to-face courses. Wilson and Allen (2011) suggested that online students tend to have higher withdrawal rates, failure rates, and often cannot complete assignments by deadline compared to the students in face-to-face courses. However, this study found no significant differences in achievement (Bernard, Abrami, Lou, Boroakhovski, Wade, Wozney, Wallet, Fiset, & Huang, 2004; Wilson & Allen, 2011) between online and face-to-face courses. Between 1996 and 2008, The U.S. Department of Education conducted a study and found students performed better in an online education setting versus a ground based setting (Feintuch, 2010; Wilson & Allen, 2011). Regardless of the type of education, online or ground-based, advising or contact with an instructor may be critical

to the continued success of students (Wilson & Allen, 2011). The preceding information would suggest that the educational medium, ground-based or online, does not define success or failure for a student, rather, it does suggest that students will succeed in either environment as long as there is contact between instructors and students. The participants in this study have been persistent in the completion of online education.

Blending of Online and Ground-Based Education

In the preceding section, academic achievement in online and ground-based education was described. However, the information did not suggest why the participants of this study chose online education when they completed previous education through ground-based education. Is it the popularity of online education that might have been the reason the participants chose online education?

Online degrees are already part of the educational culture and students show greater interest in online education to complete all or part of their education (Bristow, et al., 2011). Additionally, an increasing number of predominately campus-based educational facilities are making online learning a part of the student experience (Biluc, Ellis, Goodyear, & Piggot, 2010). Within education, students can now choose to take portions of their college credits online and then transfer the credits at the same time to ground-based institutions (Holmberg-Wright & Wright, 2012). Academic degrees offered online are provided by both non-traditional (online-only) schools and traditional (ground-based) colleges and universities (Holmberg-Wright & Wright, 2012). To differentiate online versus ground-based, Allen & Seaman (2010) state a course is considered online if at least 80% of the course is delivered through online means.

With the success of online programs, students have become interested in whether employers are willing to hire graduates that have obtained education online versus ground-based education (Tabatabaei & Gardiner, 2012). Metrejean and Nolan (2011) did not find a difference in the perceptions of recruiters when presented with candidates that received a Master's in Accounting online versus similar students that completed a Masters in Accounting through ground-based education (Tabatabaei & Gardiner, 2012). Over time, perceptions by employers that online degrees are not as valid as ground-degrees have diminished (Tabatabaei & Gardiner, 2012). The participants in this study chose online learning based on multiple factors including programs not being offered in ground-based education and the excitement to try online education as a model for education. The preceding literature has described and defined what made up the population for this study, as well as provided literature about the conceptual framework(s) and method chosen for the study. The following sections describe the literature that was researched and developed around the research questions of the study including; interaction, communication, participation, relationships, and collaboration.

Interaction

Information discussed in the preceding sections suggested that students might need a connection to technology to obtain experiences and symbolic interaction, which they can then construct into knowledge to be successful in education. Additionally, online education was discussed, along with how first-generation students can be successful when moving from ground-based education to online education. However, within the information gathered, interaction was described as an important part of educational

success; however, it was not described in detail. The following section describes the importance of interaction in the learning process.

Interaction between instructors and students, as well as interaction with colleagues, is crucial to learning (Giero, 2012; Rovai, 2001; Swan, 2002, 2003; Webb-Boyd, 2008; Woo & Reeves, 2007). Rovai (2001) suggested that people with similar interests could create a stimulating, interesting, and intense learning experience. Factors associated with retention issues often include a lack of interaction with instructors and colleagues (McKay & Estrella, 2008; Polinsky, 2002; Skahill, 2002).

Dewey (1916) defined interaction as a component of the educational process when a student transforms information passed from another and develops it into knowledge with personal application and value. It was suggested that 43% of first-generation college students leave college before completing a degree with one of the reasons being a lack of interaction with colleagues (Chen, 2005; McKay & Estrella, 2008). Strong predictors of integration into college includes formal and informal instructor-student interaction, which has been shown to influence retention and achievement on assignments (Andersen, Lampley, and Good, 2013; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Nora & Rendon, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Anderson (2003) stated that there are six types of interaction: student-student, student teacher, student-content, teacher-teacher, teacher-content, and content-content. Andersen, et al. (2013) and McKay and Estrella (2008) found that interaction with instructors is positively associated with students' beliefs about accomplishing academic goals. This study reviewed the interaction that occurred between the participants with their colleagues and with their

instructors during their online journey. To find additional literature that was relevant to this study, studies on interaction and assignments were gathered, and first-generation was removed from the keyword search. Although the information gathered did not address first-generation students, it did provide insight into interaction for students and colleagues, and interaction for students with instructors.

Interaction with Colleagues

A valuable part of this study was the information gathered from the participants about the interaction they have had with their colleagues during their online educational journey. Additionally, the information provided research about how interaction with colleagues differed in ground-based education. There are varying views on how interaction impacts education. For example, Inkelas, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) suggested that interaction with students is not a factor in the transition to college for first-generation students. However, in a study conducted by Davies, Schonder, Meyer, and Hall (2015) interaction with colleagues played an important part in the success of their student's classes. Others have suggested within the literature that interaction is essential to positive student outcomes (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003).

In 2010, Grandzol and Grandzol examined online course completion by looking at the interaction between colleagues. The study included 359 community college business courses. Grandzol and Grandzol (2010) found that interaction with colleagues had no significant impact on course completion. However, Grandzol and Grandzol (2010) suggested within their results that lower level courses might not require high levels of

interaction for successful completion. The results of this study may not be generalizable to populations outside of similar community college settings, or different programs. In a study of 17 community college faculty members, completed by Oliver (2002), it was found that student outcomes were better in courses where interaction occurred. McGuire and Castle (2010) suggested similar findings in their quantitative study of 4,000-course assessment summaries. In the study, it was noted that student interaction is important for student success. The preceding information suggested different findings in relation to interaction among students and their colleagues. More often than not, interaction was determined to have a positive impact on the education for students when it was present. The participants in my study suggested that interaction was lacking in their online courses, more so than during their ground-based education. During this study, I collected information from the participants about their interaction with instructors in online education and also how the interaction differed in ground-based education. The following literature research sought to find what was previously written about interaction with instructors.

Interaction with Instructors

Bernard, Abrami, Borokhovski, Wade, Rana, Surkes, and Bethel (2009) and Medina (2012) suggested the quality of student-instructor interaction increases through content. Interaction is a catalyst in the learning process, especially when the instructor controls the interaction (p. 59). The job of an instructor is to be a facilitator, director of discovery, philosopher, and the controller of quality (p. 78).

Instructors can stimulate interaction through interest, which then motivates the student to learn (Medina, 2012; Moore, 1989). Dewey (1859 – 1952) believed in the importance of interaction, in education; however, a study by Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) has suggested that interaction between students and the instructor online is still in its infancy stages (Medina, 2012). Vygotsky (1978) has suggested that student-instructor interaction is like a social relationship that builds additional knowledge when in occurrence. Gorsky and Caspi (2005) described the interaction between an instructor and student as the essential part of the learning process (Medina, 2012).

Instructor interaction demonstrates the importance of a relationship with students through encouragement fostered by involvement (Andersen, et al., 2013; Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005; Medina, 2012; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Pisutova-Gerber and Malovicova (2009) reported that, although they did not like participating in discussions, they did appreciate the learning and feedback from instructors. Bernard et al. (2009) noted that instructors could improve interaction with students by using positive feedback (Medina, 2012). Hodges and Cowan (2012) suggested that students and instructors must establish effective communication while engaged in online learning. Lowenthal (2011) noted that social presence of instructors influences the account of students' experiences (Medina, 2012).

Moore (1993) described interaction as a series of communication activities between individuals that is the most important aspect of online learning. Moore (p.2) suggested that educational philosophy, personality, course subject matter, and the environment influence faculty-student interaction. In online education, Moore noted that

communication would be one-way. But, reliance on one-way communication leads to greater transactional distance and less favorable learning experiences (Moore, 1993).

Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) suggested that the number of times students and instructors communicate does not equal interaction because interaction requires students to be engaged (Medina, 2012). The instructor has an obligation to format the information in a manner that the student can understand and, once established, opens dialogue for interaction (Bruner, 1963; Medina, 2012). Instructor to student contact is an important factor in determining motivation and involvement (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008; Medina, 2012). Instructors must create an environment where the curriculum is designed to have interaction (Medina, 2012; Pisutova-Gerber & Malovicova, 2009; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Research shows that instructor to student contact is an important factor in determining motivation and involvement, but the direct perceptions of students related to this contact were not adequately studied. The preceding information suggested that interaction between a student and instructor is important for student success in education. The data collected from the participants during the study suggested that there was a lack of interaction with instructors in the online classroom. However, I felt additional literature on the subject matter would provide additional input in relation to interaction with instructors.

Interaction with the Instructor Improves Learning

The information described earlier discussed how individuals could derive knowledge from the symbolic interaction that occurs within the educational process. Instructors can stimulate interaction through interest, which then motivates the student to

learn and obtain knowledge in the online classroom (Moore, 1989). Instructor interaction resonates the importance of a relationship with students through encouragement fostered by involvement (Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005; Medina, 2012; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Tomei (2006) described the interaction between instructor and student as a pivotal role in the development of student attitudes about online learning. Bollinger and Martindale (2004) characterized this interaction as the most significant factor in determining a students' satisfaction in the online learning environment. Swan (2001) found that students who experienced high levels of interaction with an instructor also reported high levels of interaction with the course and program of learning. Sanders and Hirshbuhl (2007) noted that a study of online courses at a Midwestern university showed evidence of increased student satisfaction where the dialogue between instructor and student was present. The additional literature research again suggested that interaction is an important component for student success in learning. Another topic covered within the research questions related to participant's participation in online education and in ground-based education.

Participation

The following information investigates how participation is viewed in education, and what research has been conducted on participation in education. Lee, Pate, and Cozart (2015) suggested that a lack of participation in online classrooms is one of the primary reasons that individuals are dropping from online education. In order for education to accomplish its purpose and to learn, students must be engaged participants in the classroom (Arum and Roksa 2011; Dempsey, 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt,

2005). Bain (2004), Dempsey (2015), and Kuh (2009) wrote that student participation is critical because it allows for a deeper learning and understanding, increasing the capacity for continued learning. When students participate in the learning environment of the college classroom, the results include improved critical thinking, written communication, and problem-solving skills (Arum and Roksa 2011; Dempsey, 2015; Kuh et al. 2005).

Students' participation and investment in learning activities, is important in online learning because it can increase learning and reduce educational risks such as dropout (Lee, Pate, Cozart, 2015; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Participation enables meaningful interactions between the student and the internal and external factors of learning, such as student attention, and desire, instructors, and peer interactions (Lee et. al, 2015; Finn & Rock, 1997). Schunk and Mullen (2012) suggested that when participation is part of the educational process, students become motivated to succeed.

Participation between instructors and students, as well as interaction with students and colleagues, is crucial to learning (Giero, 2012; Rovai, 2001; Swan, 2002, 2003; Webb-Boyd, 2008; Woo & Reeves, 2007). Rovai (2001) stated that people with similar interests could create a stimulating, interesting, and intense learning experience.

Participation influences retention and achievement on assignments (Andersen, Lampley, and Good, 2013; McKay & Estrella, 2008; Nora & Rendon, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Andersen, et al. (2013) and McKay and Estrella (2008) suggested that participation with instructors positively associates with students' beliefs about accomplishing academic goals. This study will review participation that has occurred between the participants with their colleagues and with their instructors during their

online journey to assess whether it has had an impact on their view of online education. The preceding information suggested that participation is an important factor when determining the success of a student in education. The following literature search was sought to provide additional detail about participation, more importantly, it focused on participation with colleagues and participation with instructors.

Participation with Colleagues

Inkelas, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) noted that participation with students is not an important factor in the transition to college for students, more importantly for first-generation students. However, in studies conducted by Davies, Schonder, Meyer, and Hall (2015) and Lee, Pate, and Cozart (2015), participation with colleagues played an important part in the success of their students' classes. Others have suggested within the literature that participation with colleagues is necessary for positive student outcomes (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). Although the literature was not strongly for, or against, how participation with colleagues determines the success of a student with his/her education, it does lean toward the notion that participation with colleagues is an important part of the educational process. However, participation with colleagues was not the only factor that was reviewed; rather, the participation that a student experienced with the instructor(s) was reviewed to determine its importance to the educational process.

Participation with Instructors

Bernard, Abrami, Borokhovski, Wade, Rana, Surkes, and Bethel (2009) and Medina (2012) suggested the quality of student-instructor participation is a catalyst in the

learning process. Instructors are meant to be facilitators, directors of discovery, philosophers, and the controllers of quality in the classroom (Medina, 2012). Instructors can use participation to stimulate interest and similarity, which then motivates the student to learn (Medina, 2012; Moore, 1989). Vygotsky (1978) alluded to student-instructor participation and compared it to a social relationship that builds additional knowledge when in occurrence. Gorsky and Caspi (2005) and Lee, Pate, and Cozart (2015) described participation between an instructor and student as the essential part of the learning process (Medina, 2012). Instructor participation builds a relationship with students through encouragement fostered by involvement (Andersen, et al., 2013; Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005; Medina, 2012; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Moore (1993) described participation as a series of communication activities between individuals, which is the most important aspect of online learning. Moore (p.2) suggested that the environment influence faculty-student participation. Moore commented that in online education, some communication will be one-way, and not all assignments will require participation with the instructor. But, Moore did comment that reliance on one-way participation leads to less favorable learning experiences with colleagues and instructors (Moore, 1993). Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) suggested that the number of times students and instructors communicate is not considered participation because participation requires students to be engaged in the educational process (Medina, 2012). The instructor has an obligation to format the information where participation occurs with the student (Bruner, 1963; Medina, 2012). As previously mentioned, instructor to student contact is an important factor in determining motivation and involvement (Gallien & Oomen-Early,

2008; Medina, 2012). Instructors must create an environment where the curriculum is designed to require participation (Medina, 2012; Pisutova-Gerber & Malovicova, 2009; Yang & Cornelious, 2005).

The literature research has suggested that instructor-to-student contact is an important factor for determining motivation and involvement. The research questions in the study also wanted to look at how the participants experienced communication with colleagues and instructors. Communication is a key component to interaction and participation; however, communication in its own right deserves attention. The following section reviewed literature related to communication in education and the impact it has on students, both with colleagues and instructors.

Communication

The information gathered from this study not only review communications habits with colleagues and instructors but also how this differed from ground-based and online education. Literature suggested that within the past decade, research has been conducted to see what role communication played between instructors' and students' (Myers & Huebner, 2011). Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) suggested that students wished to communicate with instructors and colleagues to build relationships. Students who communicated with instructors about courses on a relational level were interested in learning more about the instructors and colleagues on an interpersonal level (Myers & Huebner, 2011). However, a lack of significant communication with instructors may be related to the idea that students expect instructors to be credible, content experts, and little communication is necessary. This initial research suggested that communication is

not necessary for a student to be successful in education; however, this was a preliminary research that yielded little results. In order to gather additional literature, the focus changed to literature that looked individually at students' communication with colleagues and then communication with instructors.

Communication with Colleagues

A valuable part of this study was the information gathered from the participants about how they communicated with their colleagues during their online educational journey. Additionally, the information gathered from the participants provided information about how communication with colleagues differed in ground-based education. There are varying views on how important communication is in education. For example, Inkelas, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) suggested that students do not believe communication is an important factor to be successful in college. However, in a study conducted by Davies, Schonder, Meyer, and Hall (2015), communication with colleagues was important to the success of their students. Additional research has suggested that communication is essential to positive student outcomes (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). In 2010, Grandzol and Grandzol examined online course completion by looking at communication between students and colleagues.

Communication with Instructors

Another important factor for this study was how the participants have communicated with instructors during their educational journey. This study sought to review how the communication with instructors differed between ground-based and

online education. Bernard, Abrami, Borokhovski, Wade, Rana, Surkes, and Bethel (2009) and Medina (2012) suggested the quality of student-instructor communication increases with the content of the course. In a previous section, it was suggested that the job of an instructor is to be a facilitator, director of discovery, philosopher, and the controller of quality (Medina, 2012). Instructors can create interest in the educational process when communication is implemented (Medina, 2012; Moore, 1989). Dewey (1859 – 1952) believed in the importance of communication through interaction, in education; however, a study by Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) has suggested that communication between students and the instructor online is still being reviewed and studied (Medina, 2012). This study sought to assist with understanding how communication with instructors will assist the educational process. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that student-instructor communication is like a social relationship that builds additional knowledge for students. Gorsky and Caspi (2005) described the communication between an instructor and student as an essential part of the learning process because it gives students confidence to succeed (Medina, 2012). Instructor-student communication demonstrates the importance of a relationship with students through encouragement fostered by involvement in the educational process (Andersen, et al., 2013; Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005; Medina, 2012; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). An important part of successful learning is when instructors can communicate with students (Moore, 1993). Moore (p.2) suggested that educational philosophy, personality, course subject matter, and the environment influence faculty-student communication. He also noted that in online education, it is known that some communication will be one-way; however, reliance on one-way communication

leads to less favorable learning experiences (Moore, 1993). Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) suggested that communication does not matter if students are not engaged in the process (Medina, 2012). Therefore, the instructor has an obligation to format the information in a manner that the student can understand and, once established, opens dialogue(s) for communication (Bruner, 1963; Medina, 2012). Instructor-to-student communication is an important factor in determining motivation and engagement (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008; Medina, 2012). Instructors must create an environment where the curriculum is designed to create communication with instructors and colleagues (Medina, 2012; Pisutova-Gerber & Malovicova, 2009; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). The literature has suggested that communication with instructors and students is important to student success in education. The primary research questions for the study also sought to gain information about the experiences of the participants and their relationships with colleagues and instructors during their online educational journey.

Relationships

The information gathered from this study not only reviewed the relationships with colleagues and instructors, but also how these relationships differed between ground-based and online education. Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) suggested that students communicate with instructors to build relationships in courses. Students who communicate with instructors on a relational level are interested in learning more about the instructors on an interpersonal level (Myers & Huebner, 2011). However, a lack of significant relationships with instructors may be related to the idea that students expect instructors to be credible, content experts, and little communication is necessary to build

a relationship (Myers & Huebner, 2011). This preliminary literature review suggested that relationships are an important part of the educational process for students; however, additional literature research was necessary to provide an individual account of how students view relationships with colleagues and how students view relationships with instructors.

Relationships with Colleagues

There were few reviews found on how important relationships are in education. Additional research suggested that relationships are helpful to build positive student outcomes in education (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). Grandzol and Grandzol (2010) suggested that lower level courses might not require relationships for successful student outcomes, where advanced courses may require additional student support to improve course completion outcomes. The results of this study were not generalizable to populations outside of similar community college settings, or different programs (Grandzol and Grandzol, 2010). The limited literature available about relationships with colleagues did suggest that the research I conducted has provided additional focus on the topic of relationships in education, and more importantly, how the limited relationships experienced by the participants in my study will impact future research. Additional literature was reviewed to determine what research was available regarding the relationships that students had with instructors in education.

Relationships with Instructors

Students that report a strong relationship with instructors display better learning outcomes and achievement (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Creasy, Jarvis, & Knapcik, 2009; Eccles, 2004, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Also, students that are closer to their instructors are more confident and self-directed with their course work (Creasy, et al., 2009; Pintrich, Roeser, & DeGroot, 1994; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). Creasy et al. (2009) found that relationships with instructors and students create positive academic achievement and learning outcomes for the students involved.

A brief synopsis of how the relationships, inclusive of communication, between students and instructors, impact the educational process was presented. However, the preceding studies lacked qualitative information of the students' views regarding communication and/or relationships with their instructors. The research that was conducted on first-generation doctoral male students gathered information related to the relationships that the participants build with colleagues and instructors. The gathered information may provide insight into why students communicate with instructors and colleagues the way they do, and why students build relationships with instructors and colleagues. Future research will be able to use this material for additional support and to help bridge the gap with how students experience online education.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature review provided information that suggests that interaction, participation, communication, and relationships are important factors to consider for student success. Online learning and the tools associated with online learning have made it easier for students to go back and review materials and assignments that are due,

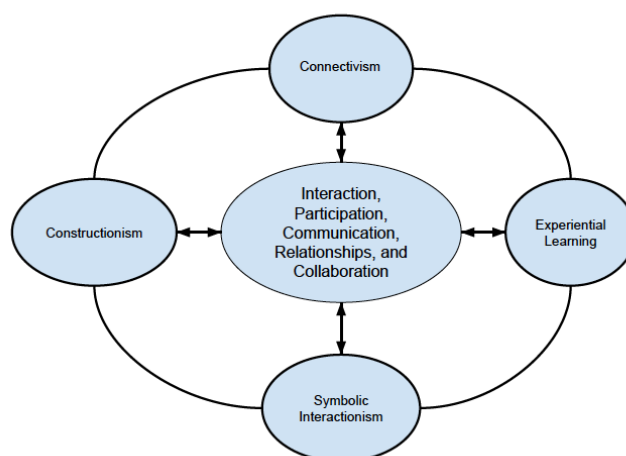
whereas, in ground-based education, missing assignments can be detrimental to a student's success (Johnson, 2010). The first-generation doctoral male students chosen for this study decided to attempt online learning regardless of their educational success in ground-based education. Information collected from the participants provided evidence that suggested that the participants in this study have been persistent and successful in their online educational journey

Thus far, I have provided information that suggested that studies have been conducted on first-generation students, men in education, and online education. Information gathered from literature has provided a base for this study; however, it failed to adhere to all of the facets of the proposed study. For example, articles related to first-generation students tended to be quantitative and did not provide sufficient evidence from a student's perspective. Also, the information presented about men in education continued to focus on mixed gender studies and did not look into a purely male perspective. This study looked at a specific group of individuals, first-generation doctoral male students that transitioned from ground-based education to online education. The study sought an understanding of how this cohort experiences online education and how this educational experience differs from previous ground-based education. Information gathered from this case study research may assist with minimizing the achievement gap that exists for male students in online education.

The following model, Figure 2.1 was developed as an initial guide for this study and throughout the study has suggested that students expect interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education.

This conceptual model, potentially the “Farris Model,” has guided this study from start to finish, originally as an internal mental idea.

Figure 2.1. Correlations of Interaction, Participation, Communication, and Relationships in Online Education – Farris Model



In the remaining chapters, Figure 2.1 has helped with answering questions, like when I took interaction, participation, communication, and relationship with colleagues and instructors what was I talking about? What was this integral whole of these experiences? How was interaction expressed differently from relationship? In chapter 3, the research method for this study is discussed. Additionally, the chapter provides information related to the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, the methodology used within the study, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative research approach that was taken to address the research questions of this study. The chapter discusses my role within the research and data collection about first-generation doctoral male students. Finally, the chapter presents and defends the methods of data collection and analysis used to understand the experiences presented by the participants. It may be recalled that in chapter 1, I provided an introduction that I used to develop the premise for this study, which looked to gather information from first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education, and portrayed the experiences of this group. Additionally, chapter 1 introduced the qualitative nature of the study, a collective case study, to ascertain the views of the participants through their experiences both in online education and ground-based education. Finally, chapter 1 provided definitions for terms commonly used in the study, assumptions within the study, scope and delimitations, limitations of the investigation, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviewed recent and relevant literature, which was used to provide details related to the participants chosen for this study, first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education to complete their studies. Online learning, one of the individual topics reviewed, has suggested that all higher education students will experience some form of online education during his/her college career (Howard, 2010; Sener, 2010).

Another topic, first-generation students, suggested that this student population has minimal understanding of what to expect and they do not understand what is necessary to

succeed in education, more importantly in online education (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011). The information presented within Chapter 2 suggested that adult learners reenter college in order to meet career goals or for self-improvement; however, challenges like full time work, family responsibilities, and under academic preparation keep them from succeeding (Bauman, Wang, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez, & Lindsey, 2004; Hardin, 2008; Methvin, 2012). The research conducted in this study showed the participants' persistence to continue in online education, regardless of having no previous online educational experiences.

Chapter 2 also contained information about the conceptual framework discussed within this study. The study sought to acknowledge the experiences of the cohort through interaction. Chapter 2 suggested that retention suffers when interaction is absent from the educational process (McKay & Estrella, 2008; Polinsky, 2002; Skahill, 2002) and interaction is positively associated with accomplishing academic goals (McKay and Estrella, 2008). Chapter 2 also looked into participation, communication, and relationships, with colleagues and instructors. The experiences, perceptions, and impact on student success of first-generation students, more importantly first-generation doctoral male students, were also represented in the literature. The literature collected and reviewed provided information that will help administrators and leaders of institutions understand the needs of the first-generation doctoral adult men who transitioned, from ground-based education to online education. However, in order to get a better understanding, it was important to know things brought up, but not thoroughly

researched, in the literature review. These gaps led to questions, which became the research questions.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this collective case study was to research the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time and to see how these experiences differed from ground-based education. I chose a collective case study because qualitative research is an inquiry process of knowledge based on methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem; and if the study is cautiously guided, provides safeguarded, vigorous information to support a study (Creswell, 2009; Yin 2009). The researcher builds a complex, whole picture, analyzes words, and reports detailed views of informants (Creswell, 2009, p. 15).

The participants chosen for this study completed their undergraduate and first graduate degrees through ground-based education. The research design of this study was built around the gap in research and literature about first-generation doctoral male students. The scope of the study was based on the primary research question: How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?

In addition to the primary research question of the study, a subset series of questions were investigated including, how did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to

interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors? And, how did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?

Institutions need to have an understanding of how their students view the educational process. The research design afforded me an opportunity to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of the participants from their perspective. The study will help design systems that support the educational process for first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education. Campus leaders can use the material gathered from the participants to add processes that will improve interaction, communication, participation, and relationships among students with their colleagues and instructors. The study will contribute to positive social change because the findings inform the design of practice to impact retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students who have transitioned from ground-based education to online education, which will add more educated individuals to today's workplace and society. Additionally, these individuals are then afforded the opportunity to give back to younger generations and continue the cycle of educating persons throughout the country and the world.

For this study, a collective case study was chosen because the study focused on a particular situation, event, program, and/or phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in real-life context, which helps

researchers gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for all involved (Merriam, 2009, p.19; Yin 2008). Each of the participant's responses was collected and treated as a case (Merriam, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested the validity and stability of findings within a study can be verified by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases to understand a single case finding.

Shekedi (2005) suggested that a collective case study presents and compares information between several case narratives. This can be accomplished by presenting the data collectively with each single case narrative portrayed through unique features and context (Shekedi, 2005, p. 21). Stake (1995) suggested that there are two principles uses for a case study, 1) to obtain the descriptions of others and 2) to obtain the interpretations of others. Qualitative researchers enjoy the opportunity to discover and portray multiple views of a case (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

Qualitative research explores a holistic pathway that helps to develop theory based on experiences of participants (Burns and Grove, 2009). Additionally, qualitative research is used to examine the naturalistic inquiry and complex human experiences through non-statistical methods (Borbasi and Jackson, 2012; Moxham, 2012). Through qualitative research, the experiences and lives are not oversimplified into some statistics (Hoffmann, T., Bennett, S., and Del Mar, C., 2013).

This study researched the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students that transitioned, from ground-based education to online education. Knowing common experiences from the participants is valuable for various groups, including administrators and educators (Creswell, 2007). The participants in this study shared similar experiences

due to the move from ground-based education to online education, especially since the online experience was new. The similar experiences were evident because of the participant's interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues, and also through the experiences of interaction, participation, communication, and relationships shared with the participant's instructors. Although a collective case study was chosen for this study, other qualitative approaches were considered.

Qualitative Approaches Considered

Several qualitative approaches were considered. Qualitative research is underpinned by several theoretical perspectives; 1) Constructivist-Interpretive, 2) Critical, 3) Post-positivist, Post-structural/Postmodern, 4) Phenomenology, 5) Ethnography, and 6) Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2009; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Phenomenology was considered, and originally chosen for the study, because it delved into the experiences of the participants through exploration of meanings based on their responses (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Individuals who live mutual experiences share some facets of experience (Methvin, 2012). The purpose of using phenomenology in this study would have been to gather experiences and narrow the information down to a description by capturing and detailing commonalities within the information (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007; Methvin, 2012; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology provides a deep understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by several individuals, which in this case was to elaborate on the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students that transitioned from ground-based education to online education (Creswell, 2007). However, after reviewing the initial information gathered

from the participants, it was found that a case study would prove more effective in addressing the research questions, based on the initial data collected.

I considered Grounded theory because its focuses on understanding the schema of a phenomenon that relates to particular situations and how persons handle the phenomenon that exists (Creswell, 2009). Grounded theory involves formulating a proposition, testing said proposition, and redevelopment of the proposition until a social theory is developed through the study of social systems present within human interaction (Jirjwong, Johnson, and Welch, 2011). Information is gathered through interviews, observations, recorded reviews, or the combination of the preceding (Creswell, 2009). Analysis is performed through concept formation, development, modification, and integration where the expected outcomes of Grounded Theory research involve developing a theory supported by examples from the data collected (Creswell, 2009, p. 16). This qualitative design was considered for this study because it does generate information related to the interaction that participants experienced with instructors and colleagues. However, it was rejected because this study did not attempt to create a new theory about first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education.

Ethnography was considered because it studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time (Creswell, 2009). Information is primarily collected through observational data and interaction to gain entrance into a culture through immersion (Creswell, 2009, p. 22). Leininger (1985) suggested that ethnography is the systematic process of observing, detailing, describing, documenting, and analyzing

the life ways or people in their familiar environment. Ethnography analyzes the characteristics of a culture with the outcome to provide a description of the culture (Creswell, 2009). Ethnography was considered for this study, based on the opportunity to collect data through interaction and observation of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Methvin, 2012); however, it was determined that the time and financial burden associated with an ethnographic study would make it unfeasible for a dissertation study (Methvin, 2012).

Narrative Research was considered because it consists of researching the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Creswell, 2009). The information is gathered and retold by the research in a chronology narrative format (Creswell, 2009, p. 16). This study design was not considered because my goal was not to provide a narrative of the research participants; rather, my goal was to gather information from the participants about specific experiences that have occurred during a specific point in time.

Lastly, historical studies were researched; however, not considered because this type of study looks at the synthesis of data from events that occurred in the past, with a goal of developing a meaning to the present (Leininger, 1985). This study was not built with the premise of studying historical data, along with the current data collected from the participants, to develop a new meaning. Therefore, it was not considered.

Ultimately, a case study was chosen because a case study is open to using theory or conceptual categories to help guide the research and analysis of data (Howard, 2010), it was only fitting in finding out how first-generation doctoral male students experienced

interaction in assignments with colleagues and instructors, how they participated on assignments with colleagues and instructors, how they communicated with colleagues and instructors, how they collaborated, and how they formed relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education through their experiences. The study also explored how their experiences differed from previous ground-based education to online education.

This study aimed to develop a foundation about this particular cohort through descriptions of common experiences between the participants. For example, the information gathered about experiences with colleagues and instructors through interaction, communication, and participation may provide evidence that will allow administrators and faculties to improve the educational process for first-generation doctoral male students by changing the format of the online classroom, or content within courses. However, the research gathered was not collected to formulate a theory about the population or the experiences described, rather, the information gathered was collected to present material from one group's experiences. As the researcher for this study, it was not only important to describe the type of study best suited for this case, it was important to understand what my role was as the researcher. The following section provides information related to my role as the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

In research, analysis is considered the instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); however, Yin (2003), Stake (1995), and Merriam (2009) suggested that the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing the data in

qualitative research. Data is mediated through the human instrument, the researcher; rather, through questionnaires, interviews, observations, etc. (Simon, n.d.). Greenbank (2003) stated that a qualitative researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, including biases, any expectations, and experiences to qualify him/herself as qualified to conduct the research. It was my responsibility to ensure that potential participants possessed some quality or experience that would add to the study and help answer the research questions (Wertz, 2005). In this qualitative study, open-ended questions were presented to the participants and the information gathered resulted in rich dialogue that led to understanding the findings (Creswell, 2009). I collected, recorded, and maintained the confidentiality of data as the researcher (Coyne, 1997; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999).

Based on the information provided, or suggested, I believed it was important to provide insight into my background. I am a first-generation doctoral student, pursuing a Ph.D. in Education Technology. I began my career in post-secondary education in 2001 in Financial Aid. I obtained a Bachelor's of Science degree in Marketing and Management in 1993, and an Executive Master in Business Administration degree in 2005. This educational journey is my first in the field of education. While I was working for Financial Aid, I had an opportunity to teach mathematics to the students at one of my campuses. In 2007, I had an opportunity to move out of Financial Aid and into an administrative role in post-secondary education. Within the administrative role, I began working with my company's online division, more specifically how courses were built and delivered to the students. My interest in the technology being used online, and the

urge to understand the educational process, led me to enroll in the Ph.D. in Education program at the University where I conducted my study.

In 2011, I moved into a new administrative role, Dean of Education, which has provided me the chance to use the education I have received within my Ph.D. studies, as well as the “Management” skills I obtained over the years, through education and experience. For me, completing a Ph.D., while working, has required that I take time from my family, and sometimes work, to complete my studies. I felt, as a first-generation student, especially in a Ph.D. program, that I was often on an island. So, this helped me build a basis for this study, as well as the information I began to research on first-generation students.

In this study, I have served in three primary roles; 1) I selected the topic and designed the methodology, 2) I conducted the research and served as the sole data collector and transcriptionist, and 3) I analyzed the data, developed clusters of meanings, and identified themes. The information collected provided a description of how first-generation doctoral male students experienced interaction, participation, communication, and built relationships with colleagues and instructors within online education and ground-based education (Methvin, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990; Smith et al., 2009; Sokolowski, 2000). I developed strategies and practices to control bias. First, I reflected on my subjectivity and monitored how I used it in the research. Glesne (2011) suggested that a researcher take the time to write before and after interviews to address preconceived opinions and subjectivity. I did not share personal experiences during any of my interactions with the participants as the comments could have potentially

influenced or skewed the amount or quality of their responses. I asked questions of, and received advice and guidance from, my dissertation committee.

There was no affiliation or professional experience with the participants. However, it is important to note that I am a first-generation student, and my undergraduate degree was completed at a traditional university. At this time, my first graduate level degree was completed online, and I continue this study as an active online learner. I am a Dean of Education at a for-profit career college and do not currently work with online students. I believe individuals have to attain certain educational standards to improve their lives and the ones they support to meet today's workforce demands (Methvin, 2012). Because I can relate to the population studied, I have taken great care to ensure that I was not biased when collecting and interpreting data, and when presenting the descriptions of the phenomenon. To make sure the research was conducted in an objective manner, I set aside pre-conceived notions about the participants (Husserl, 1931/1969; Hatch, 2002; Methvin, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Contributions to this study laid in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the material disclosed. Primarily, the goal was to report the outcomes of the study through inquiry and analysis of reporting. The narrative was composed of themes and experiences of the participants that participated in the study. The following section was meant to describe the methodology used to select the participants for this study. The study consisted of four first-generation doctoral male students enrolled at a predominately online University. The first-generation doctoral male students that chose to participate in this study completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based education. Data analysis was used to find significant

statements, structural descriptions, and the essence of their experiences as first-generation men completing a doctoral degree online.

Methodology

Participants in this study were drawn from first-generation doctoral male students who completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based education. The research provided information about how first-generation doctoral male students experienced interaction with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and formed relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. As First-generation doctoral male students, the participants entered this online academic setting with a minimal understanding of what to expect and did not understand what is necessary to meet familial expectations while enrolled in an online doctoral level program (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011).

The study was conducted through a major Online University, whom I contacted to request permission to access the participants. I utilized the University's approved participant pool and asked the participants to complete a Consent Form (Appendix A) for the study. In research, the researcher-participant relationship is important to the quality and quantity of data collected (Methvin, 2012). Efforts were taken to make sure the participants were at ease, and to build a rapport with the participants. To select my participants, I made sure that I considered the population for the study and was specific on my expectations.

Participant Selection Logic

This study examined a specific population, one that had not been thoroughly studied. The study explored the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students that transitioned from ground-based education to online education. With more information about this population, colleges and universities will now consider how to support first-generation doctoral male students through the college experience. In order to participate in this study, the participants had to be first-generation doctoral male students that transitioned from ground-based education, to online education, having completed all previous educational experience through ground-based education. The participants had to be willing to complete an Experience with Colleagues questionnaire (Appendix B) and an Experience with Instructors questionnaire (Appendix E), which took each participant approximately 1 hour to complete. He had to be willing to complete a blog (Appendix C), which took approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. Originally, he had to be willing to complete a one-on-one Skype interview (Appendix D), which took approximately 30 minutes to complete. However, during the data analysis portion of the study, it was found that additional information collected from the participants through email (Appendix F) and during a secondary Skype interview (Appendix G), would provide additional data to increase the depth and breadth of the study. The email took participants approximately 30-45 minutes to complete, and the interview took approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

The sample size chosen for this study was originally 10-12 participants; however, only four participants completed the study. Originally, there were concerns about the sample size that completed the study; however, with the information that was collected during the study, it was believed that a replication of the study with a larger population

may or may not yield different results. Creswell (2007) and Mason (2010) suggested that validation is important in a qualitative study; however, because qualitative research is labor intensive, analyzing a large sample could be impractical and unnecessary. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) conducted a study on the topic of sample size in a qualitative study. Within the study, they found that the number of interviews conducted within a qualitative study is correlated with cultural factors, rather than based on sample size (p. 21). Creswell (2007) suggested that to promote validity within a study, one should develop strategies and techniques to minimize questionability of said study. The study used triangulation to report data from multiple resources to shed light on themes and perspectives. I worked with a dissertation chair and methodologist to keep the research honest through the written dialogue, review, and drafting the document. To reduce bias, I asked the participants for acknowledgment of any experiences that could shape the outcome of the study. I provided detailed descriptions of the processes and outcomes to ensure transferability of data. Finally, I consulted with external constituents to examine the process, and product, to determine if the interpretations were supported by the data.

Participants for this study were chosen from multiple programs of study. Participants were chosen from this single university without consideration for other universities. The first-generation doctoral male students chosen completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based (brick and mortar) education, as established through their self-reported questionnaires. Participation was

limited to individuals that were enrolled in programs delivered wholly online. In order to gather rich data, I developed several research instruments for the study.

Instrumentation

Six instruments were used to elicit data needed for the study. They were:

Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire. Originally, each participant was asked to complete an Experience with Colleagues questionnaire (Appendix B) and was asked to return the completed questionnaire by email and/or fax. The Experience with Colleagues questionnaire was developed to provide preliminary information about the participant's experiences with colleagues in the areas of interaction, participation, and relationships. Three of the four participants provided information from this questionnaire.

Blog Entry. Secondly, the participants were asked to take part in a weekly blog entry (Appendix C) that began during week two of the Fall 2014 term and continued through the final week of the Fall 2014 term. The data collected was designed to gain an understanding of how the participants are experiencing interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors for the Fall, 2014 term. Unfortunately, only one of the participants completed this portion of the study. However, because of the information collected from the initial data collection, and the follow up information collected, the lack of information collected from this instrumentation source had no negative impact on the study findings.

Skype Interview. Thirdly, participants were asked to take part in a semi-structured, in-depth, Skype interview that used an interview protocol that I developed. The

interviews were conducted using a protocol with open-ended questions in a semi-structured format, as recommended by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). The interview protocol, provided in (Appendix D), was designed to prompt the first-generation doctoral male students to share a description of communication experiences, with colleagues and instructors, in the online learning environment. Each interview was conducted via Skype and was recorded on the computer. I have saved each recording on my password-protected computer, and saved an additional copy on a portable hard drive. I have saved this information to Google drive (privately), in an effort to protect the privacy of the participants. All four participants assisted with providing information for this portion of the study. The research gathered from this portion of the study provided information important to the findings of the study.

Experience with Instructors Questionnaire. For the final data collection strategy, or as it was originally planned, participants were asked to complete an Experience with Instructors questionnaire (Appendix E). They were asked to return the completed questionnaire by email. The questionnaire was meant to provide information about the participant's experiences with instructors primarily in the areas related to interaction, participation, and relationships. Three of the four participants provided information for this portion of the study.

Follow-Up Email Questions. After the initial analysis of the data that was collected, it was determined that more information, collected from the participants, might provide additional depth to this study. Therefore, the participants were sent a series of questions via email (Appendix F). Participants were asked to return the questions to me

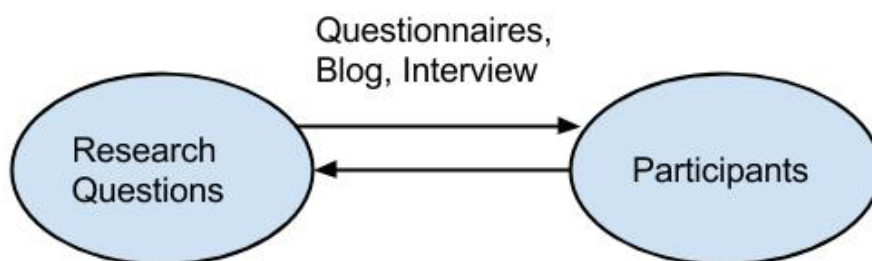
by email. Three of the four participants provided feedback for this instrument, which was beneficial to the study.

Follow-Up Skype Interview. The original data collected provided insights into the research questions, but indicated additional areas where more data would be beneficial; therefore, follow-up questions were developed, and participants were asked to participate in a follow-up Skype interview (Appendix G). The information gathered from these questions provided additional depth to the study. Three of the four participants provided additional feedback for the study from this interview.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

When I began researching the literature for this study, I was not able to locate questions that I believed would capture the open-ended responses from participant's that would be beneficial to the study. Therefore, I was left working with the dissertation chair to develop questions for the study that we believed would gather opened-ended responses from the participants. I developed the questions provided to the participants in the questionnaires, blog, Skype interviews, and email. Appendix H shows my initial attempt to align the questions that were asked of participants within the questionnaires, blog, and initial Skype interview. After developing the questions for the participants, it was time to begin determining how I would gather the participants for the study, create a preliminary idea of how they would participate in the study, and determine how I would collect and formulate the data. The questions developed for the study were created to align with the research questions of the study. Figure 3.1 shows my initial idea of how the data would align.

Figure 3.1. Research Questions Compared to Questions in Questionnaires, Blog, and Skype Interview



Triangulation was initially accomplished by creating four instruments (tools) to collect data; an Experience with Colleagues questionnaire, blog entry questions, Skype interview questions, and Experience with Instructors questionnaire. After the initial study was conducted, I used additional instrumentation to gather information; additional email questions and follow-up Skype interview questions. The initial instrumentation tools were developed to gather information that would garner feedback in relation to the primary research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?”

Table Two initially provided insight into the specific tools that were used to collect the research data and the information that was collected (please see Appendix H for written clarification what tool was used to provide information specifically related to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships). For example, when

researching interaction with the participants, questions provided in the blog entry, Experiences with Colleagues questionnaire questions, Skype interview questions, and Experiences with Instructors questionnaire facilitated responses valuable to this research. After the initial study was completed, I determined that additional input was needed to support and/or gather additional information from the participants to substantiate the initial findings and gather additional information, therefore, two new instruments were developed, additional email questions and Skype interview questions. Table Two was updated below to show what additional information was collected from the additional email and follow-up Skype interview to support the study.

Table 2

Information Collected Through Each Instrument Chosen for Triangulation (Primary Research Question)

	<u>Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire (with Colleagues)</u>	<u>Blog Entries (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Skype Interview (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Experience with Instructors Questionnaire (with Instructors)</u>	<u>Additional Email Questions (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Follow-up Skype Interview (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>
Interaction	X			X	X	X
Participation	X			X	X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationships	X			X	X	X

In addition to the primary research question for this study, there were a series of sub-questions that provided information about this cohort including, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and

instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors; in comparison to ground-based education.” Table Three initially provided insight into the specific tools that were used to collect the research data and the information that was collected (please see Appendix H for written clarification what tool was used to provide information specifically related to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships). After the initial study was completed, I determined that additional input was needed to support and/or gather additional information from the participants to substantiate the initial findings and gather additional information, therefore, two new instruments were developed, additional email questions and Skype interview questions. Table Three was updated below to show what additional information was collected from the additional email and follow-up Skype interview to support the study.

Table 3

Information Collected Through Each Method Chosen for Triangulation (Online versus Ground-based)

	<u>Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire (with Colleagues)</u>	<u>Blog Entries (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Skype Interview (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Experience with Instructors Questionnaire (with Instructors)</u>	<u>Additional Email Questions (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Follow-Up Skype Interview (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>
Interaction	X			X	X	X
Participation	X			X	X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationships	X			X	X	X

When reviewing, “How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education,” Table Four provided information regarding which instrument collected

data to support the research (please see Appendix H for written clarification of the exact questions that were used to collect the initial data related to this research question). After the initial study was completed I determined that additional input was needed to support and/or gather additional information from the participants to substantiate the initial findings, therefore, additional email questions and Skype interview questions were developed and delivered to the participants. Table Four was updated below to show what additional information was collected from the additional email and follow-up Skype interview to support the study. Unfortunately, the data collected from the instruments developed did not gather information supporting, or refuting, the participant's feelings about collaboration.

Table 4

Information Collected about Collaboration (Online versus Ground-Based)

	<u>Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire (with Colleagues)</u>	<u>Blog Entries (Colleagues and Instructors)</u>	<u>Experience with Instructors Questionnaire (with Instructors)</u>	<u>Additional Email Questions</u>	<u>Follow-up Skype Interview</u>
Collaboration	X	X	X	X	X

Recruitment, Participation, and Two-Step Data Collection Process

Recruitment, participation, and data collection was accomplished in four phases. During the recruitment phase, a purposeful, criterion-specific sample was decided upon and took place in two steps (Methvin, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, the criteria for the participants was created and provided to the University. Secondly, once potential participants acknowledged interest in the study and acknowledged that they met all

criteria for the study, a letter of invitation to participate in the study was submitted through email. The study was conducted through an Online University that offers Doctoral level programs. The University provided permission to access the participants; first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time, through the University's approved sites, which included a participant pool offered at the University (Appendix A).

The study questions, inclusive of the questionnaires and blog questions, were provided to the participants via email and a wiki page, which was created through wikispaces.com. Communication regarding the Skype interviews and the follow-up information was set up through email and phone conversations. Based on the methods of communication used, each participant was able to get their answers back in a time frame that suited each individual's needs, as well as maintaining their complete privacy. Participants in this study were not provided monetary compensation or any other means of compensation. However, it was suggested to the participants how the study would provide them with the "experience" of participating in a study, which would help them gain insight into the process of developing their future studies. This phase was open for approximately 32 weeks. This phase was closed once four participants consented to the study. It is important to note that due to the limited number of participants that showed interest in the study I listed this as a limitation.

The second phase was the participation phase. This phase was initially open until the four participants completed their questionnaires and Skype interviews. Data was collected through multiple contacts with each participant. First, each participant

completed an Experience with Colleagues questionnaire (Appendix B) and returned the completed questionnaire by email and/or fax. The Experiences with Colleagues questionnaire provided preliminary information about the participant's experiences with colleagues.

Secondly, the participants were asked to complete a weekly blog entry (Appendix C) that began during week two of the term and continued through the final week of the term. The data collected was designed to gain an understanding of how the participants experienced education for that term. More specifically, the focus of the blog was centered on interaction with colleagues.

Thirdly, participants were asked to take part in a semi-structured, in-depth, Skype interview that used an interview protocol that I developed. The interview protocol, provided in (Appendix D), was designed to prompt the first-generation doctoral male students to share a description of communication experiences, with colleagues and instructors, in the online learning environment.

For the final data collection strategy, participants completed an Experience with Instructors questionnaire (Appendix E) and were asked to return the completed questionnaire by email and/or fax. The questionnaire provided me with information about the participant's experiences with instructors.

A third phase was added because of the limited number of participants that were available for the study; it was determined that additional depth was needed. Therefore, the participants were emailed a series of questions (Appendix F) and were asked if they would participate in a secondary, follow-up, Skype interview (Appendix G). Three of the

four participants provided information related to the email that was sent, and three of the four participants provided information during the follow-up Skype interview.

The fourth and final phase was the follow-up phase. This phase occurred after the study was completed. In this phase, participants were informed by email regarding the results of the research. They were thanked again for their participation and were given contact information to ask any questions they had regarding the study. It was important to note, that during the initial Skype interview, I informed the participants that upon completion of the study, a copy of the dissertation would be provided to them. I did give the participants an opportunity to request a review of their answers to the Skype interview questions, and questionnaire responses, prior to the submission of the dissertation, should they choose to do so. The participants had not requested to see their transcripts at the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Organization and management of data are essential to make sense of the information collected in a case study (Merriam, 2009). Data was collected from participants meeting the eligibility requirements for the study. The data analysis process began following the receipt of the Experience with Colleagues questionnaire and continued throughout the research process. The analysis of the data focused on those items that attempted to answer the research question(s). Comparative data was obtained from the questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up email. Demographic information was collected from the follow-up email that was sent to the participants during phase three of the study. The questionnaires, Skype interview(s), and follow-up email contained semi-

structured open-ended questions. The questionnaires and blog response received were manually input into Microsoft Excel. Appendix I demonstrates how I originally set up the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to capture responses from the interviews and recordings. Initially, I entered the responses from the questionnaires and blog responses. In some cases, when the participants provided their responses in word I was able to copy and paste the responses into the Excel spreadsheet.

The original Skype interviews were recorded using Quicktime player for Mac. Initially, I input the information into Microsoft Excel. I listened to the responses from the participants to capture, and re-capture, the information. The participants' interviews were recorded so I could obtain additional explanation (if necessary), clarify, and verify the accuracy of the transcription. I read the data collected and attempted to code the data in an effort to develop or find themes in the material. When transcribing the information I would strive to repeat what the participants had to say word for word; however, in certain instances, I made minor grammatical changes to the information. After the information was transcribed and checked for accuracy, I saved the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to my password-protected computer, portable hard drive, and Google Drive (there was no information that was transcribed, and saved, that would give any inclination as to the names of the participants). At this stage, I analyzed the data using methods, which followed Merriam (2009). In the general sorting stages, I read through the spreadsheet and highlighted bits of data that I found interesting based on the literature review and protocol questions (Merriam, 2009). After completing my initial review, I followed

Merriam's (2009) process of reflective sorting and conceptualization, in order to find themes within the data.

I re-read the literature gathered and efforts were made to identify discrepant cases that challenged my findings. My original "coding" procedures were used to identify patterns, similarities, and differences used to answer the research questions asked within this study. I found, through the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, that although I was able to provide examples through the "words" of the participants, I was not able to obtain the depth of information, develop codes, or gather themes for the study. Therefore, I incorporated and used NVivo to help strengthen the study. In accordance with Hatch (2002) and Moustakas (1994), the identification of major themes is used to break data into segmented units. I used similarities and differences found in the information gathered during the study to make general statements (Hatch, 2002; Medina, 2012). The meaning units were clustered into themes, which allowed me to apply textural descriptions of the information (Medina, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

I repeated the process of Merriam (2009) and reviewed the wording within NVivo and found 32 codes to refer to with 540 references to various topics. However, Merriam (2009) suggested that researchers must learn to create discipline and not pursue all themes that develop, or risk having too much data to diffuse; therefore, I limited the writing to themes that stood out to me. After reviewing the data several more times, I decided the information originally collected indicated themes that could be more fully developed, and additional data would be useful. Therefore, I developed an additional series of follow-up questions, which I delivered to the participants via email.

Additionally, there were follow-up questions that I developed to use in a Skype interview.

During phase three, the follow-up email and Skype interviews, I replicated the processes originally used (i.e. Microsoft Excel and NVivo) in order to capture the information provided by the participants. Again, efforts were made to identify discrepant cases that challenged the findings. All coding procedures were used to identify patterns, similarities, and differences used to answer the research questions asked within this study. The software used during this study was installed on my home computer and the computer is password-protected. I ensured data results were reflections of the participant's experiences through verification of the recorded interviews and collected materials. Detailed descriptions of related events, phenomenon, and the setting increase the transferability of results (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Medina, 2012; Miyata & Kai, 2009; Twycross & Shields, 2005).

Crishna (2007) suggested that validity is established through the content and construct (Medina, 2012). Content validity is concerned with the breadth and depth of information (Crishna, 2007; Medina, 2012). In order to provide triangulation in my analysis; questionnaires were created and collected, blog entries were created and collected, and interviews were conducted and recorded. The questions established for the study were reviewed by the dissertation chair and URR of the university. Construct validity is based on triangulation of multiple data sources (Crishna, 2007; Medina, 2012). Curtin & Fossey (2007) noted that triangulation provides a, "holistic view of a phenomenon being studied" (Medina, 2012). Triangulation can provide a complete

explanation of a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing consistency in data patterns (Curtin and Fossey, 2007; Medina, 2012).

Data collected from the participants in this study indicated patterns related to their experiences that educators could use to promote changes to the online educational process (i.e. add Skype to simulate face-to-face communication). Knowledge gained from this study provided solutions for colleges/universities to adjust interaction methods with students, especially male, first-generation doctoral students; and make adjustments to the educational process. Addressing factors that promote and hinder academic success is a component of creating a productive society (Inge, 2012). Study findings suggested needed areas of improvement for universities, especially as they relate to students feeling more connected to their colleagues and instructors. The study findings can inform the design of practice that impact retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students who have transitioned from ground-based education to online education.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established in this study through the content and construction from the information gathered (Chrishna, 2007; Medina, 2012). I summarized and analyzed the data through the notes I collected and summarized. I used the notes and data to build themes, and developed relationships within the data collected. The notes I gathered provided additional trustworthiness for the information in my analysis; questionnaires, blog entries, emailed questions, and interviews that were conducted. My dissertation chair reviewed the questions established and used within the study. I

provided descriptions by using direct quotes from the participants when possible, in an effort to convey their feelings, and to provide a sense of shared experiences (Creswell, 2003). I did not have any predictions of whether or not the data would agree with any of the theories presented within the literature review. I also had no theories of whether or not the material would provide new revelations in relation to the questions developed for the study. Information noted by Dervin (1983) suggested that, when there are similarities within a study, the data collected might have greater credibility and meaning for the reader. Within the research I was responsible, not only for making sure that I used methods valid for the research, and to develop appropriate instrumentation, but it was also important that I protected the participants in the study.

Ethical Procedures

Researchers are obligated to make certain considerations for human participants (Methvin, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Doing so insures that participants are honest and forthcoming when providing information (Methvin, 2012). Full disclosure about the research must be considered (Methvin, 2012). All participants were provided accurate and complete information about the study, and were allowed to ask questions about the study before agreeing to participate. Each participant was provided consent documentation that outlined the intent of the study and made explicit the voluntary nature of the study (Appendix A). Participants were given the option to ask for and receive additional information about the study.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University (IRB approval #10-29-13-0165009) approved the proposal for the study. The research participants came

from categories considered protected. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants could dismiss themselves from the study at any time through an email to me. Three of four participants completed one Experiences with Colleagues questionnaire (Appendix B); one participation completed the weekly blog that included questions (Appendix C); all participated in a Skype interview of approximately thirty minutes (questions provided in Appendix D), and three of four participants completed one Experiences with Instructors questionnaire (Appendix E). After the initial research analysis was conducted, I determined that additional depth was needed, due to the limited number of participants in the study. Therefore, a set of questions was asked of the participants via email (Appendix F), which three of the four participants answered; and another Skype interview was set up (Appendix G), which three of the four participants completed. An interview protocol was developed for the in-depth, Skype interviews (Appendix D). The Skype interviews were recorded, and a transcript of each interview was created. Upon final approval of the dissertation, a summary of the final study has been made available to all participants and to the presidents or chancellors of the university that served as a site for the study.

Participant anonymity was another ethical consideration. I was going to assign each participant a number, which was to be used for the purpose of distinguishing one participant from another; however, based on the number of participants that completed the study, I chose pseudonyms for each individual. For example, the first participant interviewed has been given the name John. No one received any identifying information about research participants. The design of this study necessitated that selected staff at the

university were aware of participants being invited to take part in the study. Once each participant was identified, I communicated only with the participant(s) and did not identify potential participants that were selected to take part in the study, even to the dissertation committee members.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided information related to the research design and rationale for this collective case study and discussed additional qualitative studies that were considered. I provided information regarding my role as the researcher for this study and the methodology I used in this study. The information I collected from the participants, through the instruments created for the study, was reviewed and originally entered into Microsoft Excel for use in Chapter Four and Five. However, after reviewing the information, I found that Microsoft Excel did not provide the depth and/or provide coded themes; therefore, NVivo was implemented to help find codes/themes from the participants' responses. The data analysis process focused on intuitive-reflection and follows a case study approach to data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). From the analysis of the structures of the experiences, I developed a description of the common perceptions and experiences of the participants. Consideration of research participants, respondent validation, and richness/redundancy of data was used to ensure the quality and validity of this research. In Chapter 2, I developed a model, the "Farris Model", see Figure 2.1, which has guided my study and has suggested that students expect interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. I move, now, to Chapter 4 where I provide a summary of the thoughts and

responses from the participant's, primarily looking at themes that developed from their responses, which further supported the model I developed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this collective case study was to research the experiences of a group of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time versus previous ground-based education. The experiences described by the participants helped develop an understanding of the participant's experiences through interaction, participation, communication, and relationships, with colleagues and instructors. Chapter 4 consisted of the following; a) examining whether or not the setting influenced the participants' answers, b) examining whether or not the setting influenced the interpretation of the study results, c) the demographics and characteristics relevant to the study, d) an explanation of data collection, its frequency, and duration; e) data analysis, f) the evidence of trustworthiness, g) the results of the study findings, and h) the chapter summary.

Data was initially collected from the questionnaires, interviews, and a blog to answer, "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?" The same questionnaires, interviews, and blog also provided information from the participants related to the research question, "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?" The blog questions

were meant to assist with understanding, “How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?” however, only one of the participants in the study decided to complete this portion, therefore, the data collected did not appear to provide any true relevant data originally.

Responses collected by the participants during the original data collection process provided information related to the four conceptual frameworks covered in the study; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism. The following section describes the setting used for the study.

Setting

Participants in this study were drawn from first-generation doctoral male students who completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based education. The data collected sought to provide information about how this group, first-generation doctoral male students, experienced interaction with colleagues and instructors, participated with colleagues and instructors, communicated with colleagues and instructors, and formed relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. Information gathered from the participants during the study provided information to the preceding and is described in detail in the following sections of the paper.

The study was conducted through an Online University that offers multiple degree options, including Doctoral level programs. The University provided permission to access the participants; first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for

the first time, through the University's approved sites, which included a participant pool offered at the University. The study questions, inclusive of the questionnaires and blog questions, were provided to the participants via email and a wiki page, which was created through wikispaces.com. Communication regarding the Skype interviews and the follow-up information was set up through email and phone conversations. The participants for the study did not come from the same program(s). The following section described the demographics of the participants from this study.

Demographics

Participants for this study were chosen from multiple programs of study.

Participants were chosen from a single major online university without consideration for other universities. The first-generation doctoral male students chosen to participate in this study completed their undergraduate and first graduate degree through ground-based (brick and mortar) education, as they established through their self-reported questionnaires. Participation was limited to individuals that were enrolled in programs delivered wholly online. Table Five includes the age, locations, Programs of Study, and Fields of Employment for 3 of the four participants (Jacob did not respond to the follow-up email that requested this information; however, I was able to gather some information, except Jacob's age, based on the Skype interview conducted with Jacob).

Table 5

Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Location	Program of Study	Field of Employment
John	56	Chicago, IL	Education Technology	Education

Jacob	Unknown	Washington D.C.	N/A	N/A
James	52	Arizona	Management and Finance	Financial Planner/Investment Advisor
Joseph	41	Lansing, MI	Doctor of Business Administration	Digital Marketing Services and Consulting

Originally, I hoped to assemble a participant pool of 10-12; however, with the online participant pool utilized to gather participants, only four participants were interested in participation in the study. Mason (2010) suggested that, if the sample is too large, data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous; and, therefore a smaller sample size is sufficient. Based on Marshall's study, I mitigated the smaller size by focusing on the richness of data collected from each participant (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot, 2013).

Data Collection

Participant Selection

Solicitation procedure. Four participants committed to the study after 32 weeks of focused effort for finding suitable participants from the university participant pool. Of the four participants, three participants responded to the "Experiences with Colleagues Questionnaire," "Experiences with Instructors Questionnaire," and four participants completed the initial Skype interview. Only one of the participants provided feedback to the Blog questions and therefore the topic of collaboration was not considered further in the study. One participant did not provide any feedback to the questionnaire, blog questions, or communication related to the Skype interview. Three of the four

participants provided feedback to the follow-up email questions, and one of the four participants provided information during the follow-up Skype interview. The participants in this study were all working individuals and their participation was limited to their availability. Contact with the participants was limited to email and fax with the questionnaires and blog questions. The Skype interview provided virtual face-to-face contact with the participants. It was during the Skype interviews that the participants were able to discuss their limited availability due to their work schedules. The following section was created to describe the instruments used in the study.

Instrumentation

Four instruments were initially used to elicit data needed for the study. They were:

Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire. Originally, each participant was asked to complete an Experience with Colleagues questionnaire (Appendix B) and was asked to return the completed questionnaire by email and/or fax. The Experience with Colleagues questionnaire was developed to provide preliminary information about the participant's experiences with colleagues in the areas of interaction, participation, and relationships.

Blog Entry. Secondly, the participants were asked to take part in a weekly blog entry (Appendix C) that began during week two of the Fall 2014 term and continued through the final week of the Fall 2014 term. The data collected was designed to gain an understanding of how the participants are experiencing interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors for the Fall, 2014 term.

Skype Interview. Thirdly, participants were asked to take part in a semi-structured, in depth, Skype interview that used an interview protocol that I developed. The interviews were conducted using a protocol with open-ended questions in a semi-structured format, as recommended by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). The interview protocol, provided in (Appendix D), was designed to prompt the first-generation doctoral male students to share a description of communication experiences, with colleagues and instructors, in the online learning environment. Each interview was conducted via Skype, and was recorded on the computer. I have saved each recording on my password-protected computer, and saved an additional copy on my password-protected portable hard drive. I have saved this information to Google drive (privately), in an effort to protect the privacy of the participants.

Experience with Instructors Questionnaire. For the final data collection strategy, or as it was originally planned, participants were asked to complete an Experience with Instructors questionnaire (Appendix E). They were asked to return the completed questionnaire by email. The questionnaire was meant to provide information about the participant's experiences with instructors primarily in the areas related to interaction, participation, and relationships. Once the initial instruments were developed and the information was gathered from the participants, the data was then analyzed.

Data Analysis

Per the data analysis plan outlined in Chapter 3, the steps that were employed were as follows:

1. The raw data was collected from the two participant questionnaires (all four participants provided feedback), blog entries (only one participant provided feedback), and Skype interviews (all four participants provided feedback) for overall content.
2. The data was read and then reread.
3. I made notes to gain an understanding of the material and to align it with the questions of the study.
4. I originally used Microsoft Excel to enter the initial data in order to develop codes, themes, categories, descriptions, or definitions, as well as to make comments regarding understanding and explanations by participants.
5. I interpreted meanings aligned within the themes of the participants' responses to the two questionnaires, blog responses, and Skype interviews.
6. The information was compared across participants' responses looking for common themes to discuss in the study.
7. After determining that I needed explore the codes and themes in the study in greater depth, I incorporated NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package, to code the data into themes, categories, descriptions, or definitions, as well as to make comments regarding understanding and explanations by participants.
8. Follow-up email questions were developed, as well as Skype interview questions, to probe deeper into the themes uncovered in the initial data collection phase.

9. I went back to NVivo to code the new data to see if there were any new codes and themes that emerged, or additional information to add to support themes already found within the study.

The treatment of discrepant information was taken into consideration, and information found to be of no current importance to the case study nature of this study was kept on hand for future exploration and use in the study. Lastly, the information submitted was examined in an effort to look for common information, as well as contrasts between participants in relation to the major themes of the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through the content and construct of information within the study (Chrisna, 2007; Medina, 2012). I provided descriptions when possible by using direct quotes from the participants, in an effort to convey their feelings, and to provide a sense of shared experiences (Creswell, 2003). I did not have any predictions of whether or not the data would agree with any of the theories presented within the literature review. I also had no theories of whether or not the material would provide new revelations in relation to the questions developed for the study. Information noted by Dervin (1983) suggested that, when there are similarities within a study, the data collected might have greater credibility and meaning for the reader. The results of the study provided a deeper meaning for the study and have been described below.

Results

When I initially reviewed the results captured from the participants in the study I found that the information lacked the depth necessary to support the themes that had been

generated around the research questions. Therefore, I decided it would be best to complete the study using a two-step data collection process (as it was described in Chapter 3). With this in mind, the data presented below has been broken into two sections; results from initial data collection and results from follow-up data collection.

Results from Initial Data Collection

This section of the chapter provides participant's responses to various questions that were asked during the preliminary data collection process of the study. Much of the information is in summary form, but a detailed analysis will follow the presentation of data. Following presentation of the participants' experiences, data analysis will proceed based on themes and topics. The information presented in this section represents the participant's responses that relate to the primary research question of the study, "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?" and "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?"

In a few instances, the participants provided insight into the topic of collaboration, which alluded to the research question for the study, "How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors

differ online versus ground-based education?”

Additionally, information presented in this section delves into conceptual framework components of the study; including connectivism, experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and constructionism.

The information is presented in the following categories and subcategories;

- Interaction with Colleagues and Instructors
- Participation with Colleagues and Instructors
- Communication with Colleagues and Instructors
- Relationships with Colleagues and Instructors

John

John is a 56-year-old male from Chicago, IL. The program of study he chose at the university was Education Technology. He currently works in the field of education. John chose online education because, “I decided to attend the online program to complete my doctoral degree so that I would be a testimony that online education is an effective alternative to ground-based learning.”

The following information provides an account of John’s experiences in relation to his interaction with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, and relationships built with colleagues and instructors. The information presented not only describes his experiences, it also provides feedback about how, on certain occasions, the preceding differed from his previous ground-based education.

Interactions with Colleagues

When John was asked how often he interacted with his colleagues on assignments in the online environment (collected from the survey instrument), he suggested that his interactions occurred on an occasional basis. With his interaction with colleagues he noted,

“The amount of interaction with colleagues on assignments varied by course requirements and the type of assignments included in the course. Some courses required group work or small teams while others were completed individually. Because I am relatively outgoing, I started course wikis to try to encourage teamwork and a community of learners. Some colleagues joined me while others may have just visited the wiki to view additional resources. Currently, I am meeting with a colleague via cellphone or Skype as we partner and mentor one another during the dissertation process. I find that the weekly meetings are encouraging and help reduce the isolation of online learning since we have the opportunity to discuss and share ideas in real time.”

He suggested that interaction was much “easier and natural” and occurred often, when describing interaction with colleagues in ground-based education. He commented, “It seems to be natural human tendency to work together, share ideas, collaborate, and discuss assignments in a face-to-face forum.”

My initial view on John’s comments suggest that he was ok with limited interaction in the online environment; however, even when it did occur, it did not seem as cohesive as it was in ground-based education. John felt that in the online environment, most interaction was used to collaborate on assignments. However, he suggested that the

extent of interaction was limited to determining group roles. In one group assignment, he and another colleague worked together to complete the group assignment to avoid, “receiving a reduced grade.” He noted that in the online environment, interaction was more of a challenge, especially when group work was involved.

He did not recall this ever occurring during his ground-based education. He referred to interaction in ground-based education as “peer review.” He again suggested that it was “easier” to share ideas, opinions, and perspectives in order to lead to deeper discussion in ground-based education. Furthermore, he commented,

“I learned how to compromise and negotiate when working face-to-face with others. I feel that my interpersonal skills were more effective in the ground-based environment.”

The preceding statements from John would suggest that he did not connect with the learning community and benefit from it (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005). John was asked to describe his interaction with “cohorts” and/or peers (collected in the survey), and if he believes having a peer, or group, would have been helpful online.

The preceding information described by John would suggest that there was no real peer interaction in the online environment; however, to the contrary, John did have one individual he interacted with online. He had the following to share about his peer colleague,

“My peer colleague has been very inspirational and has actually helped me through the frustrations of the dissertation process more than my faculty mentor.

He has more closely scrutinized my drafts, offered detailed suggestions, explained his understanding of concepts, listened to my perspectives, questioned my thinking, and expanded my ideas through discourse and conversation. I have found his ‘peer mentorship’ to be invaluable in helping me stay motivated as I write my dissertation proposal.”

Although John did talk about his peer-colleague, when he was asked if a peer-mentor would have been beneficial for him in the online environment, he provided the following,

“Peer mentors can share in the struggle and understand how frustrating completing the program online can be. Initially, we formed a cohort to support one another since we were all assigned to the same faculty mentor. Though we have lost our sense of cohesion because a few cohort members have graduated or left the program, my peer and I decided to resume our weekly meetings this term to support one another, vent our frustrations, gain ideas, and sometimes just be there as a friend.”

In this case, John was constructing ideas and meaning as the result of social interaction and collaboration with others (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). When John was asked in the survey to describe the tools that he used to communicate with colleagues in the online and ground-based education environments, he noted that email and phone were used between the two. However, he did provide the following when describing ground-based interaction with the various tools,

“Because technology was not ubiquitous when I completed my Bachelor and Master degrees, I primarily interacted with others face-to-face or by phone. Both of these were effective communication and interaction mediums because we were in the same geographical location. Face-to-face interactions were most effective for me because they allowed me to view the speaker’s body language in addition to spoken language. Another benefit was the opportunity to ask questions and keep the conversation going synchronously. Face-to-face conversations seem more natural to me as the best form for communication.”

The preceding paragraphs provided a description of how John interacted with colleagues in education. Based on John’s responses, it did not appear that he built a connection with colleagues through the technology that was available (connectivism), his experiences were limited to one primary colleague, which would suggest that symbolic interactionism was not present (Blumer, 1969), as Kolb (1984) suggested the experiences he gathered through association and collaboration with others was limited (experiential learning), and as suggested by Kafai and Resnick (1996) the limited interactions with others did not allow him to construct information into new knowledge (constructionism). In order to see if there were any similarities, or differences in his interaction with instructors, and to find out how/if he was able to use interactions with instructors to connect, create experiences for knowledge, and/or construct information into new ideas/knowledge, similar questions were developed and asked. John’s comments, related to interaction with instructors, are provided in the following section.

Interaction with Instructors

John was asked in the survey how often he interacted with his instructors online. His response to this question was similar to his response to his interaction with colleagues, occasionally. His response was also similar in relation to how often he interacted with instructors when he suggested,

“Interaction with instructors has varied depending upon the course. In program coursework, most instructors responded to my weekly posts, asked probing or higher order questions, and encouraged me to think deeply and reflect on my discussion board responses. Assignments were graded but there was very little opportunity to interact beyond the assignment submission, mainly because I received a good assignment grade.”

John believes that most of his interaction with instructors online was clinical and assignment-oriented. He commented that only a few instructors provided more details and resources during contact. During his coursework, he only recalled one time when an instructor truly interacted with him during his studies.

For John, there seemed to be a theme developing that would suggest that interaction was not prevalent during his doctoral studies. As a first-generation student, there could be others that would not succeed with limited interaction. However, it is too early to assess, and it is important to continue reviewing John’s responses to the other questions associated with interaction.

When he was asked in the survey to describe his interactions with instructors in ground-based education, John felt that interaction with instructors occurred more frequently. He believed that if he needed tutoring, had a question, or needed to discuss a

problem; he could easily schedule an appointment to meet with an instructor. He went on to suggest that, in the online classroom, there were only a few instructors that provided additional detail and more resources during interaction. He could recall only one instance where an instructor reached out to him about his thoughts and ideas on a particular topic.

John's interactions with instructors, thus far, do not support the ideas presented by Baggaley (2012) who commented on Pask's statement (1976) that learning occurs when the subject matter is discussed in conversations, including those digitally mediated by computers. However, John's interaction with his instructors in ground-based education often occurred for tutoring, or to clarify something not understood. He commented,

“I found the ground-based environment meetings to be very effective since they sometimes uncovered additional learning needs or clarified misconceptions. The ground-based environment also provided the opportunity for face-to-face interactions that seemed more personal than the online environment.”

John felt connected to instructors in ground-based education; however, he did not feel as connected with instructors online. It made me wonder, does the medium with which a person connects to other's really matter? When John was asked in the survey to describe the tools used for interaction with instructors, both online and in ground-based education, he noted that email and phone were used between the two. However, he did provide the following when describing ground-based interaction with the various tools,

“Email and Skype had not yet been invented when I experienced learning in the ground-based environment, most interactions were face-to-face. The phone interactions were usually the last option since cellphones were not yet widely

available. I found face-to-face interactions to be the most effective form of communication in the ground-based environment.”

Although John commented about the benefits of face-to-face interaction with colleagues and instructors, he did suggest that his interaction with his faculty mentor via email and phone have been beneficial to his dissertation. However, these tools can be used in online and ground-based education. This information would suggest that not all was lost in relation to interaction with instructors, or at least with his dissertation chair. However, some individual's may not make it through to the dissertation stage of doctoral education, especially first-generation doctoral male students that have no one outside of the educational realm to work with in order to progress.

The preceding sections provided information related to how John interacted with colleagues and instructors. In addition to interaction it is important to understand how communication occurred, and the part it played, in John's educational experiences, both online and ground-based.

Communication Differences – Online versus Ground-Based

In the preceding sections, John was asked during the Skype interview to describe the tools he used when interacting with colleagues and instructors. In addition to finding out what tools John used to interact, the study asked John how communications differed for him, in relation to online education and ground-based education. John commented,

“The biggest difference is you do not have the human factor. There is no human preference. You can watch something online, but you do not have someone to communicate with you real time. I haven't been able to experience this in the

online environment, or within online courses. I have had some courses where communication was better than in others, both collaboratively and through interaction. Most courses have been alone with no connection to anyone. The discussion board was the only place where I felt a sense of connection.

Communication in an online environment is still a problem for me. The environment hasn't changed in the 7 years that I have been participating.”

This was an interesting statement from John. He suggested that in the 7 years that he has been working on his doctorate, the communication tools available have not changed. My question for the university would be, why haven't you incorporated tools like Skype to create the simulation of face-to-face communication, especially when individuals like John prefer seeing the individual he is speaking with?

In fairness to the university, I think additional responses might be helpful to see what else John had to say about communication. The following sections look at responses provided by John in relation to communication with colleagues and communication with instructors.

Communication with Colleagues

John was asked during the Skype interview which communication strategies he used with his colleagues online. He suggested that his communication methods varied, mostly because of his specialization. He noted that there were times where wiki's, Skype, and telephone were used, and often communication was strictly limited to email. John was then asked how he believed communication could be improved among colleagues in the online environment. John stated that, for him, “Synchronous communication between

students would have been more beneficial. It would add to the richness of activities. Additionally, it would add to more collaboration, which would help create a deeper understanding of the courses and materials.”

It was suggested earlier in the study that most individual’s move to online education for the freedom to learn at their own pace. John’s remarks contradict the preceding statement, if he is suggesting synchronous communication in the online environment would have been beneficial for him. However, the question could be asked, do others enter online education without understanding that synchronous communication may be limited, if offered at all? Additionally, could this be a reason that first-generation students, male students, and/or students in general, do not succeed in online education?

At this stage, it was important to capture John’s thoughts on communication with instructors in the online environment. One of the goals was to see if his comments regarding communication would be similar to those that he discussed when speaking about communication with his colleagues.

Communication with Instructors

John was also asked during the Skype interview which communication strategies he used with his instructors online. He commented, “95% of my communication with instructors was via email.” For him he recalled,

“I had one experience in 7 years where an instructor was intrigued by my input on a discussion board and contacted me about my response. This was one of the only experiences that I felt that an instructor reached out to me. I am learning as I go

that I need guidance and communication with my mentor. I would like to know where to shine the flashlight.”

In the preceding statement, John suggested that many of his instructors did not reach out to him outside of the classroom. Instructors in online education have the ability to reach out to students by many means (i.e. phone, email, Skype, discussion boards, etc.). For individuals, learning is influenced, aided, and enhanced through socialization, technology, diversity, strength of ties, and the context of the occurrence; and it takes place outside of the formal classroom (Rousseau, 2007; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). To gather additional information on the subject, John was asked within the survey how communication with instructors could have improved for him. Based on his response to the preceding question, John commented,

“I believe if the instructor takes on a human element and reaches out to the student it makes a difference. I am the one reaching out to the instructor about assignments. I am also the client, the customer, the one paying. I believe the 21st century learner has changed. We consume. We need to create more. There needs to be guidance and structure. There is nothing that this knowledge becomes without guidance and structure. For my students my worst feeling is seeing a senior getting to the end and they do not know what their strengths are.”

John has provided several examples of how he has interacted and communicated with his colleagues and instructors, both online and in ground-based education. Additionally, he has described some of the differences that he has experienced in relation to his interactions and communication with colleagues and instructors between the two

educational models. The information provided by John thus far suggests that there is a lack of interaction that occurred with colleagues and instructors in the online environment and communication with colleagues and instructors was limited. According to Siemens' theory of learning, connectivism is the promotion of speaking, listening, questioning, reading, writing, discussing, publishing, and creating multimedia to connect with others in the digital age (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2004). For the preceding to occur, individuals have to be able to interact and communicate with colleagues and instructors. Because participation, both online and through ground-based education, with colleagues and instructors seems to have a connection to interaction and communication, I felt it would be beneficial to gather information from the participants on the subject matter. The following information provides information that John provided about participation with colleagues and instructors.

Participation with Colleagues

When John was asked in the survey how often he participated on assignments with his colleagues, he suggested that his participation with colleagues was only "occasional." He commented, "I assumed the leadership role on assignments because most of my classmates did not want the additional responsibility."

Additionally, he was asked a similar question within the survey; however, it was related to his participation with colleagues in ground-based education. John admitted that, during his undergraduate degree, there was not much participation because the coursework was completed individually. He noted that there was more participation with colleagues during his ground-based graduate level coursework. His comments,

“In the ground-based setting, we usually only had the class time to collaborate, organize, and complete tasks as a group. We may not see each other until the next week’s class. To that end, I worked well with colleagues and fully-participated to accomplish as much as I could and help the group stay on-track.”

The information gathered from John regarding participation does not seem to provide information that he believed differed from that of ground-based education. However, the limited participation on assignments does differ from the views of Lee, Pate, and Cozart (2015) whom suggested that a lack of participation in online classrooms is one of the primary reasons that individuals are dropping from online education. Participation with colleagues is not the only item that I wanted to address in relation to the subject matter. I felt it was important to review how the participants, in this case John, viewed participation with instructors, in the online environment and ground-based environment.

Participation with Instructors

John was also asked in the survey how he participated with instructors, both online and in ground-based education. John suggested that the only time he really participated on any assignments online was during the discussion board. His specific comments on the discussion boards were,

“When online instructors responded in a manner that made me think more deeply, I was more apt to continue participating with the instructor to be certain that I answered deeper questions or clarified my position. I did not participate as much

when instructor interactions were generic (i.e. ‘good job’; ‘I never thought of that’; ‘Interesting comment’).”

John’s participation on assignments in ground-based education occurred in the traditional classroom. He commented that most participation was used to clarify assignments, or to check for an understanding of topics and/or concepts.

John’s comments about participation suggested that it was limited in the online environment. During the literature review it was suggested that when students participate in the learning environment of the college classroom, the results include improved critical thinking, written communication, and problem solving skills (Arum and Roksa 2011; Dempsey, 2015; Kuh et al. 2005). One of the schemes of experiential learning is the concept of cooperative interaction. It takes participation and interaction to help build knowledge, something that the courses seem to be lacking, at the university attended by John. The participants in this study were asked about their interactions, communication, and participation. Additionally, they were asked about the relationships they formed with colleagues and instructors online. The following section provides John’s experiences in relation to the relationships he formed with colleagues and instructors online.

Relationships with Colleagues

I asked John, in the survey, how he formed relationships with his colleagues in the online environment. John noted that in 7 years, he has formed a relationship with three students. He commented,

“However, life challenges/changes have interfered with maintaining a close friendship. Sometimes the life challenges were as simple as changing

cellphones and losing contact numbers (in the old days) to moving to another country. A few of the friendships were temporary, ending with graduation from the university, while others seem like a friendship that will last (like with my peer mentor).”

John was also asked in the survey to describe a relationship(s) formed with colleagues online. John described the relationship that he has formed with one individual during his doctoral studies. He stated that they met through a mutual class and were able to connect because they “challenged each other’s perspectives on a discussion board.”

When John was asked in the survey to describe the relationships that he formed with colleagues in ground-based education, he suggested that the relationships were formed as a result of sharing thoughts, ideas, and opinions. He noted that relationships were often formed as a result of being intrigued by the similarities in thought on topics. He believed the relationships with colleagues in ground-based education were deeper because, “we shared more about ourselves, letting others into our personal lives at some level.”

For John, it seems that it was easier to form relationships in ground-based education, and that the relationships were built to last. In a study conducted by Davies, Schonder, Meyer, and Hall (2015) relationships with colleagues was an important to the success of their students. Additional research has suggested that relationships are helpful to build positive student outcomes in online education (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). The university attended by John does not seem to hold the same regard for student relationships, as studies would

suggest. It was not only important to understand how John built relationships, if any, with colleagues; however, it was also important to get his perspective on his relationships with instructors.

Relationships with Instructors

John was asked in the survey how he formed relationships with his instructors in the online environment. He stated that the relationships were formed when clarification was needed on an assignment; however, he noted that the relationships ended when the course concluded. He did acknowledge that meeting several of his instructors at residencies helped him feel more comfortable communicating with them.

John commented that his relationships were formed with instructors in ground-based education as a result of classroom interaction. He noted,

“Some instructors were humorous or passionate or just simply seemed so approachable in the ground-based environment. Seeing the instructors as being similar to myself made it easy to approach them and engage them in conversations around the course topic.”

When John was asked to describe the relationships with instructors in ground-based education he stated,

“Relationships formed with instructors in the ground-based environment seemed more personable and less clinical than those formed in the online setting. There were many times that just seeing the instructor smile or laugh reduced any tensions that I had about approaching them. The relationships formed in the

ground-based environment also seemed to be very genuine, as if the instructor was really concerned about me and whether I was learning the course content.”

John did not seem to build any lasting relationships with instructors in the online environment. It has been suggested that students who report a strong relationship with instructors display better learning outcomes and achievement (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Creasy, Jarvis, & Knapcik, 2009; Eccles, 2004, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Also, students that are closer to their instructors are more confident and self-directed with their work (Creasy, et al., 2009; Pintrich, Roeser, & DeGroot, 1994; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998).

The preceding information, collected from John, suggested that he favored interaction, participation, and communication with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education, and he had better relationships with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education. A more detailed, theme or topic-based analysis will follow in Chapter 5.

Jacob

Jacob did not provide his age for the study; however, I was able to confirm through our original Skype interview that he resides in the Washington D.C. metro area. Jacob did not share his program of study, or his current field of employment. Additionally, Jacob did not respond to the email that requested information that suggested why he chose online education for his Doctoral studies.

The following information provides an account of Jacob’s experiences in relation to his interaction with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and

instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, and relationships built with colleagues and instructors. The information presented not only describes his experiences, it also provides feedback about how, on certain occasions, the preceding differed from his previous ground-based education.

Interactions with Colleagues

When Jacob was asked how often he interacted with his colleagues on assignments in the online environment, he suggested that he seldom interacted with colleagues online. When he did interact with colleagues he noted, “I relied on engaging with colleagues on assignments to help me get clarity and to get an example of how they may be approaching the assignment.”

For Jacob, interaction was delayed in the online environment because the methods of communication were usually by phone, email, or text. He commented,

“As a new online learner interaction delays was a little frustrating, but as I got familiar with the online environment, I managed to become accustomed to the delayed communication. In fact waiting to hear back from colleagues moved me to seek and find answers on my own using the university resources available.”

Jacob suggested that he was able to adapt to the limited interaction and lag in time that was required for interaction with colleagues; however, his frustrations seemed to suggest that he would not finish his degree if it were not for the fact that he has come so far. Methvin (2012) suggested that first-generation students and adult learners that do persist in education share tenacity; however, he also noted that they share similar obstacles. In ground-based education, Jacob felt that he could get answers much quicker

from colleagues because interaction was in real time. He also suggested that the interaction in ground-based education allowed for more collegial discourse about the meaning and usefulness of assignments. The differences that Jacob has suggested between the ease of interaction with colleagues in ground-based education, compared to interaction with colleagues in online education, showed vast differences and responses. Therefore, within the study, he was asked if having a cohort or peer, with whom to interact, would have assisted him during his educational journey. He provided the following,

“All of the people in the research forum class were at different stages in their doctoral program. It would have been more productive if we were all at the same stage in the program. In fact, I think it would have been better and more meaningful if we all entered as a cohort group and walked through the doctoral program together. My interaction with my peers in the research forum is limited to answering and responding to the discussion question posed at the 5th and 9th week of the twelve-week semester. Now that I am further along and working on my dissertation proposal, I reach out to those peers who are further along, to get ideas and lessons learned on various aspects of completing the dissertation. Again the communication responses are delayed and take time to keep conversations engaging.”

The preceding notion from Jacob might suggest that his university think about establishing groups, built around the start dates of the students, that are available to help the students meet peers and colleagues to help with questions that might arise. This might

also be beneficial for individuals that are first-generation students. The following section was set up to find out if Jacob had the same type, or different, responses in relation to his interaction with instructors.

Interaction with Instructors

Jacob was asked how often he interacted with his instructors online. His response to this question was similar to his response to his interaction with colleagues, seldom. When asked to describe his experience with interaction with instructors, Jacob suggested that he needed discourse to assure he was on track. His method of interaction with instructors was usually in the form of email. He felt that waiting two or three days to receive feedback from an instructor was not beneficial to his education, so he had no problem interacting with instructors by phone in order to get clarity on assignments. Jacob's feelings on the lack of interaction and the frustration of waiting to receive feedback from instructors might lead others' to remove themselves from the educational process, especially someone that is a first-generation student that has no one outside of school to assist with his/her needs. Additionally, there are other tools that his instructors could have used to interact with him (i.e. Skype, phone, etc.) that may have changed his mind on the "benefits" of his education.

When he was asked about interaction in ground-based education, Jacob provided a response similar to the preceding. He did note that in ground-based education, he was often able to get real-time feedback to questions. If Jacob had similar things to say about interaction in ground-based education, as he did with online education, it might suggest that interaction may not be an overarching detail for him in education. The fact that Jacob

is working on his doctorate would suggest that he has been able to overcome obstacles related to interaction with instructors throughout his educational journey. The following section provides Jacob's input in relation to communication and what part it played in his ground-based and online education.

Communication Differences – Online versus Ground-Based

In the preceding sections, Jacob was asked to describe the tools used for interaction with colleagues and instructors. Jacob was asked how communication(s) differed for him, in relation to online education and ground-based education. For Jacob, ground-based education provided an immediate exchange of information. Jacob commented, "I started out with face to face conversations. If I needed more clarity, I called or emailed the instructor. I feel that it helps establish a bond with the instructor; and it showed the instructor that I cared about my work."

Unfortunately, Jacob did not provide much feedback in relation to the communication differences he experienced between ground-based education and online education. However, from the small amount of feedback provided, it is suggested that Jacob does reach out to individuals by any means that he believes will assist him with obtaining the information he needs. As it was commented on in the literature section, Inkelas, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) suggested that first-generation college students do not believe communication is an important factor to be successful in college. In order to obtain additional information from Jacob related to communication, more focused questions related specifically to communication with colleagues and then communication

with instructors. The following section provides the information that Jacob provided in relation to these specific topics.

Communication with Colleagues

Jacob was asked which communication strategies he used with his colleagues online. He suggested that his communication methods were primarily completed via email and phone. Jacob provided an interesting perspective when asked how he determined which communication strategies to use with colleagues. He stated that for him,

“In the online environment you begin to write like you speak. I look for words, indicators, "sounds good to me," may be an auditory learner. I may say does that sound right. As a visual learner I would make responses to go with interchanges. As a kinesthetic learner, I look into their words and respond this way to the person I am speaking with.”

Jacob’s perspective on how he used communication tools that were available in online learning, “seeing how they speak through their words” suggests that Jacob again learned how to adapt to his online environment. He found ways to make the limited communication work for him. To get additional clarification, Jacob was also asked how he thought communication could be improved for him in the online environment. He shared that for him, the following would improve communication for students,

“If we vary the medium options that we use it could make the communication more dynamic. Discussion boards seem to be the most used. Skype or tele-conferences could have been added to the courses. Adobe Connect may have

helped us have real time communication in the classroom. There may be times where synchronous communication would have been beneficial. It may help the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learner.”

In the section about John, it was suggested that different tools that could make communication with colleagues much easier in the online environment. Jacob’s response in the preceding suggested the same. Online learners are looking for tools that will help them communicate with colleagues, and possibly tools that will give them a resemblance to face-to-face to communication. The following feedback from Jacob related to communication with instructors in the online environment.

Communication with Instructors

Jacob was asked which communication strategies he used with his instructors online. He suggested that he uses a method to communicate with instructors online that is similar to the method he uses to communicate with colleagues. He looks to see how the instructor writes to determine the best way to communicate with that instructor. He did provide an example of one course where an instructor provided mp3 files to the students as a method of communication. He used the file to learn how to communicate with the instructor, through the audio content. Again, Jacob found a way to adapt to the communication style, and tools, used by his instructors. He alluded to a communication tool, the mp3, that one instructor used in his classes. This would suggest that he likes not only reading the words presented by instructors, but also, hearing what they have to say. When asked how what communication methods could have been improved for him, Jacob commented,

“Instructors could have been a little more innovative with the way they delivered the material. I encourage an instructor to have an mp3 file for the learner. Give an introduction to an assignment. It might be beneficial to add Skype to the course. Vary the materials used to lessen the static nature of the asynchronous learners. Learning styles do not always line up in online education.”

Jacob was quick to suggest that Skype, or tools that would help resemble face-to-face communication, would have been beneficial for him. Other first-generation students, male students, and any student moving from ground-based education to online education for the first time may benefit from the incorporation of multimedia tools in the virtual classroom, and outside the classroom for that matter. The following information provides information that Jacob provided about participation with colleagues and instructors.

Participation with Colleagues

When Jacob was asked how often he participated on assignments with his colleagues, he suggested that participation was seldom. He felt that in the online environment, he did not have time to participate with others unless it was required. Additionally, he was asked a similar question; however, it was related to his participation with colleagues in ground-based education. Jacob did not have a response. The response to this question would suggest that participation is not something that Jacob felt was/is beneficial to his education. I felt it was important to review how the participants, in this case Jacob, viewed participation with instructors, in the online environment and ground-based environment.

Participation with Instructors

Jacob was also asked how he participated with instructors, both online and in ground-based education. Jacob suggested that the only time he really participates with instructors is when he needs clarification on an assignment. In ground-based education, Jacob stated that he would communicate with instructors during class in order to get real-time responses. The participants in this study were asked about their interactions, communication, and participation. Additionally, they were asked about the relationships they formed with colleagues and instructors online. The following section provides Jacob's experiences in relation to the relationships he formed with colleagues and instructors online.

Relationships with Colleagues

I asked Jacob how he has formed relationships with his colleagues in the online environment; he commented,

“I have forged relationships by finding out personal things we have in common or have learned more about a person by the way they respond to questions. I can see the patterns and their way of thinking which may be similar to mine. In that case, I tend to reach out to the person via phone and talk more in-depth and real-time to confirm or not confirm my initial thoughts about the person.”

The preceding response from Jacob suggests that he was using symbolic interactionism and constructionism because he was constructing a reality, meaning, and ideas from social interaction and collaboration (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989, Walker, 2012). Furthermore, he was asked to describe the relationships that he formed with his

colleagues online. He described the relationships that he formed as a way to get “support.” If a colleague responded to his post, he would respond to that individual’s post, therefore, creating a “bond of support” which would lead to a virtual relationship.

When he was asked how he formed relationships with colleagues in ground-based education, Jacob suggested that he would watch a colleagues behavior in the classroom, or would work with them on projects; and from there would forge a working relationship. He stated the relationships were collegial; however, he did comment that he still keeps in touch with come colleagues, something he did not comment on when discussing the relationships he has formed with online colleagues. The preceding information collected from Jacob would suggest that the relationships formed in the online environment were limited to only a few, which would go against the belief that relationships are helpful to build positive student outcomes in online education (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). Jacob was also asked questions within the study about his relationships with instructors. The following provides his response to these questions.

Relationships with Instructors

Jacob was asked how he formed relationships with his instructors in the online environment. Jacob provided the following response on how he formed a relationship with his doctoral committee,

“I reached out to and introduced myself and my research interest to my current doctoral committee. Before I introduced myself, I read their background, books, journal articles and other things to get a better understanding of who the person is

and whether or not we could work well together. I then spent time with them in person at a residency and talked with them over the phone on a regular basis. The relationship continues to grow as I get to know the more about the preferences and style of my doctoral committee members.”

When Jacob was asked how he formed relationships with his instructors in ground-based education, he suggested that he would spend time with the instructor(s), while watching their behavior and teaching style. Additionally, he was able to form relationships with them through project completion.

The preceding information, collected from Jacob, suggested that he favored interaction, participation, and communication with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education. A more detailed, theme or topic-based analysis will follow in Chapter 5. The following section provides detail accounts from James in relation to his experiences in online and education, in relation to the questions of the study.

James

James is a 52-year-old male from Arizona. The program of study he chose at the university was Management and Finance. He currently works as a Financial Planner/Investment Advisor. James chose online education because, “I chose online education in order to be able to incorporate my studies with my profession, without sacrificing so much time traveling to and from campus, and in classes. Those precious hours that I would have spent in the ground-based program would have made simultaneous full-time work impossible.”

The following information provides an account of James' experiences in relation to his interaction with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, and relationships built with colleagues and instructors. The information presented not only describes his experiences, it also provides feedback about how, on certain occasions, the preceding differed from his previous ground-based education.

Interactions with Colleagues

When James was asked how often he interacted with his colleagues on assignments in the online environment, he suggested that his interactions occurred on an occasional basis. With his interaction with colleagues he noted,

“I will share experiences through discussion boards and the class café (although that has only been at the beginning of classes). I have no time for class café after term begins. I usually only interact with colleagues during discussion, because I don't have time to interact more often.”

He suggested that interaction occurred often, when describing interaction with colleagues in ground-based education. He commented, “The interaction built a more personal connection. I was able to share experiences with my colleagues.”

James' account of interaction was similar to those of John and Jacob. The limited interaction with individuals online would suggest a theme, “lack of interaction” that has occurred in relation to the current participants' responses. James felt that in the online environment, most interaction was used to collaborate on assignments. However, for him, he acknowledged he didn't expect much interaction and collaboration. He did suggest

that the online environment has been different because he would interact with colleagues regularly to make sure assignments were completed correctly, and to understand expectations in ground-based education. This is not something that occurred online. Another theme, or trend, that has been seen is the persistence toward degree attainment. Although the information provided, thus far, has only come from three participants, it is suggesting that first-generation doctoral male students may not face similar obstacles that colleagues at lower levels of education might experience when discussing degree attainment. Continuing back into the responses to the questions, when James was asked if having a peer to communicate with would be helpful, he stated that it would seldom be helpful for him. When asked to describe his experiences in relation to interactions with “cohorts” or peers in the online environment, he commented,

“I am too busy with the assignments. Between those, projects, and working full time, I have no time for additional interaction(s). The current interaction only occurs during discussion. I'm not sure if having a group will help at the doctoral level, because much of the work that we do is individual.”

Groups do not seem to be something that James is concerned about, where John and Jacob believe that groups would have been beneficial for interaction and to build a connection with others through a hyper-connected global network (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Rousseau, 2007; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). When James was asked to describe the tools he used to interact with colleagues in the online environment, and in ground-based education, he commented that most interaction has occurred by email and through discussions board, where in ground-based communication, email, phone, face-to-face,

and meetings were used to interact on assignments. When James was asked to elaborate on the tools he used for interaction in the online environment, he believed that email and discussion boards were effective, mainly because he did not have time for other forms of communication, except maybe phone. He does believe that email is an acceptable form of communication; however, James did comment that email can be misconstrued. In cases where email was not effective, James suggested that a phone call is needed. For James, face-to-face was the most effective tool used for interaction, a tool not available online. However, although face-to-face is not usually an option in online education; Skype, Face Time, and other visual communication tools are available. This would help learners start with a connection that is meant to shrink the distances between sectors through interconnectivity and information-rich resources which calls for thinking inventively to solve problems (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2008; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). The following sections break down James's responses in relation to interaction with instructors.

Interaction with Instructors

James was asked how often he interacted with his instructors online. His response to this question was similar to his response to his interaction with colleagues, occasionally. When he was asked to describe his interaction with instructors, he commented,

“I limit my interaction with instructors to relevant questions about the course, or any issues submitting assignments. I interact to ask questions, or get clarification

on assignments. Although I also answer their discussion questions, I would not consider that to be interaction.”

When he was asked to describe his interactions with instructors in ground-based education, James felt that interaction with instructors occurred more frequently. For him, it was easy to ask questions to gain more insight and directly understand their expectations. He stated, “I interacted to ask questions and to get clarification on assignments in person. Those interactions were usually more effective versus a one or two sentence email.”

When James was asked what his purpose was for interacting with instructors, both online and in ground-based education, the purpose was to discuss assignment requirements. For James, the common difference was,

“In the ground based environment, it was easy to ask questions to gain more insight directly to better understand their expectations. I found the ground-based environment slightly more fulfilling, just being able to connect in person. I also had more of an opportunity to discuss and share feelings with the instructors. This is not the same online.”

When James was asked to describe the tools used for interaction with instructors, both online and in ground-based education, he noted that email and phone were used between the two. However, he did state that in online education, he would only use the phone with an instructor if it were an emergency. He believes that email is sufficient. James does suggest that in ground-based education, face-to-face interaction was most effective because of “in person” discussions.

The preceding sections provided information related to how James interacted with colleagues and instructors. In addition to interaction, it is important to understand how communication occurred, and the part it played, in James' educational experiences, both online and ground-based.

Communication Differences – Online versus Ground-Based

In the preceding sections, James was asked to describe the tools he used when interacting with colleagues and instructors. However, the study also wanted to find out how communications differed for James, in relation to online education and ground-based education. James commented,

“In the online environment, the communication has been based on clarification of assignments. There has not been much interaction with the instructor. Maybe there is a question on a particular assignment. At residencies there is an opportunity to communicate face to face. Communication has been limited online. It's quite a bit different on ground then online. I would ask questions face to face in the ground based on environment. We don't have that advantage in an online environment. It is quite a bit different. In ground-based education there was a lot more clarity. It is easier to get an understanding of what people are looking for.”

The information presented by James in relation to the tools used for communication suggests that it has been limited, which could hinder the educational process for others, and even cause other students to disregard the educational process altogether. To gather more detailed accounts from James about communication, questions were asked about how he communicated with colleagues and instructors in online

education. The following accounts are related to his responses with regard to communication with colleagues.

Communication with Colleagues

James was asked which communication strategies he used with his colleagues online. He suggested that with his communication with his colleagues, he has learned “You have to communicate with the method that is used to communicate with you. If they tell you to use something different change it up. If they use text, use text.”

James’s response was similar to that of Jacob. Both participants believe that you have to work with the individual and use the medium that they use to communicate. Their responses would suggest that they are connecting (connectivism) through speaking, listening, questioning, reading, writing, discussing, publishing, and creating multimedia to connect with others in the digital age (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2004). When James was asked how communication could have improved for him he suggested,

“I think having discussion, not discussion boards, is the best way to improve communication. Discussion boards during the week are used, as well as the class café. The instructor can play a big part in this. Some instructors have helped to get students to open up within the classroom. A combination of the instructor and the discussion with other students would improve communication.”

James’ comments in the preceding quote would suggest that he was looking for a way to converse with his colleagues. The concept of experiential learning would suggest that, if James and his colleague had a chance to discuss items through digital communication (i.e. Skype, or other tools), they could use the knowledge from others to

build new knowledge for self (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). In order to see if James might have the same things to say about communications with instructors, he answered several additional questions. The following is his account of his communication with instructors.

Communication with Instructors

James was also asked which communication strategies he used with his instructors online. He suggested that he has yet to communicate with an instructor by telephone. He noted that he has used email and residencies to communicate with instructors. He also commented that this has been effective for him. This information would suggest that James has not expected communication with instructors to be a major obstacle, or conflict, for him. However, when James was asked how communication with instructors could have improved for him, he stated, “Communication is 50/50 between student and instructor. The instructor can be open to different communication methods. Communication should not be judgmental or to illicit more feedback. The instructor has to get the ball rolling. There should be an open environment to communication. Help the student know it is a safe environment.”

James has provided several examples of how he has interacted and communicated with his colleagues and instructors, both online and in ground-based education. Additionally, he has described some of the differences that he has experienced in relation to his interactions and communication with colleagues and instructors between the two educational models. James also provided his feedback to several questions related to participation, both online and through ground-based education, with colleagues and instructors.

Participation with Colleagues

When James was asked how often he participated on assignments with his colleagues, he suggested that his participation with colleagues was “seldom.” He commented, “Participation is for clarification on assignments only, except at residencies. Nearly all of our assignments at the Doctoral level are individual, which is how it should be to mirror the work we will be doing for our dissertation.”

Additionally, he was asked a similar question; however, it was related to his participation with colleagues in ground-based education. James suggested that participation on assignments was “occasional.” He noted that participation was on joint projects, to collaborate on assignments, and for group study. The information gathered from James suggested that he did believe participation did occur more often in ground-based education versus online education. This limited participation differs from the views of Lee, Pate, and Cozart (2015) whom suggested that a lack of participation in online classrooms is one of the primary reasons that individuals are dropping from online education. Participation with colleagues is not the only item that I wanted to address in relation to the subject matter. I felt it was important to review how the participants, in this case James, viewed participation with instructors, in the online environment and ground-based environment.

Participation with Instructors

James was also asked how he participated with instructors, both online and in ground-based education. James suggested that he “occasionally” participated on

assignments with instructors online; however, in ground-based education, his participation with instructors was often.

James limited his participation with instructors to weekly discussions. He commented,

“I limit my participation with instructors on assignments so that I don't waste their time with trivial questions; or with questions that could be answered if I read all of the information. I limit questions to discussion questions and asking for clarification on questions.”

James would participate with his instructors in ground-based education during office hours and in the classroom. James feels that participating with instructors in ground-based education was more “casual” and in the online environment it feels more “formal.” He commented, “I participated with instructors in ground-based education to gain a better understanding of the material being taught.”

James's comments about participation suggested that it was limited in the online environment. During the literature review, it was suggest that when students participate in the learning environment, the results include improved critical thinking, written communication, and problem solving skills (Arum and Roksa 2011; Dempsey, 2015; Kuh et al. 2005). One of the schemes of experiential learning is the concept of cooperative interaction, which suggests it takes participation and interaction to help build knowledge. The participants in this study were asked about their interactions, communication, and participation. Additionally, they were asked about the relationships they formed with

colleagues and instructors online. The following section provides James' experiences in relation to the relationships he formed with colleagues and instructors online.

Relationships with Colleagues

I asked James how he formed relationships with his colleagues in the online environment. James has not really formed relationships with his colleagues online. He noted that he has shared experiences with colleagues about the dissertation process at residencies. Additionally, he called these relationships cordial, friendly, professional, and helpful.

When James was asked to describe the relationships that he formed with colleagues in ground-based education, he suggested that the relationships were formed through telephone calls, meetings before and after classes, and through collaboration on assignments. He noted that relationships were often formed as "friendships" only. The relationships were formed for support, and to share ideas. He described these relationships as professional, warm, collegial, and helpful. For James, it seems that it was easier to form relationships in ground-based education, and that the relationships were built to last. As mentioned previously, Davies, Schonder, Meyer conducted a study, and Hall (2015) about relationships with colleagues and findings suggested it was important to the success of their students. Additional research has noted that relationships are helpful to build positive student outcomes in online education (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012; Crawford & Persuad, 2012; Schuster, 2003). The university attended by James does not seem to hold the same regard for student relationships, as studies would suggest. It was not only important to understand how

James built relationships, if any, with colleagues; however, it was also important to get his perspective on his relationships with instructors.

Relationships with Instructors

James was asked how he formed relationships with his instructors in the online environment. He stated that the relationships were formed through discussion boards, when clarification was needed. He did comment that, “the residency experiences have been the best for forming relationships with instructors.”

When he was asked to describe the relationships with instructors online, James stated,

“I have formed instructor relationships online for discussion to compare and evaluate thoughts, beliefs and perspectives. The dialogue has created the relationship. I don't consider these relationships.”

When James was asked how he formed relationships with instructors in ground-based education, he stated that he would meet with instructors after class in person, during classroom discussions, and during office hours. He also commented that instructors in graduate school would often have social functions for students to connect outside of the classroom. When asked to describe these relationships, he suggested that they were cordial, friendly but professional, professional, working, and interactive.

James did not seem to build any lasting relationships with instructors in the online environment. Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps (1997), Creasy, Jarvis, & Knapcik (2009), Eccles (2004), and Pianta & Stuhlman (2004) suggested that students who report a strong relationship with instructors display better learning outcomes and achievement.

And, students who build a relationship with instructors are more confident and self-directed with their work (Creasy, et al., 2009; Pintrich, Roeser, & DeGroot, 1994; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). The preceding information, collected from John, suggested that he favored interaction, participation, and communication with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education. A more detailed, theme or topic-based analysis will follow in Chapter 5. We have seen how John, Jacob, and James have responded to questions within the study thus far, and now I will examine the responses provided by Joseph within the study.

Joseph

Joseph is a 41-year-old male from the greater Lansing area of Michigan. The program of study he chose at the university is a Doctorate in Business Administration. He currently works in Digital Marketing Services and Consulting. Joseph chose online education because,

“Online gave me options. At the time I wanted to begin my doctoral program I wasn't sure where in the country (or world) I would be working. I didn't want to have to fly back to Detroit, or another location, twice a month for a couple days then fly back to work or a client site. The online universities program allowed me to manage assignments each week on my terms. I no longer had to worry about being at the school by 6 pm on Monday nights. Instead I could discuss issues with my peers and facilitator on forum boards and occasionally via telephone or Skype. There were weekly deadlines but I could manage how to approach it.”

Unfortunately, Joseph's schedule did not allow him an opportunity to complete certain portions of the study. However, Joseph did have an opportunity to provide feedback in relation to communication, both with colleagues and instructors. The following information provides his experiences related to communication.

Communication Differences – Online versus Ground-Based

The study also wanted to find out how communications differed for Joseph, in relation to online education and ground-based education. Joseph commented,

“The biggest strategy I have learned is to embrace and use asynchronous communication to my advantage. This matters both in form and in function. Figuring out how to do this can take some time. As far as technology has advanced, we are still limited and have to approach things differently than traditional student/scholars. In my experience distance education has been done is primarily done through written communication, followed by conference calls, and then occasionally face-to-face communication. This is the reverse order of what I was used to when attending a traditional college.”

He suggested that there is disconnect in relation to direct interaction. He stated that in order to cope with the lack of direct connection, a person taking online courses has to become a great writer, which for him has become a strength when working on a doctoral study project, or dissertation. He also commented that, for him,

“Your primary outlet and form of communication with your instructor or chair and other students is receiving feedback is through email and responses on the Blackboard forum for the class. So you have to become a master of written

expression. You also learn to spend time self-reflecting on what your question is clear enough for another to understand. Feedback is not immediate so you learn to slow down and focus on developing quality arguments and ideas rather than flippant, poorly constructed, casual ideas that are tossed around back and forth in face-to-face conversation.”

I think additional responses might be helpful to see what else John had to say about communication. The following sections look at responses provided by Joseph in relation to communication with colleagues and communication with instructors.

Communication with Colleagues

Joseph was asked which communication strategies he used with his colleagues online. He stated the biggest challenge with communication with someone new is learning how to interact with everyone. He commented,

“Some prefer to comment directly on the classroom forum. I had talked about ideas with others who seemed to open up more when emailing them a response privately. While that wouldn't count as credit towards discussion the casualness of it often opened others up to write another follow-up post that would. I had a couple of other peers that wanted to touch base with me on the phone as well. I found that to be refreshing honestly .”

When Joseph was asked how communication could have improved for him, he suggested,

“I think for me the immediate future of education can best serve itself by having open dialogue with chairs, instructors, and students about the challenges digital

education has on the learning process. There should be greater awareness of how each of us, as individuals, respond and interact with others in the growing list of communication tools. Perhaps if each of us had an individual evolving profile that we could update that showed our preferred learning style then our instructors or chairs, and our peers would know how best to interact with us.”

Communication with Instructors

Joseph was also asked which communication strategies he used with his instructors online. He suggested that he has let the instructor set the tone for which communication strategy he/she wished to use in class. He has used email when a telephone was not available to communicate with his instructors. He misses the immediate face-to-face communication that was available in ground-based education.

When Joseph was asked how online communication could improve with instructors, he noted that, for him, “I think the biggest challenge is the accessibility. We have more tools yet there is a challenge to get together. Time makes the difference.”

The preceding information, collected from Joseph, suggested that he favored communication with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education.

Results from Follow-Up Data Collection

This section of the chapter provided participant’s responses to various questions that were asked during the follow-up data collection process of the study. The questions were formulated because of responses collected from the participants during the initial period of the study. Responses from the participants in this section provided responses that addressed the primary research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male

students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?”

The same follow-up email and Skype interview also provided information from the participants related to the research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?”

Finally, follow-up email and Skype interviews were meant to assist with understanding, “How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?”

Responses collected by the participants during the follow-up data collection process gathered information related to the four conceptual frameworks covered in the study; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism.

Two instruments were created for the follow-up portion of the study and were used to elicit data needed for the study. They were:

Follow-Up Email Questions. After the initial analysis of the data that was collected, it was determined that more information, collected from the participants, might provide additional depth to this study. Therefore, the participants were sent a series of

questions via email (Appendix F). Participants were asked to return the questions to me by email.

Follow-Up Skype Interview. The original data collected provided insights into the research questions, but indicated additional areas where more data would be beneficial; therefore, follow-up questions were developed, and participants were asked to participate in a follow-up Skype interview (Appendix G). The information gathered from these questions provided additional depth to the study.

The following ideas presented were limited to responses that were alluded to by the participants during the initial study, or based on questions that should have been presented during the initial study. The information is presented in the following categories and subcategories;

- First-Generation Doctoral Male
- Learning Style
- Educational Environment
- Collaborative Experiences

First-Generation Doctoral Male

During the initial study, it was found that there was no question asked of the participants about their expectations as first-generation doctoral male students, and whether those expectations have been met. When John was asked if his expectations as a first-generation doctoral male have been met in online education, in comparison to his expectations in ground-based education, he stated the following,

“When completing coursework, I found the online learning experience to be more difficult than ground-based learning. The inability to ask questions was my greatest challenge. However, I learned how to be a self-directed learner as a result of learning online. When writing my dissertation, I have found online mentorship at the university to be lacking the support that I need as a student. I have had four different mentors to date. Each mentor had his or her own approach, position, and requirements. This has severely delayed my ability to complete the program in a timely manner since I had to restructure my paper several times to meet the subjective desires of each mentor.”

John acknowledged something that was discussed by Allen and Lavin (2007) when they suggested that first-generation students often take longer to obtain a degree. Attewell & Lavin (2007) and Methvin (2012) noted that colleges and universities should continue to embrace the value of post-secondary education for all students and design programs that support services to ensure that all students, first-generation students included, are able to develop educational skills to their fullest potential.

When James was posed the same question, he suggested that he was not sure what to expect when enrolling in online courses. He commented that he couldn't really state that online education has/has not met his expectations. He did provide the following comment about his educational experience online,

“I will say that it is quite different and much more challenging than I anticipated. The workload is extremely time consuming, and thought provoking more than I expected. Also, I do not have anyone else to share ideas with, compared to

ground-based education where I could interact and share ideas with classmates daily.”

James has stated that, for him, an expectation from online education has been met. He believes the university he is attending has done a good job helping him get the most out of this online experience. For him, “On a more strategic level the residencies and capstone intensives have helped me get face-to-face assistance, as well as helped me socialize with the community and meet peers.”

The comments from John and James provide similar thoughts to those that were suggested during the initial data selection stage, which is, the lack of face-to-face interaction and communication in online education can be a hindrance for some students’ success. The underlying theme is this, first-generation doctoral male students, along with other students, enter online education with different learning styles. One of the participants alluded to his learning style in multiple answers during preliminary data collection. Colleges and universities offering online programs must insert activities and curricula that require interaction, participation, communication, and build relationships for first-generation doctoral male students, and other students for that matter, to improve retention and degree completion. However, the type of student (i.e. first-generation doctoral male) is not the only factor that needs to be factored into the educational process. A students’ learning style, if not addressed, could hinder retention and completion for online students.

Learning Style

When John was asked how learning style impacted his learning in the online environment, he did not believe that, as a visual/auditory learner, his education was impacted. James, when asked the same question, stated that his style is methodical and visual. Online learning, for him, “has greatly impacted my education by consuming much more time for every project and assignment than expected. So, in addition to maintaining a full-time job, my learning style has consumed much more time, energy and focus than I originally expected.”

When Joseph was asked the question, he commented,

“I am very much a monkey-see-monkey-do kinesthetic mimicking style learner. I learn things quickest having someone do it first, then do it again talking it through, then talking through it while I attempt it, then helping me with specific parts that I am having trouble with. This is very difficult prospect to attempt online, which is why I believe, looking back, the few socialized encounters including seminars at the residencies, and personalized face-to-face communication at the residencies and capstone intensives has helped me make the fastest progress.”

Although the topic of learning style did not present itself as a major theme in the study, it was still represented. Colleges and universities must ensure the online educational environment addresses individuals learning styles when creating curricula. For example, a visual and auditory learner can benefit from Skype interviews with instructors and colleagues. Another item that I felt needed to be addressed, asked of participants, in the follow-up questions is the educational environment. I wanted to know

how the educational environment differed online when compared to ground-based education.

Educational Environment

For John, asynchronous communication was the biggest difference between online and ground-based education. For him,

“The educational environment seems more artificial when communication does not occur in real time. I had to remember to follow-up with the online instructor when I had a question or problem. I lost time when I had pertinent questions but had to wait for the instructor to respond.”

James had a similar response to this question, and he suggested that interaction in the online environment was extremely limited and not face-to-face, giving an artificial feeling. For him, the lack of body language, gestures, or any type of interpersonal connection, was missing. He alluded to the following,

“Some students are better than others with written expression, so it is difficult to determine their nature from their written words. In comparison to the ground-based environment, usually it took only a minute or two of meeting a classmate to get a good sense of their character, thoughts, and ideas in common. In other words, the interpersonal connection was much easier to assess a sense of our fellow classmates, and the instructor. Those types of interactions are non-existent in the online environment.”

Joseph's response was similar to the other participants. He noted that online education differs from ground-based education in that it requires more dedication to get interaction to occur, in order to get the most from the course. He commented,

“Rather than wait until your class session to discuss ideas you and everyone else had to put the effort into creating discussion points based on others written posts. Because you weren't there physically you had to make an attempt to learn everyone's preferred online communication style. Some were more interested in corresponding via email; others wanted to talk on the phone. Some wanted to Skype or use an online messenger service. Many just wanted to use the forum itself for communication.”

Online learning has provided students opportunities to obtain an education outside of the synchronous learning environment, primarily because of the freedom of time that it affords students; however, colleges and universities must understand that when students move from ground-based education, or a synchronous environment, to online education, or a primarily asynchronous environment, there may be difficulties that arise because of the lack of set timing. Colleges and universities must consider incorporating some type of synchronous curricula, or projects, that require colleague and instructor interaction, participation, communication, and relationships to improve retention and completion for the student(s). For example, creating projects that require collaboration can improve interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with colleagues and instructors.

Collaborative Experiences

When John was asked how collaboration compared between the online and ground-based environment, he suggested that collaboration occurs more “naturally” in ground-based education. He commented,

“I often had to do the work of colleagues with low participation and little-to-no collaboration in the online environment. In the online environment, I was faced with the decision whether to report colleagues with low participation whereas the colleague’s low performance is more likely to be noticed by the instructor in an on-ground environment.”

James, although presenting a different answer, alluded to a response similar to John’s. He stated that he has tried to work on group assignments with others; however, it was difficult to coordinate. He commented,

“In fact, unless there is a certain amount of interpersonal communication (i.e., Skype, telephone, or some additional type of interpersonal communication), then group assignments with the online environment are extremely challenging. However, with the ground-based environment, collaboration and joint participation for assignments worked quite well, and often saved time overall in completing assignments since each participant handled their portion of the assignment. Additionally, interaction and collaboration with instructors worked well also in the ground-based environment.”

Finally, Joseph also had a similar response to his peer’s when asked about collaboration. He stated that it was easier to collaborate during his traditional MBA program. He also stated that, for him, the only way that to collaborate on assignments is

if the group is pre-selected, and the assignment is given out early in the term, which would allow students to self-organize how and when they wish to meet.

As stated previously, if colleges and universities incorporate projects that require interaction, participation, communication, and relationships among students with colleagues and instructors in the online environment, retention and completion can improve. The preceding information provides detailed commentary and results provided by the participants during the follow-up questions of study. Before moving to Chapter Five, it is important to summarize the overarching findings that were presented within the research, more importantly, in relation to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships for the participants with colleagues and instructors. The findings presented in the following sections provide the findings that were presented by the participants and relate to the primary research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?” and the secondary research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?”

Interaction

During my research, it was important to discover how the participants in this study described their interaction(s) with colleagues and instructors because interaction is frequently described as an integral part of building a community of learners (Howard, 2010; Ruane & Koku, 2014). Howard (2010) and Misanchuk, Anderson, Craner, Eddy, and Smith (2000) suggested that communities evolve by employing increasing levels of student interaction and commitment. The responses received from the participants helped provide answers built around the primary research question of the study and sub-question of the study. Additionally, the information centered on the conceptual framework(s) of this study including; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism. The following information described the lack of interaction that was found with colleagues and instructors and the differences experienced between ground-based and online education.

Lack of Interaction with Colleagues and Instructors

Interaction on assignments with colleagues and instructors in the online environment was lacking. The information gathered suggested that work needs to be completed at the university, attended by the participants, to get students in online classes interacting more, both inside and outside of the classroom. NVivo coding noted 19 separate occasions when participants mentioned lack of interaction, or a problem with interaction, with colleagues or instructors. There were only a few instances where participants (5 times) mentioned positive interactions with colleagues or instructors. For example, John seemed to sum it up best when he suggested that interaction, “occurred

more easily and naturally in the ground-based environment; and in the ground-based environment it seemed natural to share ideas and opinions.”

There are technologies available (i.e. Skype) that can be incorporated into the classroom to minimize the lack of interaction. The literature reviewed noted that individuals could educate themselves through strong learning communities and interaction (Andersen, et al., 2013; Clark & Kinne, 2012; Frederickson, Pickett, & Shea, 2006; Howard, 2010; Huang, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Sadera, Robertson, Song, & Midon, 2009). Universities must provide students an opportunity to interact, regardless of the educational method of delivery.

Using the theory of connectivism, which suggested learning is a continuous process that requires individuals to have the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their experiences with colleagues using technology (Siemens, 2004), the university, and other schools for that matter, can build a connection between students, especially first-generation doctoral male students that decide to enroll in online education.

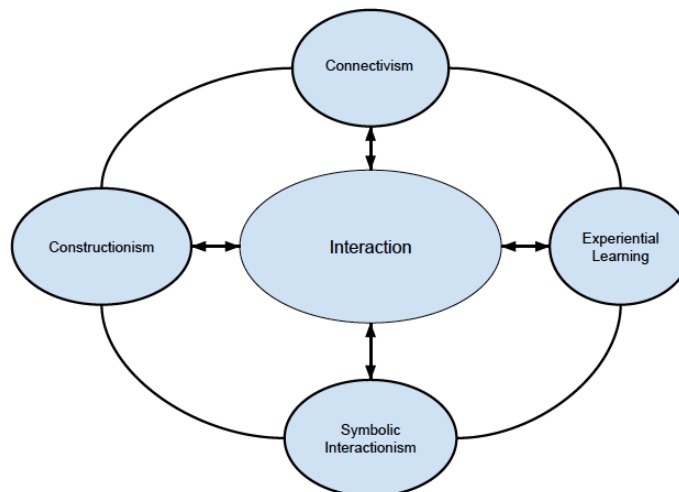
Experiential learning suggested that previous knowledge, learned through experiences, allows an individual to build knowledge through new experiences (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). The university, again, can use existing tools, like discussion boards, to allow students to express how their experiences can create knowledge for each other. It is a matter of designing the questions to bring out said “experiences” and allowing students to express themselves.

Symbolic interaction was built around a premise that humans gain meaning about the world through interaction (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For symbolic interactionism to occur, the university/schools need to make sure that they are using all available resources to help students build meaning and knowledge. The lack of interaction mentioned by the participants of this study was concerning and needs to be addressed. The following information described the differences that the participants discussed between ground-based education and online education, and provided comments to improve the process for future first-generation doctoral male students, and students in general.

Differences in Interaction Between Online and Ground-based Education

Participants in this study suggested that they interacted more often in ground-based education. The reason for this interaction was attributed to the face-to-face nature of ground-based education. NVivo coding noted 23 separate occasions when participants mentioned face-to-face interaction with colleagues or instructors. There were only a few instances where participants (2 times) mentioned positive interactions using simulated face-to-face interaction (i.e. Skype) with colleagues or instructors. The university the participants attend needs to look at incorporating more methods (i.e. Skype) to improve interaction for students. Through these interactions, the participants can connect (connectivism) using previous experiences (experiential learning) through the interactions (symbolic interactionism) in order to build new knowledge (constructionism). Figure 4.1, which is related to the Farris Model (Figure 2.1), shows how I envisioned the conceptual frameworks aligning with the topic of interaction. The following section presented the findings of the study from the participation perspective.

Figure 4.1. Interaction and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study



Participation

It was important to discover how the participants in this study described their communication habits with colleagues and instructors. Lee, Pate, & Cozart (2015) suggested that despite rapid growth in online learning, the dropout rate for online courses has reached 50% because of lack of participation. An additional study, conducted by Shah, Goode, West, & Clark (2014) stated there is a quest to widen student participation by governments in some countries in order to ensure that the growth in numbers of students in online higher education does not compromise academic quality, standards and student outcomes. NVivo analysis in this study shows limited participation between the participants and colleagues and instructors. There were eighteen instances in NVivo where participants noted dissatisfaction with participation on assignments versus only one instance where a participant felt that an assignment encouraged participation.

Coupled with other research (noted above), this made a compelling case that the university, and other institutions, must incorporate assignments into the educational model that require participation between colleagues, and require student(s) to participate with instructors. The responses received from the participants helped provide answers built around the primary research question of the study and sub-question of the study. Additionally, the information formulated around the conceptual framework(s) of this study including; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism. The following information described the limited participation that was found with colleagues and instructors and the differences experienced between ground-based and online education.

Limited Participation with Colleagues and Instructors

The participants in this study had similar reactions to participation as they did with interaction as shown through NVivo analysis. There seemed to be limited participation with colleagues and instructors in the online environment. For example, in the Experiences with Instructors questionnaire, the participants noted that participation on assignments was limited primarily to discussion boards.

When I coded participation with colleagues into NVivo, there were 23 cases where it was noted with colleagues, and with instructors it was noted 11 times. Moloena (2013) suggested that lecturer's need to be proactive, recognize the students' work and provide feedback. Interestingly enough, the participation for these participants was described differently within the ground-based environment. The participants suggested that participation in the ground-based environment, both at the undergraduate and

graduate level, was “readily available” and “real time.” In order to gather additional feedback of the term, “real time,” I coded the information into NVivo. The results produced nine references that related to this term. In all cases, the terminology referred to communication that occurred with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education, rather than in online education. When I was discussing the lag in participation online, during a follow-up Skype interview, John commented that, if given the choice, he would probably complete his PhD in a ground-based program because of the participation that he believes would be available. Feedback with instructors was instantaneous because of the face-to-face communication that was available. James noted that the participation with instructors in the online environment feels more “formal,” whereas, in ground-based education, his communication with his instructors was “casual.”

During the literature review, it was noted that participation is an important factor in determining motivation and involvement; however, direct perceptions of students related to this have not been adequately studied (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008; Medina, 2012). The preceding information suggests the importance of participation for students with colleagues and instructors, something that the participants feel is lacking at the university they attended. There are technologies available (i.e. Skype) that can be incorporated into the classroom to minimize the lack of interaction. Using the theory of connectivism, which suggested learning is a continuous process that requires individuals to have the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their experiences with colleagues using technology (Siemens, 2004), the university, and other schools for that matter, can use some of the tools previously

discussed to build a connection between students through participation, especially first-generation doctoral male students that decide to enroll in online education.

Kolb (1984) stated learning is the “creation of knowledge” through experiences in the world, and meaning is made through a compilation of these experiences (Peters, 2012). The university, and other schools, need to make sure there are assignments, even at the doctoral level, that allow students an opportunity to participate with each other and discuss their “experiences” in order for others to use those “experiences” to help formulate knowledge. Symbolic interaction was built around a premise that humans make meaning, symbolic meaning making, about the world through interaction with others (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For symbolic interactionism to occur, the university and other schools need to make sure that they have built assignments and/or classes that allow students an opportunity to participate and interact. Students cannot expect to share their knowledge if there are no opportunities to do so. The following information described the differences that the participants discussed between ground-based education and online education, and provides comments to improve the process for future first-generation doctoral male students, and students in general.

Differences in Participation Between Online and Ground-based Education

Participants in the study also noted there was more participation, in some cases weekly, in ground-based education when compared to the online environment. Face-to-face opportunities were offered as a primary tool when discussing participation in ground-based education. When I added “face-to-face” in NVivo, 23 referenced results were identified. The primary difference in relation to participation was the availability of

face-to-face interaction in the ground-based environment. Although face-to-face interaction is limited in an online platform (if individuals live in the same area), there are tools that could be used to help resemble face-to-face interaction (i.e. Skype, Go To Meeting, etc.). One of the participants noted that when using Skype, he could visually see his colleagues and instructors, which allowed him to view their facial expressions. The participant stated that he could see when a colleague was puzzled, or needed additional clarification, when he could see their expressions in Skype.

Finally, in relation to building relationships, through participation, with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education, the participants noted how they were able to build relationships through participation more often in ground-based education (mentioned on six occasions in NVivo); however, this again was related to the face-to-face nature of the educational environment. This is another instance where the university, and other schools that teach online courses, should consider incorporating the technology that is currently available to improve participation among students and colleagues and instructors. When first-generation doctoral male students, or any students for that matter, have a chance to participate with colleagues and instructors he/she can connect (connectivism) using previous experiences (experiential learning) through the interactions (symbolic interactionism) in order to build new knowledge (constructionism). Figure 4.2, which are related to the Farris Model (Figure 2.1), shows how I envisioned the conceptual frameworks aligning with the topic of interaction. The following section presented the findings of the study from the communication perspective.

Figure 4.2. Participation and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study



Communication

It was important to discover how the participants in this study described their communication habits with colleagues and instructors. Ladyshefsky & Pettapiece (2015) conducted a study on how communication tools are currently used in online education. It was suggested that today's tech-savvy students are more technologically literate in relation to the tools they use to communicate with instructors; however, they noted that older students, considered being "digital immigrants" because they have not grown up with technology at their fingertips, may be at a disadvantage. The information gathered from this study provides evidence that even at a major online university, technology is not being utilized to its fullest to improve communication between students and colleagues and instructors. The responses received from the participants helped provide answers built around the primary research question of the study and sub-question of the

study. Additionally, the information added to findings associated with the conceptual framework(s) of this study including; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism. The following information described the limited participation that was found with colleagues and instructors and the differences experienced between ground-based and online education.

Lag in Communication with Colleagues and Instructors

The communication methods discussed by the participants varied in the online environment. What the participant information seemed to agree on was there was a lag in time for communication, which caused frustration. It was noted, during the literature review, that effective communication must be established in an online learning environment (Hodges and Cowan, 2012). Caspi, Chajut, and Saporta (2008) noted that, in an online environment, communication, for both men and women, is not as attractive as it is in a ground-based environment, rather, it is used simply as a tool to exchange ideas, rather than to challenge, or develop, meaning. Additionally, when given the choice, men may choose face-to-face communication versus an open web-based forum (Caspi, et al., 2008). For future students, universities should consider incorporating technology-related tools to improve educational outcomes for students. During the literature review, it was noted that participation is an important factor in determining motivation and involvement; however, direct perceptions of students related to this have not been adequately studied (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008; Medina, 2012). The preceding information suggests the importance of communication for students with colleagues and instructors, something that the participants feel is lagging at the online university they

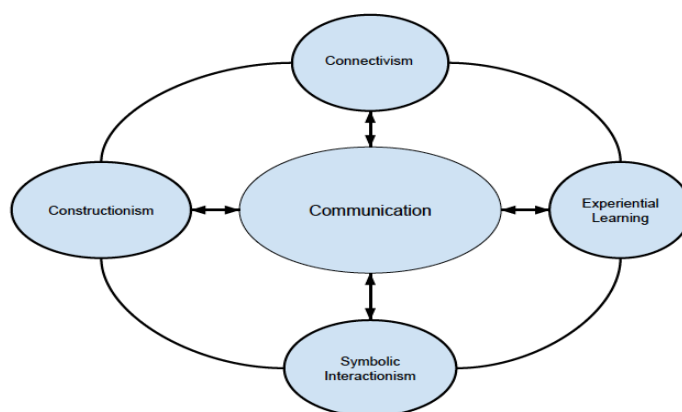
attended. There are technologies available (i.e. Skype) that can be incorporated into the classroom to minimize the lag in communication.

Using the theory of connectivism, which suggested learning is a continuous process that requires individuals to have the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their experiences with colleagues using technology (Siemens, 2004), the university, and other schools for that matter, have to incorporate tools that will allow students an opportunity to communicate with colleagues, and communicate with instructors in order to be successful. Experiential learning involves the transformation of new experiences into knowledge while combining that knowledge with previous experiential knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). The university, and other schools, need to make sure there are assignments, even at the doctoral level, that allow students an opportunity to communicate with each other and discuss their “experiences” in order for other’s to use those “experiences” to help formulate knowledge.

Symbolic interaction is built around a premise that humans make meaning about the world through interaction with others (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For symbolic interactionism to occur, the university and other schools need to make sure that they have built assignments and/or classes that allow students an opportunity to communicate and interact. Students must have an opportunity to share knowledge built through experiences. When first-generation doctoral male students participate with colleagues and instructors he/she can connect (connectivism) through his/her experiences (experiential learning) using interaction (symbolic interactionism) to build new

knowledge (constructionism). Figure 4.3, which is related to the Farris Model (Figure 2.1), shows how I envisioned the conceptual frameworks aligning with the topic of interaction. The following section presented the findings of the study from the relationship perspective.

Figure 4.3. Communication and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study



Relationships

Another important aspect to look at within this study was the relationships the participant's formed with colleagues and instructors. Kowch and Schweir (1997) stated that a learning community depends on relations that can be built by using traditional (face-to-face) and non-traditional (digital) interaction. Additionally, Kim and Thayne (2014) noted that the strength of the rapport between instructors and students impacts the learner's affective experience and achievement, which in the online environment has been challenging. The information gathered during this study provides evidence that the participants built only limited relationships with colleagues and instructors. The university, and other schools with online programs, needs to incorporate relationship

building assignments/methods into the educational process. Online, or not, students must believe they can build a relationship with others. The responses received from the participants helped provide answers built around the primary research question of the study and sub-question of the study, as well as the conceptual framework(s) of the study. The following information describes the limited relationships that were found with colleagues and instructors and the differences experienced between ground-based and online education.

Limited Relationships with Colleagues and Instructors

Relationships with colleagues and instructors in the online environment yielded differing results. Some of the participants described relationships with colleagues, while others were not concerned with forming a relationship with colleagues and/or instructors because of the nature of the doctoral program. John noted, “The relationships formed with instructors were course-related and professionally-based in the online environment. With the exception of my faculty mentor for my dissertation, the relationships lasted only for the duration of the course.”

It has been noted that students that report a strong relationship with others display better learning outcomes and achievement (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Creasy, Jarvis, & Knapcik, 2009; Eccles, 2004, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Jacob alluded to this when he has learned that through his commitment to become efficient and timely with the return of his work, he has built a stronger relationship with his instructors. This supports the point that students need to have someone(s) to connect with to help improve educational outcomes. This university, and other schools, needs to consider this

when building the courses, and work done within the courses, for students. The preceding information suggests the importance of relationships for students with colleagues and instructors, something that the participants feel they had limited opportunities to build at the university they attended.

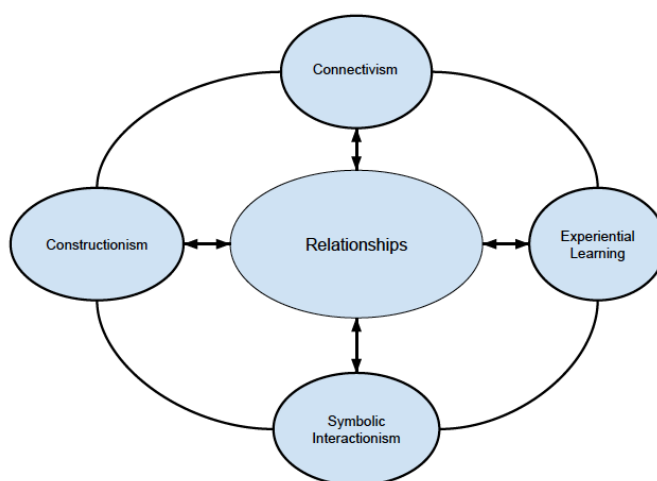
Siemens (2004) suggested that learning is a continuous process that requires individuals to have the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information through their relationship with colleagues and instructors using technology. The university attended by the participants, and other schools for that matter, have to incorporate tools that will allow students an opportunity to build relationships with colleagues, and build relationships with instructors in order to be successful.

Experiential learning suggests that students learn through hearing the experiences of others and using those experiences through demonstration (Rosenstein, Sweeney, and Gupta, 2012). The university, and other schools, need to make sure there are assignments, even at the doctoral level, that allow students an opportunity to interact, participate, and communicate with colleagues and instructors to discuss their “experiences” in order for other’s to use those “experiences” to help formulate knowledge through the relationships garnered.

Symbolic interaction is built around a premise that humans gain meaning about the world through interaction with others (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For symbolic interactionism to occur, the university and other schools need to make sure that they have built assignments and/or classes that allow students an opportunity to build relationships with colleagues and instructors. Students cannot expect to build relationships if there are

no opportunities to do so. Earlier I suggested the following, when first-generation doctoral male students, or any students for that matter, have a chance to build relationships with colleagues and instructors he/she can connect (connectivism) using previous experiences (experiential learning) through the interactions (symbolic interactionism) in order to build new knowledge (constructionism). I have eluded to this comment to serve a purpose and show the connection between the conceptual frameworks chosen for this study and the themes that have presented themselves in the findings. Figure 4.4, which is related to the Farris Model (Figure 2.1), showed how I envisioned the conceptual frameworks aligning with the topic of interaction.

Figure 4.4. Relationships and the Conceptual Frameworks of this Study



The following section presents the findings from the participants in relation to the third research question, “How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?” Although I felt it was important to present the findings from

participants in relation to collaboration, I did not build the subject of collaboration into the Farris Model (see Figure 2.1) because I believed the subject of collaboration blends into interaction, participation, communication, and relationships (i.e. all of these items can include collaborative projects).

Difference in Collaborative Experiences between Ground-Based and Online Education

The final research question developed for this study centered around collaboration and how the participants experienced collaboration differently with instructors and colleagues in ground-based education and online. Collaboration was noted on eight occasions in NVivo, with the subject of peer tutoring (elaborated on below) being mentioned on two occasions. The feedback provided by the participants, in relation to collaboration, favored ground-based education, with both colleagues and instructors.

The participants suggested that when collaboration was available online, it could be frustrating because of the lag in time between communications. In a study conducted by Zavallos and Washburn (2014), it was suggested that a mentoring relationship has a positive impact because it; 1) enhances a student's social relationship and well-being, 2) improves their skills through instruction and conversation, and 3) promotes positive identity development.

Zavallos and Washburn (2014) noted that across college campuses, many learners have attributed their abilities to overcome academic and personal challenges because of having a mentor. On another note, John believes that since his faculty mentor received her doctorate in a ground-based setting, he is not sure that she knows the struggles that

online doctoral candidates face. He formed a cohort with his peer mentor to help support one another since they were assigned to the same faculty mentor. He and his peer decided to resume weekly meetings this term to support one another, vent frustrations, gain ideas, and sometimes just be there as a friend. Zavellos and Washburn (2014) noted that their first-year students learn how to navigate the college environment with the help of a mentor. The information provided suggests the university is not meeting the students' needs in relation to collaboration. The university, and other schools, needs to create assignments that require collaboration for students and colleagues and instructors. The responses received from the participants helped provide answers built around one of the sub-questions of the study. Additionally, the information formulates information around the conceptual framework(s) of this study including; 1) connectivism, 2) experiential learning, 3) symbolic interactionism, and 4) constructionism.

Using the theory of connectivism, the university, and other schools for that matter, have to incorporate tools that will allow students an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, and collaborate with instructors in order to be successful. Experiential learning suggested that students learn through hearing the experiences of others and using those experiences through demonstration (Rosenstein, Sweeney, and Gupta, 2012). The university, and other schools, need to make sure there are assignments, even at the doctoral level, that allows students an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and instructors to discuss their "experiences" in order for other's to use those "experiences" to help formulate knowledge through the relationships garnered.

Symbolic interaction is built around a premise that humans gain meaning about the world through interaction with others (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For symbolic interactionism to occur, the university and other schools need to make sure that they have built assignments and/or classes that allow students an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and instructors. Students cannot expect to collaborate online if there are no opportunities to do so. The preceding sections discussed the overarching themes, in relation to the research questions of the study; however, one theme that presented itself, which was not built into the initial research questions, was the frustrations of being a first-generation doctoral male.

Frustrations in Online Education as a First-Generation Doctoral Male

The participants that completed the additional email and Skype interview all suggested that they were frustrated by the lack of interaction available with instructors, especially at this time when they are working on their dissertation proposals, and/or program completion requirements.

When James was asked the same question, he noted that he really couldn't express whether online education has/has not met his expectations as a first-generation doctoral male; however, he did state that it has been much more challenging than expected. He doesn't believe he has had anyone else to share his ideas with, where he could bounce ideas off of colleagues or instructors, as in ground-based education. The university, and other schools, must consider incorporating certain technologies (i.e. Skype) into the curriculum to improve interaction with colleagues and instructors.

Throughout this section, I have presented the findings and attempted to create a correlation between the conceptual framework and interaction, participation, communication, and relationships in order to show how this information suggested the Farris Model (see Figure 2.1).

Review on the Conceptual Framework of the Study as it Relates to the Findings

The primary conceptual framework used for this qualitative study was based on connectivism; however, other theoretical perspectives including experiential learning, symbolic interactionism, and constructionism, also provided a base for the study.

Connectivism

This study asked the participants how they interacted, participated, communicated, and built relationship with colleagues and instructors, to continuously draw distinctions between important and unimportant information using today's technology (Siemens, 2008). Learners are connected to a learning community together through continuous communication through similar interests (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005). Additionally, learning and knowledge within this environment is dependent on different views and opinions with the idea that information is always changing (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005). Finally, Rousseau (2007) and Siemens (2004) promote connectivism as the promotion of speaking, listening, questioning, reading, writing, discussing, publishing, and creating multimedia to connect with others in the digital age.

Within this study, participant(s) developed meaning and knowledge through the connections made with colleagues and instructors through the technology that was available (i.e. LMS, email, Skype, telephone, etc.). When I entered “connected/connection” into NVivo, there were 16 references to the terminology. The majority of the references related to interactions, and/or a feeling of connectedness, with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education, rather, than online education. In online education, the information gathered from the participants suggested that a connection with colleagues and instructors was primarily limited to discussion boards and, on occasion, assignments. Jacob commented that he felt connected to colleagues and instructors in ground-based education; however, he only felt a connection with colleagues and instructors in the online environment when there were questions about assignments, and whether they were completed correctly. Connectivism suggested that students will use technology to develop a feeling of connection with colleagues and instructors. With today’s technologies available (i.e. Skype, email, mobile phone, etc....) it was my thought that students might connect more with colleagues and instructors.

When I added the function “face-to-face” into NVivo, the term produced 23 coded references. To me, this suggests that students moving from ground-based education may have an expectation of some level of face-to-face interaction with colleagues and instructors in the online environment. The view of Joseph, as described previously, suggests that online education may still be viewed as a “correspondence” course, or set up based on educational models that have been used in the past. Gail Caruth (2013) suggested that online learning has a history with correspondence learning.

The preceding information provided evidence, as collected from the study, that a level of “connectedness” needed to be strengthened by the university attended by the participants. As a major online university, the school needs to incorporate additional technologies into the various “schools” to improve. Again, Skype and other online media tools could be added to the classroom to improve interaction, participation, relationships, and communication for students and colleagues and instructors. It appears that additional work is needed by the university to incorporate technology that is available to make students feel connected. The preceding offered suggestions of how students can be connected; however, it did not address how they experienced the learning in relation to interaction, participation, communication, and relationships in the online environment.

Experiential Learning

Kolb (1984) and Peters (2012) suggested that individuals use previous experiences to build knowledge when encountered with new experiences. Experiential learning is broken into six schemes including; the process of relearning, integration of new conditions, conflict resolution, cooperative interaction, and acquisition of knowledge through external experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Peters, 2012). The thought was that the participants would be able to take the experiences they used in ground-based education and use that information to help build new knowledge in the online environment. When I looked back at NVivo to see how often the participants talked about being part of a group, it was mentioned on eight occasions. This may suggest, 1) group work is purposely not built into online doctoral level education at the university attended by the participants, 2) the participants did not utilize the experiences used in ground-

based education to build new knowledge in the online environment, and/or 3) because the educational environment experienced by the participants is doctoral level, the participants should have mastery level experience that would negate a need to use prior experiences to generate new knowledge.

In the ground-based environment, John described his experiences as follows, “I learned how to compromise and negotiate when working face-to-face with others. I feel that my interpersonal skills were more effective in the ground-based environment.”

Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann (2010), Dewey (1938, 1998), and Peters (2012) note that learning is a cognitive process that involves constant adaptation and engagement in individuals’ experiences. The participants in this study could use previous ground-based educational experiences to enhance the online educational experiences. The responses from the participants, particularly participant two, noted that he used his knowledge of reading non-verbal face-to-face communication into a method online. He learned to look into the writing of others, in an online environment, to try and discern what the persons’ were trying to say, both colleagues and instructors.

Van Manen and Adams (2009, p. 10) suggested that,

“In recent years, college and university teachers have been increasingly required to integrate technology in their teaching, and institutions schedule ever more courses online. Especially in postgraduate programs, there is a preponderance of alternative online offerings whereby much of the interaction is through reading and writing texts. Students encounter their teacher, other students, and their subject matter through words on the screen.”

I do not know that the university has integrated the technology available to help improve the experiences for the participants of this study, or other students attending the university. Additionally, because of the lack of interaction described by the participants, I do not believe students are being given the opportunity to use his/her experiences to improve his/her educational outcomes. Participants of this study might not only use experience from the virtual classroom to gain knowledge, but to develop relationships with colleagues and instructors to develop additional perspectives and thought processes.

Symbolic Interactionism

Individuals can construct ideas and meaning as a result of social interaction and collaboration (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). Participants in this study might be able to provide information that relates how they were able to connect with colleagues and instructors, based on having similar backgrounds. Ioannis, Fokion, and Apostolos (2009) suggested that engagement in meaningful learning is negotiated through strategies developed by those with similar interests and a desire to learn. The information gathered from the participants in this study does not show evidence that the university considers interaction an important aspect of the educational environment. The participants described on multiple occasions the lack of interaction that occurred during the educational process. The university should consider incorporating more assignments that require interaction for students, colleagues and instructors, which can then be used to construct ideas into knowledge.

Constructionism

Constructionism is the reality that individual's build over time using social interaction with others (Walker, 2012). Participants in this study were asked to provide information related to their interaction with colleagues and instructors in ground-based education and online. This study looked to provide an interpretation of the experiences that first-generation doctoral male students have illustrated on assignments through interaction with colleagues and instructors online and how that interaction differed with previous ground-based education. The information gathered from the participants in this study did not show evidence that the university considers interaction, participation, communication, and relationships are a priority of the educational environment. The participants described on multiple occasions the lack of interaction that occurred during the educational process. The university must incorporate additional assignments that require interaction, participation, communication, and relationships for students and colleagues and instructors.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided information of the participant's responses. The following information provides a summary of the research questions from the study and information presented in the chapter. The purpose of this case study was to research the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time and to see how these experiences differed from ground-based education. From the information that was collected during the study, a list of codes emerged. Through the process of general sorting, reflective sorting, conceptualization, and reconceptualization

(Williams, 2004) additional codes became useful. The codes were organized into themes and sub-themes based on the questions of the study.

The themes that emerged, which further support the model developed (see Figure 2.1), from the information provided by the participants are;

Lack of Interaction with Colleagues and Instructors. The responses from the participants suggested that they did not interact with their colleagues and instructors often in their online education. Some did not have the expectation that they would interact all of the time; however, even for those participants, interaction was lacking. This information helped to answer a piece of the research questions, “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?” and “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?”

Additionally, the data collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; Connectivism suggests that learners connect within a learning community through continuous interaction and similar interests (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005). Within experiential learning, the concept suggests that individual’s gain

knowledge and experience through the experiences that other share in a connected environment (Peters, 2012). With a lack of interaction, the participants did not have much opportunity to use others' experiences to help build their knowledge. The idea of symbolic interaction suggests that learning takes place in an environment where individuals can construct ideas and meaning as the result of social interaction and collaboration with others (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the lack of interaction they described. Finally, constructionism suggests that individuals choose to build a reality and formulate knowledge over time through social interaction with others (Walker, 2012). The participants were not able to formulate knowledge through their connections because of the lack of interaction.

Limited Participation with Colleagues and Instructors. The responses from the participants suggested that they experienced limited participation with their colleagues and instructors in their online education. This information helped to answer a piece of the research questions, "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?" and "How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?"

Additionally, the data collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; Connectivism suggests that knowledge does not reside in the mind of an individual or in one location; rather, it is distributed across a network through multiple individuals. Learning and knowledge creation are dependent on different views and opinions, and on access to various information centers (Boitshwarelo, 2011; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2005). Within experiential learning, the concept knowledge is developed when individuals' connect the experiences that occur through participation with others and convert the experiences into information (Kolb, 1984). With limited participation, the participants did not have much opportunity to use others' experiences to help build their knowledge. The idea of symbolic interaction focused on the interaction of individuals in a learning community where meaning is developed and moved into actions (Blumer, 1969). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the limited participation they described. Finally, constructionism suggests the view of reality is based on tradition; however, as new ideas surface and beliefs change, a person's reality can change (Gergen & Gergan, 2008; Gergen, 2001; Searle, 1995; Walker, 2012). The participants were not able to construct knowledge through their connections because of the limited participation that occurred online.

Communication Differences – Online versus Ground-Based Education and Lag in Communication with Colleagues and Instructors. The responses from the participants suggested that communication was lagging with their colleagues and instructors often in their online education and it was suggested that it varied significantly from their ground-

based educational experiences. This information helped to provide insight into pieces of the research question one and two. Additionally, the information collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; Connectivism suggests All learning starts with a connection that is meant to shrink the distances between sectors through interconnectivity and information-rich resources which calls for thinking inventively to solve problems (Rousseau, 2007; Siemens, 2008; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). Within experiential learning, the concept suggests that essentially, the individual takes the experiences they have through communication with others, develops the perceptions of the experiences, and converts the information into knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Peters, 2012). With the lag in communication with instructors and colleagues and the differences between ground-based and online education, the participants did not have much opportunity to use others' experiences to help build their knowledge. The idea of symbolic interaction suggests that learning takes place in an environment where individuals can construct ideas and meaning as the result of their communication with each other (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the lag in communication they described. Finally, constructionism suggests that individuals choose to build a reality and formulate knowledge over time through online communication with others (Walker, 2012). The participants were not able to formulate knowledge through their connections because of the lag in communication and the communication online compared to ground-based education.

Limited Relationships with Colleagues and Instructors. The responses from the participants suggested that the participants in this study did not develop relationships with colleagues and instructors often in their online education. This information helped to answer a piece of the research question which attempted to answer how the participants described their relationships with colleagues and instructors during their online endeavor, and also how they described these experiences in relation to ground-based education.

Additionally, the information collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; Connectivism suggests that Internet users are learning while searching the web, and that this learning enhances conversations with others in face-to-face and virtual discussion, which helps build relationships (Bell, 2011). Within experiential learning, Kolb (1984) suggested that adult education models have fallen victim to teacher-centered models versus models that allow students' to learn through relationships built through others (Peters, 2012). With the limited relationships with instructors and colleagues, the participants did not have much opportunity to use others' experiences to help build their knowledge. The idea of symbolic interaction suggests people act toward others and objects in a manner that is based on the meaning that people and objects have in relation to them (Blumer, 1969). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the limited relationships they described. Finally, constructionism suggests that individuals choose to build a reality and formulate knowledge over time through relationships with others (Walker, 2012). The participants were not able to formulate knowledge through their connections because of the limited relationships they built with their colleagues and instructors.

Frustrations of Online Education as First-Generation Doctoral Male Student. The responses from the participants suggested that the participants in this study experienced frustrations as first-generation doctoral male students. This information helped to answer a piece of the research questions, How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?” and “How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?”

Additionally, the information collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; Connectivism suggests that Internet users are learning while searching the web, and that this learning enhances conversations with others in virtual discussion, which helps with learning (Bell, 2011). Within experiential learning, there are six schemes including the process of relearning, integration of new conditions, conflict resolution, cooperative interaction, and acquisition of knowledge through external experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Peters, 2012). The participants developed frustrations because they were first-generation doctoral students that did not have others to rely on outside of their colleagues and instructors to experience and build knowledge. The areas of a lack of interaction, limited participation, lag in communication all assisted with the frustrations the participants

described. The idea of symbolic interaction suggests that successful learning takes place in an environment where individuals can construct ideas and meaning as the result of social interaction and collaboration with others (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the limited relationships they described, which, as first-generation doctoral students, caused frustration. Finally, constructionism suggests that individuals construct views of the world through social influences (Burr, 1995). The participants were not able to formulate knowledge through their connections because of the lack of interaction, limited relationships, and lag in communication they built with their colleagues and instructors, which as first-generation students, could cause frustration.

Collaborative Differences between Online Education and Ground-Based Education. The responses from the participants suggested that the participants in this study experienced collaboration differently between online and ground-based education. This information helped to answer, “How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?”

Additionally, the information collected provided information related to the conceptual framework for the study, which acknowledged the following; within experiential learning, individuals use experiences to develop a link to work, education, and personal development (Kolb, 1984). The participants were not able to build knowledge through their experiences because the collaborative experiences were limited

online. Symbolic interaction suggests that successful learning takes place in an environment where individuals can construct ideas and meaning as the result of social collaboration with others (Brown & Palinscar, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Slagter van Tryon, 2009; Sweller, 1989). This did not seem to be apparent for the participants based on the limited collaboration they described. Finally, constructionism suggests that individuals construct views of the world through social influences (Burr, 1995). The participants were not able to formulate knowledge through their connections because of the limited collaboration that occurred online.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings from the research presented. Additionally, the chapter provides theme-based information that was collected from the participants. Finally, the chapter discusses limitations of the study, implications for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This collective case study was designed to explore, describe, and document the experiences of a specific cohort, first-generation doctoral male students that moved from ground-based education to online education to complete their educational journey. Chapter Four provided the findings from the study conducted, from the participants' perspectives. The information presented was gathered from the building block of information that was presented previously in Chapters One, Two, and Three. For example, in Chapter One, I stated that there have been studies conducted using first-generation students and men in online education. There have also been studies describing the experiences of students within online education. However, there was a lack of research about the population chosen for this study, namely, first-generation doctoral male students in online education. This study was conducted because there was a gap in the literature that explores how first-generation doctoral male students note their experiences; through interaction, participation, communication, collaboration, and building relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education, and the differences in the preceding areas versus previous ground-based education. The remaining portions of this chapter have been written to provide an interpretation of my findings, to discuss limitations of the study, provide recommendations for future research, describe the implications of this study, and to end the section with my conclusion of this study.

With the increased popularity of online education, from the instructional and administrative perspectives, information was gathered that suggested why this population

chose online learning, and how administration at universities and colleges can improve educational processes for future online students that fit this population's description.

Within this collective case study the purpose was to research the experiences of a group of first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time, and to describe and develop a deep understanding of the participants experiences through interaction, participation, communication, and relationships, with colleagues and instructors. The literature review was written to provide a background for the study and provided research about online learning, first-generation college students, adult learners, ground based and online success, blending environments, interaction, communication, and the experiences of students. I designed the study around a gap in qualitative research about first-generation doctoral male students. I collected information from the participants' about their experiences in online education and determined there was interaction was lacking, participation and communication and relationships was limited, and there were minor discussions and evidence of group work or collaboration with colleagues and instructors in online education; and the belief by the participants that, for them, there were many differences in the preceding areas versus previous ground-based education. The goal of the research was to provide information about this specific population to have an understanding of first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education in order to improve the outcomes for future students that move from ground-based education to online education. The following information was included to provide examples of information presented by

the participants during the study, and to provide conclusions found within the information gathered.

When it comes to the topic of interaction in an online environment, with both colleagues and instructors, the message received from the participants, from this university, suggested that interaction is lacking, and it is limited primarily to discussion boards, and as noted by one participant, “virtual café’s.” There were some courses where the participants described various levels of interaction; however, there were signs of frustration noted because of the delay in communication.

The primary difference(s) noted by the participants, in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors in the online environment, is there was much more interaction in ground-based education, again suggesting that interaction is still an expectation by students in online education. The participants believed it was much easier to interact with colleagues and instructors because of the face-to-face availability, in addition to email and phone. With today’s technology, students can simulate face-to-face interaction through Skype, or other media sources. This university needs to revisit the resources being used for interaction and implement said resources inside, and outside, of the classroom.

The information collected about interaction, both with colleagues and instructors, suggested that at the doctoral level, at the university attended by the participants, interaction needs additional focus and improvement. The participants came from different specialties at the university; therefore, the lack of interaction was not apparent in one specialization over another at the university. The results received from participants in

relation to participation were similar to those noted by the participants in relation to interaction. Participation was limited primarily to discussion boards, which did not provide the participants a feeling of “participation” with colleagues and instructors. One of the participants did mention that an instructor once engaged him in participating in dialogue outside of the classroom in relation to his response to a discussion board post; however, it was limited to this one encounter, again suggesting that participation is not considered a vital part of the educational process at the university attended by the participants. Most of the participants agreed that the lack of availability and lag in communication were deterrents to the participation process. As I mentioned in the section on interaction, there are media resources available (i.e. Skype) that can be implemented by the administration of the university to improve participation between colleagues and instructors.

The participants noted that they participated more often with their colleagues and instructors in the ground-based environment. Participation on assignments occurred on a weekly basis for some of the participants in the ground-based environment. It is understood that because this educational program is doctoral in nature, participation may be limited because of the makeup of the educational level; however, when participants go through almost an entire program without feeling a level of participation, it gives the impression that the university does not believe students need to participate to belong.

The information gathered from the study suggested that additional emphasis should be added in regard to participation, particularly for first-generation doctoral male students. There were times when the participants acknowledged they did not have

persons to reach out to, especially toward the latter part of their educational journey (i.e. dissertation phase).

Communication with colleagues and instructors was an area where the participants noted a disconnection between the online and ground-based environment. The participants missed the face-to-face interaction with colleagues and instructors. This is a theme that has been noted within interaction and participation, and now in communication with colleagues and instructors. There are many tools that are available for students to use in online education (i.e. Skype, phone, email, discussion boards, etc.).

The primary reason the participants liked communication in the ground-based environment, in comparison to the online environment, was the immediate gratification, or acknowledgement, from the person. The lag in communication time, with both colleagues and instructors, was frustrating for the participants. Additionally, as noted previously, the type of communication methods used did not provide comfort for the participants. Jacob often noted, in his comments, that face-to-face communication allowed him the opportunity to view the non-verbal expressions of others to see if his message was being received accurately. Again, there are tools that are available to help simulate face-to-face communication, and provide non-verbal expressions. The university needs to determine how these tools can be incorporated into lessons to allow students an opportunity to have “face-to-face” time.

The primary communication tool used in the online environment varied by participant; however, most communicate through email and telephone. The participants did note that it would be beneficial to learn how to use additional tools (i.e. Skype and/or

Go To Meeting) in an online environment. These tools may help with providing some semblance to face-to-face communication, especially with instructors. The types of communication used by the participants were similar to those discussed online, with the exception of one, face-to-face communication. The participants noted that communication was more open in the ground-based environment because of the immediate response available. Participants were able to get an instructor's point of view more easily in the ground-based environment. The information gathered from the study suggested that although the participants are enrolled in an online university, most of the communication occurred by methods that are used in ground-based education today (i.e. phone and email). The university could improve communication between colleagues and instructors, and colleagues and colleagues, by incorporating digital technologies into the virtual classroom (i.e. Skype, etc.). More study could be done to research the relative effectiveness of these methods in online courses.

The information gathered in this study suggested that students did not believe they developed any true relationships with colleagues and students. Participants built relationships in ground-based education because of a need to collaborate on assignments. The relationships formed with colleagues and instructors seemed to be personable in the ground-based environment, in comparison to the online environment. Most of the participants did describe forming some type of relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education; however, participant three did not provide a similar response. The participant believed the program was built to be standing alone, without forming relationships. The information gathered from the study showed evidence that the

university must find methods, outside of residencies, to help first-generation doctoral male students develop relationships with colleagues and instructors to improve educational outcomes for students.

Several questions were asked of the participants to find information related to how collaborative experiences differed online versus through ground-based education. The participants described opportunities for collaboration in the ground-based environment; however, collaborative efforts online were limited. Participants noted the lag in communication availability online. Additionally, the assignments built in their online environment did not call for collaboration. One participant did note that collaboration in ground-based education is not perfect, because of keeping colleagues on task. The participants described multiple opportunities for collaborating with instructors in the ground-based environment; however, they did not have the same belief in the online environment. Participants suggested, through their responses, that it was easy to communicate with instructors in their ground-based studies; however, not as easy online. This difficulty was primarily related to the lag in communication caused by the lack of immediate face-to-face contact. The information collected during the study suggested that collaboration was not a major obstacle, for or against, for the participants of this study; however, additional collaborative efforts could be a valuable resource for first-generation doctoral male students. The university should develop methods, and possibly courses, to assist students' with collaboration/progress during his/her dissertation (outside of discussion boards) to help students' progress quicker.

Interpretation of the Findings

Annotated examples of what the participants had to say about their experiences in relation to the questions asked throughout the study, and initial conclusions determined from the research collected, were presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter of this collective case study analysis is presented to describe the interpretations that developed from the responses collected from the participants, primarily based around the research questions of the study, themes that emerged during the study, and the conceptual framework of the study. The primary research question was built to understand how first-generation doctoral male students described their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education. One of the secondary research questions was constructed to understand how the preceding differed in ground-based education. The following section outlines the conclusions developed around the individual sections asked within the questions.

Limitations of the Study

The project was originally meant to gather input from 10-12 participants; however, I was surprised that only four individuals from the universities participant pool responded to the request to participate in the study. The university where the study was conducted should consider allowing researchers other avenues to request study participants (i.e. LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.). In an effort to protect participants, guidelines and procedures could be created to describe the limits a researcher could go to when using these tools when attempting to gather participants for a study. The study was

limited to first-generation doctoral male students, which represents only a small portion of students that participate in online education at the university chosen for this study.

This study did not consider the perspectives of other adult learners, including myself as an adult learner, and only focused on limited topics.

As a collective case study, the information collected involved more than one case, which was not physically collocated with other cases. This study was conducted at one site (a major online university) by examining a specific group at one site and it did not take other colleges or universities into consideration. Other methodologies might have resulted in different findings; however, the method chosen for this study provided the information initially sought, which was to gather the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students in relation to interaction, participation, communication, relationships, and collaboration with colleagues and instructors in online education and how those experiences differed from ground-based education. I conducted the study with the mediation of technology, so I was not able to meet physically with the subjects and needed to rely on the ways in which they presented themselves online. The amount of time I had to meet with the participants was limited because of a host of factors, including their work schedules and mine, and time zone differences.

Recommendations

I have six recommendations for future research including;

One suggestion for future research would be to conduct a similar study using both male and female participants. The information collected from this study provided men's perspective only. If the study included first-generation doctoral female students, it may

provide similar, or different, feedback beneficial for universities to improve educational outcomes for most populations.

Second, the study could be opened to students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education at lower educational levels to find out if there are similar reactions to the research questions formulated for this study. This study focused on doctoral level students. For example, the school group I am associated with offers online associate degree programs. A study on this population might lead to improved retention efforts for schools offering lower educational level degrees.

Third, First-Generation students continue to take online courses. Additional studies may provide information that will assist with providing evidence that will help this cohort succeed in online/distance education. Many studies have been conducted on first-generation students; however, as more students continue to move toward online education (first-generation included), continued studies would be necessary.

Fourth, additional studies, at the university chosen for the study and others, can be conducted to determine how far communication and interaction extends beyond the classroom for students enrolled in online courses. The participants in this study suggested that communication lagged and interaction was lacking in their online program. Studies at other universities might have similar findings, which could then be used by specialists to improve the types of communication used online, and to enhance the educational product to include more interaction.

Fifth, replication of this study with additional emphasis put on questions that acknowledge “first-generation” status, especially online. I suggest this terminology again,

because more students are attending college, and more colleges/universities are offering at least one online course (Allen and Seaman, 2015). Colleges and universities must continue to understand student populations to help improve the educational product.

Sixth, Replication of this study with additional participation from students that are just beginning, or are at earlier stages of the doctoral process. The participants that completed this study were at the ending stages of their doctoral programs.

Implications

Online education has seen tremendous growth in recent years and will continue to grow and expand to new students (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008; Varvel, 2007; and Wolfe, 2006). With this growth, universities and schools that offer online courses will need help designing systems that support the educational process for first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education, as well as other students that move to online education. Allen and Seaman (2015) suggested that the proportion of academic leaders who report that online learning is critical to their institution's long term strategy has grown to 70.8% in 2015, which is up from 48.8% in 2002. Information collected in the study provided administrators and educators with information that will enhance education methods, curricula, and projects; which will improve retention and student achievement. For example, if administrators and instructors can find ways to simulate face-to-face interactions in the online environment (i.e. required Skype sessions), it may give students a feeling of connectedness and improve his/her experiences.

As more individuals move toward online learning, there is an ever-changing population of students, and a necessity to learn as much about the different sub cultures as possible. Universities are moving beyond education through the ground-based classroom to online learning (Maddix, 2012). As a result, additional research is needed to understand the student populations and to acknowledge the differences that each cohort experiences. Greener (2008) commented that some researchers believe that students are the most important stakeholders in online education. Others have argued that faculty expertise and dedication is the most important part of online education (Rodriguez, Ooms, and Montanez, 2008).

Research has shown that online courses can prove to be equal to face-to-face instruction, less intimidating, and students can experience a sense of flexibility from overwhelming daily challenges, such as work and family (Barcelona, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; Zhou & Zhang, 2008). Unfortunately, the information collected from the participants in this study suggested differently; however, that was due to a lack of chance to interact, participate, communicate, and collaborate with colleagues during the program. This study helps provide evidence that additional research needs to be conducted to help improve in these areas for future students.

The study has contributed to positive social change because the findings can inform the design of practice to impact retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education. This group often does not have someone outside of the classroom to

lean on for guidance and support. This group needs the support of colleagues and instructors to help with his/her success.

Additional studies could be conducted to determine how interaction can improve within the online classroom between instructors and students. The participants in this study suggested that interaction, participation, communication, and relationships with instructors was limited to discussion boards, and sometimes communication outside of the classroom. This could have been because of the level of progression of the participants. Students at earlier stages in his/her studies, especially programs with classroom projects, might have different responses.

Additional studies could be conducted to determine how interaction, participation, communication, and relationships can improve within the online classroom between colleagues and students. The participants in this study suggested that interaction with colleagues was limited to discussion boards, and sometimes communication outside of the classroom. This could have been because of the level of progression of the participants. Students at earlier stages in his/her studies, especially programs with classroom projects, might have different responses. Also, studies could provide more knowledge about the effectiveness of various forms of interaction, such as Skype.

Conclusion

It is clear that the participants felt there is a lack of interaction (connection) with instructors, and even colleagues, within their online PhD program. While the answers from the participants did not provide a direct correlation as to why first-generation doctoral male students transition successfully from ground-based education to online

education, it does provide a better understanding for instructors, administrators, and researchers of the experiences and needs of the first-generation doctoral adult men based on the experiences described by the participants of this study. The research provides evidence for instructors, administrators, and researchers about how first-generation men experience interaction with colleagues and instructors, participate with colleagues and instructors, communicate with colleagues and instructors, and form relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education versus ground-based education.

Evidence showed that interaction at this university was limited, as suggested by the participants of this study. Thormann and Fidalgo (2014) suggest that instructors need to have an effective and differentiating role outside of the pedagogical, managerial, and technical role. The lack of interaction that occurred for the participants demonstrates that even a major online university must look at the educational product, and continue to make improvements, for students. The university needs to strongly consider incorporating certain technologies (i.e. Skype) into the curriculum to help improve interaction between students, colleagues and instructors.

Pattison (2012) describes how students can participate in online social culture. It was suggested that 21st century learners are immersed in social media, and because of this they need to learn how to navigate multiple platforms while maintaining an adequate level of discussion. As the 21st century learner is learning how to use these tools in the classroom, administration and instructors should become immersed in using these tools as well (Siemens, 2004). The information gathered from this study suggests that instructors teaching at the participants' university may need to immerse themselves into today's

technology. These tools might help improve participation for students, colleagues and instructors.

Data collected from the first-generation adult men in this study provided information that indicated patterns related to their experiences that will allow educators to understand how men feel about online education and to promote changes in the educational process. Knowledge gained from this study may provide solutions for colleges and universities to adjust communication methods with students, especially male, first-generation doctoral students; and make adjustments to the educational process. All of the participants in this study wanted to discuss the questions presented here and their responses to those questions. They were given an opportunity to do that through multiple tools. They were able to provide feedback in a confidential manner, in an effort to help improve online education for first-generation doctoral male students. As first-generation students completing a PhD program, it is imperative that students feel a connection to instructors and colleagues. The study findings can inform the design of practice to impact retention and degree completion of first-generation doctoral male students who have transitioned from ground-based education to online education, which will add more educated individuals to today's workplace and society.

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Appendix A: CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of A Study of First-generation Doctoral Male Students Experiencing Online Courses at the Doctoral Level. The researcher is inviting first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by Terry R. Farris, MBA, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a student, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this collective case study is to research the experiences of the first-generation doctoral male students attempting online education for the first time versus previous ground-based education and to identify and develop a deep understanding of these experiences through interaction, participation, communication, and relationships, with colleagues and instructors.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete an Experience with Colleagues Questionnaire about experiences with colleagues. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information collected will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. Information collected in the questionnaire will be viewed by only the researcher and will not be shared with other participants of the study.
- For 7 weeks you will be asked to answer a series of questions on a weekly basis via blog in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. Information collected from the blogs will be viewed by only the researcher and will not be shared with other participants of the study.
- Take part in a Skype interview. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information recorded and will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. Information collected during the interview will be viewed by only the researcher and will not be shared with other participants of the study.
- Complete an Experience with Instructors Questionnaire about experiences with colleagues. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information collected will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. Information collected in the questionnaire will

be viewed by only the researcher and will not be shared with other participants of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. The only benefits are the opportunity to state your perspectives and know that you are positively contributing to research that will inform the design of support services for first-generation doctoral male students that have transitioned from ground-based education to online education.

In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study, you may terminate your participation at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful.

Payment:

No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by portable hard drive, secured desktop folder, and stored hard copy. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at terry.farris@waldenu.edu or via phone at 937.768.9122. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

You may keep or print a copy of this consent form.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to the email with the words “I Consent”, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Appendix B: Experiences with Colleagues Questionnaire

Study: A Collective Case Study of First-generation Doctoral Male Students Experiencing Online Courses at the Doctoral Level

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this doctoral study concerning first-generation doctoral male students. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information collected will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be glad to clarify any concerns.

1. How often do you interact with colleagues on assignments in the online environment?
 - Never
 - Seldom (2 Times per Month)
 - Occasionally (Weekly)
 - Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why you do, or why you do not, interact with colleagues on assignments.

2. How often did you interact with colleagues on assignments in the ground-based environment?
 - Never
 - Seldom (2 Times per Month)
 - Occasionally (Weekly)
 - Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with colleagues on assignments.

3. What is your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with colleagues in the

online environment?

- a. To collaborate on assignments
- b. Discuss assignment requirements
- c. Peer-review (another's point of view)
- d. Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use in the online environment. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

4. What was your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with colleagues in the ground-based environment?

- e. To collaborate on assignments
- f. Discuss assignment requirements
- g. Peer-review (another's point of view)
- h. Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the ground-based environment. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you felt this way.

5. Do you feel that having a "cohort" or peer to whom you consistently interact with would be helpful?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe the current interaction that occurs within the "cohorts" or with peers. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that having a group or peer would be helpful.

6. Which method of interaction do you use to communicate with colleagues on assignments in the online environment?

- Email
- Phone
- Skype
- Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

7. Which method of interaction did you use to communicate with colleagues on assignments in the ground-based environment?

- Email
- Phone
- Skype
- Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

8. How often do you participate on assignments with your colleagues within the online learning environment?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the online

environment. Elaborate on why or why you do not participate with colleagues on assignments.

9. How often did you participate on assignments with your colleagues within the ground-based learning environment?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the ground-based learning environment. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with colleagues on assignments.

10. How have you formed relationships with your colleagues in the online environment thus far?

Describe the relationships you have formed with colleagues in the online environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

11. How did you form relationships with your colleagues in the ground-based environment?

Describe the relationships you formed with colleagues in the ground-based environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

12. Do you feel that group work or collaboration in online learning with colleagues would be helpful?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe the current group work or collaboration with colleagues. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that group work or collaboration would be helpful.

13. Did you complete assignments using group work or collaboration with colleagues in ground-based learning?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe the group work or collaboration with colleagues. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that the group work or collaboration was helpful.

Appendix C: Weekly Blog Questions

Study: A Collective Case Study of First-generation Doctoral Male Students Experiencing Online Courses at the Doctoral Level

Introduction: Thank you for continued participation in my doctoral study concerning first-generation doctoral male students. Throughout the term you will be asked to answer a series of questions on a weekly basis via blog in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter.

Each weekly blog response should take you no longer than 10-20 minutes. The first entry does not require an answer until week three of the current term. Please provide one paragraph (at least five sentences) for each question that has been provided.

For this research, please use wikispaces.com to record your entries. I will assist you with setting up the account and how to record your entries. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be glad to clarify any concerns.

On a Weekly basis I would like you to submit your thoughts to each of the following questions:

Week 3: Describe your experiences with interaction on this week's assignment. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with colleagues on the assignments.

Week 4: Describe your experiences with the various form of interaction you used this week (i.e. email, phone, Skype, other, etc...). Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

Week 5: Describe your experiences with participation on assignments this week. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with colleagues on assignments.

Week 6: Describe the relationships you have formed with colleagues this week. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

Week 7: What methods of communication were used in building relationships with colleagues this week? (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

Week 8: Describe the current group work or collaboration with colleagues this week. Elaborate on your experiences and whether this was beneficial.

Week 9: What part has communication played in your experiences with colleagues this week?

Appendix D: Skype Interview

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my doctoral study concerning first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information recorded and will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be glad to clarify any concerns.

1. With your newfound understanding of online learning and ground-based learning experiences, what communication strategies differ between online learning and ground-based learning?
2. How do you determine which communication strategies to use with your colleagues in your online classroom?
3. What is your philosophy, based on your experience with online learning about how communication can be improved among colleagues?
4. How do you determine which communication strategies to use with your instructors in your online classroom?
5. What is your philosophy, based on your experience with online learning about how communication can be improved with instructors?

Closing: Thank you for sharing your experiences. As soon as I transcribe and type my notes, I will share them with you.

Appendix E: Experiences with Instructors Questionnaire

Study: A Collective Case Study of First-generation Doctoral Male Students Experiencing Online Courses at the Doctoral Level

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this doctoral study concerning first-generation doctoral male students. You will be asked a series of questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. The questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes. All information collected will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be glad to clarify any concerns.

1. How often do you interact with instructors on assignments in the online environment?
 - Never
 - Seldom (2 Times per Month)
 - Occasionally (Weekly)
 - Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you do not interact with instructors on assignments in the online environment.

2. How often did you interact with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment?
 - Never
 - Seldom (2 Times per Month)
 - Occasionally (Weekly)
 - Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment.

3. What is your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with instructors in the

online environment?

- i. To collaborate on assignments
- j. Discuss assignment requirements
- k. Peer-review (another's point of view)
- l. Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the online environment. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

4. What was your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with instructors in the ground-based environment?

- m. To collaborate on assignments
- n. Discuss assignment requirements
- o. Peer-review (another's point of view)
- p. Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the ground-based environment. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you felt this way.

5. Which method of interaction do you use to communicate with instructors on assignments in the online environment?

- Email
- Phone
- Skype
- Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

6. Which method of interaction did you use to communicate with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment?

- Email
- Phone
- Skype
- Other _____

Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.

7. How often do you participate on assignments with your instructors within the online learning environment?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the online environment. Elaborate on why or why you do not participate with instructors on assignments.

8. How often did you participate on assignments with your instructors within the ground-based learning environment?

- Never
- Seldom (2 Times per Month)
- Occasionally (Weekly)
- Often (More than Once a Week)

Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the ground-based learning environment. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with instructors on assignments.

9. How have you formed relationships with your instructors in the online environment thus far?

Describe the relationships you have formed with instructors in the online environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

10. How did you form relationships with your instructors in the ground-based environment?

Describe the relationships you formed with instructors in the ground-based environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).

Appendix F: Additional Questions Sent to Participants Via Email



Terry Farris <terry.farris@waldenu.edu>

May
31

to bcc: Daniel, bcc: Terrence, bcc: Derek, bcc: Stanley

Good Sunday to You,

I want to thank you once again for your willingness to conduct a follow-up Skype interview with me. Your information is very valuable to my study, and it will help others with future study topics. I would like to have the follow-up interview this upcoming weekend, if you are available.

Additionally, I have included a few questions that I would ask that you send to me in a separate email. The questions will help provide those reading the dissertation a little bit about you, and help me with some of the themes I am seeing within your original responses. Here are the questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your geographic location?
3. What is your current educational specialization?
4. What is your field of employment?
5. As a first-generation student, how have your expectations been met, or not met, in online education in comparison to ground-based education?
6. How has your learning style impacted your doctoral level education?
7. What was the reason you chose online education for your doctoral level studies having completed your previous education through ground-based education?
8. How did the educational environment differ online in comparison to ground-based education?
9. Have the relationships formed online been individual in nature compared to ground-based education, or vice-versa?

10. Describe the differences, if any, in interaction with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.

11. Describe the differences, if any, in relationships with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.

12. Describe your decision to attend an online program over other alternatives.

13. Describe the difference in communication, if any, with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.

14. Describe the difference in participation and collaboration, if any, with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.

15. What role, if any, did gender play in participants' online interaction and experience?

If you could provide me your feedback to the questions above in the near future it would be truly appreciated. Also, please feel free to send me a day and time that you might be available for the Skype interview.

Thank You,
Terry Farris

Appendix G: Follow-Up Skype Interview

Introduction: Thank you for participating in my doctoral study concerning first-generation doctoral male students that have moved from ground-based education to online education. You will be asked a series of additional questions in order gain your professional thoughts and experience with the subject matter. This quasi-structured interview should take approximately 60 minutes; however, based upon the depth of your answers could take longer. All information is being recorded and will be given to you to ensure all information gleaned is correct. If at any time you have a question, please email me and I will be glad to clarify any concerns.

1. Tell me why you decided to attend an online doctoral program?
2. Many of your colleagues and other students in doctoral level programs have parents or family members with advanced degrees. What does it mean to you to be a “first-generation” doctoral student?
3. What does it take to meet your expectations for online education?
4. What would have made your experience better online?
5. As a first-generation student working on your dissertation, what are some frustrations you have experienced while attempting to complete your dissertation?
6. Why did you have these frustrations?
7. How were you able to work through those frustrations?
8. Who was available to help you work through your frustrations?
9. Who did you talk to work through your frustrations?
10. What help services might those that helped you work through your frustrations use?
11. Did you reach out to your instructor to help with your frustrations?
12. How did you think the dissertation process would play out in online education?
13. What improvements do you think could have been made to make online experiences better for you?
14. Tell me about frustrations, if any, you might be having about the dissertation process in online education?
15. Tell me about your learning style and how it has impacted your doctoral level education.
16. What adjustments have you had to make to your learning style to succeed in online education, compared to ground based education?
17. How could your institution improve the educational process to help meet your learning style needs?
18. How do you feel about your choice of completing your doctorate online, rather than through ground-based education?
19. What are some factors that would have made you choose ground-based education over online education to complete your doctorate?
20. Tell me about your experience with differences in the online educational environment in comparison to ground-based education?

21. Based on your experience, what changes would you recommend to the online environment to make it better for you as a first-generation doctoral student?
22. Tell me how the online environment could be changed to make it a more positive experience for you.
23. Tell me about your experience with the differences in the relationships formed online compared to ground-based education, or vice-versa?
24. Tell me about your experience with the differences, if any, in regard to interaction with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.
25. Tell me about your experience with the differences, if any, in the relationships formed with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.
26. Tell me about your experience with the difference in communication, if any, with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.
27. Tell me about your experience with the difference in participation and collaboration, if any, with colleagues and instructors in the online environment compared to the ground-based environment.

Closing: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

Appendix H: Detailed Outline of the Research Questions and the Triangulation Points
Associated with the Research

“How did first-generation doctoral male students describe their experiences in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors in online education?” the experience with colleagues questionnaire will provide insight into the experiences, of first-generation doctoral male students with their colleagues, in relation to interaction through questions one, three, and five. Question six, of the experience with colleagues questionnaire, will summarize the thoughts of the participants in regard to communication. Question eight, of the experience with colleagues questionnaire, will allude to student participation, with colleagues, in an online environment. And, question ten will provide information related to relationships that the participants have with colleagues in the online environment. The blog entries will provide additional information about the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students, in relation to communication, with their colleagues. Skype interview questions one, six, and seven will collect information about the communication habits that first-generation doctoral male students have experienced between ground-based education and online education.

The information discussed in the preceding paragraph notes the information that will be gathered from the participants through their experiences with colleagues. In order to gather information about this cohort and the interaction, participation, communication, and relationships formed with instructors, a pre- questionnaire was developed. The experience with instructor’s questionnaire will provide insight into the experiences, of

first-generation doctoral male students with their instructors, in relation to interaction through questions one and three. Question five, of the experience with instructors questionnaire, will summarize the thoughts of the participants in regard to communication. Question seven, of the experience with instructors questionnaire, will allude to student participation, with instructors, in an online environment. And, question nine will provide information related to relationships that the participants have with colleagues in the online environment. The blog entries will provide additional information about the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students, in relation to communication, with their instructors. Skype interview questions two; eight, and nine will collect information about the communication habits that first-generation doctoral male students have experienced between ground-based education and online education.

“How did first-generation doctoral male students describe the differences in experiences they had in ground-based education; in relation to interaction with colleagues and instructors, participation with colleagues and instructors, communication with colleagues and instructors, and relationships with colleagues and instructors?”, the experience with colleagues questionnaire will provide insight into the experiences, of first-generation doctoral male students with their colleagues, in relation to interaction through questions two and four. Question seven, of the experience with colleagues questionnaire, will summarize the thoughts of the participants in regard to communication. Question nine, of the experience with colleagues questionnaire, will allude to student participation, with colleagues, in an online environment. And, question eleven will provide information related to relationships that the participants have with

colleagues in the online environment. The blog entries will provide additional information about the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students, in relation to communication, with their colleagues. Skype interview question two, will collect information about the communication habits that first-generation doctoral male students have experienced between ground-based education and online education.

The information discussed in the preceding paragraph notes the information that will be gathered from the participants through their experiences, in the ground-based environment, with colleagues. In order to gather information about this cohort and the interaction, participation, communication, and relationships formed with instructors in the ground-based environment, an experience with instructors questionnaire was developed. The experience with instructor's questionnaire will provide insight into the experiences, of first-generation doctoral male students with their instructors, in relation to interaction through questions two and four. Question six, of the experience with instructors questionnaire, will summarize the thoughts of the participants in regard to communication. Question eight, of the experience with instructors questionnaire, will allude to student participation, with instructors, in an online environment. And, question ten will provide information related to relationships that the participants have with colleagues in the online environment. The blog entries will provide additional information about the experiences of first-generation doctoral male students, in relation to communication, with their instructors. Skype interview questions three will collect information about the communication habits that first-generation doctoral male students have experienced between ground-based education and online education.

“How did first-generation doctoral male students feel that their collaborative experiences with colleagues and instructors differ online versus ground-based education?”

”, information gathered from questions five, twelve, and thirteen of the experience with colleagues questionnaire will suggest how this cohort reports on their collaborative efforts with colleagues. There are also questions within the blog entry that call on this requested information and information gathered from questions within the blog entry that call on this requested information.

Appendix I: Microsoft Excel Field Notes – How I Planned to Capture Information from

Participants in Microsoft Excel

**Experiences with Colleagues Questionnaire - Multiple Choice
Answers**

Questions		P1
1	How often do you interact with colleagues on assignments in the online environment?	
2	How often did you interact with colleagues on assignments in the ground-based environment?	
3	What is your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with colleagues in the online environment	
4	What was your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with colleagues in the ground-based environment	
5	Do you feel that having a “cohort” or peer to whom you consistently interact with would be helpful?	
6	Which method of interaction do you use to communicate with colleagues on assignments in the online environment	
7	Which method of interaction did you use to communicate with colleagues on assignments in the ground-based environment	
8	How often do you participate on assignments with your colleagues within the online learning environment	
9	How often did you participate on assignments with your colleagues within the ground-based learning environment	
10	N/A	
11	N/A	
12	Do you feel that group work or collaboration in online learning with colleagues would be helpful	
13	Did you complete assignments using group work or collaboration with colleagues in ground-based learning	

Experiences with Colleagues Questionnaire - Written Response

Questions	P1
1	Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why you do, or why you do not, interact with colleagues on assignments
2	Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with colleagues on assignments.
3	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use in the online environment. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way
4	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the ground-based environment. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you felt this way
5	Describe the current interaction that occurs within the “cohorts” or with peers. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that having a group or peer would be helpful
6	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way
7	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way
8	Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the online environment. Elaborate on why or why you do not participate with colleagues on assignments.
9	Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the ground-based learning environment. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with colleagues on assignments

10	How have you formed relationships with your colleagues in the online environment thus far? Describe the relationships you have formed with colleagues in the online environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment)	
11	How did you form relationships with your colleagues in the ground-based environment? Describe the relationships you formed with colleagues in the ground-based environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).	
12	Describe the current group work or collaboration with colleagues. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that group work or collaboration would be helpful.	
13	Describe the group work or collaboration with colleagues. Elaborate on why or why you do not feel that the group work or collaboration was helpful.	

Experiences with Instructors Questionnaire - Multiple Choice Answers

Questions		P1
1	How often do you interact with instructors on assignments in the online environment?	
2	How often did you interact with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment?	
3	What is your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with instructors in the online environment?	
4	What was your primary purpose for interaction on assignments with instructors in the ground-based environment?	
5	Which method of interaction do you use to communicate with instructors on assignments in the online environment?	

6	Which method of interaction did you use to communicate with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment?	
7	How often do you participate on assignments with your instructors within the online learning environment?	
8	How often did you participate on assignments with your instructors within the ground-based learning environment?	

Experiences with Instructors Questionnaire - Written Response

Questions		P1
1	Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you do not interact with instructors on assignments in the online environment.	
2	Describe your experiences with interaction on assignments. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with instructors on assignments in the ground-based environment.	
3	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the online environment. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.	
4	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used in the ground-based environment. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you felt this way.	
5	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you use. Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.	
6	Describe your experiences with each form of interaction you used. Be sure to include whether you found it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.	

7	Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the online environment. Elaborate on why or why you do not participate with instructors on assignments.	
8	Describe your experiences with participation on assignments in the ground-based learning environment. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with instructors on assignments.	
9	Describe the relationships you have formed with instructors in the online environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).	
10	How did you form relationships with your instructors in the ground-based environment? Describe the relationships you formed with instructors in the ground-based environment. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).	

Blog Responses

Questions		P1
1	Describe your experiences with interaction on this week's assignment. Elaborate on why or why you did not interact with colleagues on the assignments.	
2	Describe your experiences with the various form of interaction you used this week (i.e. email, phone, Skype, other, etc...). Be sure to include whether you find it to be effective and please elaborate on why you feel this way.	
3	Describe your experiences with participation on assignments this week. Elaborate on why or why you did not participate with colleagues on assignments.	
4	Describe the relationships you have formed with colleagues this week. (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).	

5	What methods of communication were used in building relationships with colleagues this week? (Do not mention names or classes, just how the relationship works within the online environment).	
6	Describe the current group work or collaboration with colleagues this week. Elaborate on your experiences and whether this was beneficial.	
7	What part has communication played in your experiences with colleagues this week?	

Skype Interview

Questions		P1
1	With your newfound understanding of online learning and ground-based learning experiences, what communication strategies differ between online learning and ground-based learning?	
2	How do you determine which communication strategies to use with your colleagues in your online classroom	
3	What is your philosophy, based on your experience with online learning about how communication can be improved among colleagues?	
4	How do you determine which communication strategies to use with your instructors in your online classroom?	
5	What is your philosophy, based on your experience with online learning about how communication can be improved with instructors?	