

ATTORNEYS' EXPERIENCES WITH CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION
DELIVERED ONLINE: A HOLISTIC SINGLE CASE STUDY

by

Kimberly Ann Thomas

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative holistic single case study was to describe how practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience continuing legal education (CLE) courses delivered online. The theories guiding the study are Knowles' adult learning theory and Siemens' connectivist theory, as they address how adults learn and how the use of technology connects learning. The central research question is as follows: How do practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience online CLE courses? This question leads to three sub-questions: What meaning do practicing attorneys ascribe to CLE? What benefits and concerns do attorneys identify with CLE delivered online? How do attorneys connect CLE content to their legal practice? The literature review presents what is known about the guiding theories, professional development, CLE, and online learning for adults. The gap in the literature is a lack of information regarding the experience with professional development delivered online for attorneys. Results of the study show that the attorney experience with online CLE is ineffective, with little transfer to the practice of law.

Keywords: professional development, continuing education, online learning, adult learning

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Dedication

Without the love and support of my family and friends I could not have completed this journey. I thank you all for keeping me going when I was ready to give up, for understanding when dinner was late (or takeout) or I was too busy to play games or watch movies, for waking me up when I fell asleep at the keyboard, for being the wonderful people that you are. Chris, Jared, Brianah, Brandon, Minnie, Edna, and Mel – I thank you, and I thank God for you!

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List of Abbreviations

American Bar Association (ABA)

Central Research Question (CQ)

Continuing Legal Education (CLE)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA)

North Carolina State Bar (NCSB)

Professional Development (PD)

Research Sub-Question (RQ)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Continuous learning is necessary to the success of individuals in professional positions, as a method of maintaining knowledge and skills required in their work (Collin, Van der Heijden, & Lewis, 2012). The legal profession is no exception. The American Bar Association (ABA) recognizes this need for ongoing education and offers various methods by which attorneys can pursue continuing legal education (CLE) for credit in compliance with each specific state's requirements (American Bar Association, 2016). One method of CLE delivery is online courses, which includes synchronous and asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars.

This chapter provides an introduction to the case study. It begins with some background information regarding the necessity of researching how attorneys experience online delivery of CLE courses. Continuing Legal Education is identified as professional development courses for attorneys, as accepted by the North Carolina State Bar (NCSB) in partial fulfillment of the attorneys annual licensing requirement (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). Following the background is information regarding myself as the researcher, wherein I describe my own background and beliefs related to the proposed study. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the problem, purpose, and research plan.

Background

Attorneys have a responsibility to the public to protect their legal interests and rights (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Fry, 2012). However, the law is an ever-changing and evolving dynamic (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Fry, 2012) and, therefore, continuing education and

development for attorneys is imperative in order for them to effectively fulfill their responsibilities.

Historical Context

The ABA formed in 1878 with the purpose of advancing uniformity of justice in the United States. By 1921, the organization adopted standards for educating and admitting future attorneys to the bar. Today the ABA is a major provider of CLE, although each individual state sets its own CLE requirements for active licensure ("ABA timeline," 2016). The North Carolina State Bar (NCSB) was formed in 1933 and is responsible for regulating the state's legal professionals (North Carolina State Bar, 2016a), including issuing requirements for professional development. North Carolina's Bar Association (NCBA) was founded in 1899 to promote high standards for integrity, competency, and well-being of its members. The NCBA is a voluntary association that provides CLE in various formats so that attorneys can satisfy their NCSB mandate (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014).

In the past 15 to 20 years, the popularity of online Professional Development (PD) has grown (Cervero & Daley, 2016), and industries such as healthcare and formal education have found value in online delivery of PD (Bennetts, Elliston, & Maconachie, 2012; Cranton, 2016; Marks et al., 2014; Teräs, 2016). Attorneys in North Carolina are required to take 12 hours of PD each year, and until 2014, all of these hours were required to be completed in person (North Carolina Continuing Legal Education, 2016). As of 2014, attorneys are allowed to complete the required PD hours using online courses, but only six hours completed online are accepted each year (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014).

Theoretical Context

In order to understand the continuous learning process of attorneys with regard to CLE, it is important to be familiar with how adults learn. There is little research available on CLE, and less on adult learning and CLE with relation to online delivery of courses. What is known is that adult learning is related to the individual's self-concept, experience, and readiness to learn (Knowles, 1973). In examining attorneys' experiences with CLE, adult learning theory must be explored. It is also important to review the use of technology in the pursuit of continuing education, as it relates to adult learning. In recent years, a theory on such use was advanced by Siemens (2005), who posited that using technology to "derive our competence from forming connections" (p. 4) is a basis for a connectivist theory of learning.

Professional Development itself has indeed been studied, including participants' reactions to required PD for their field. Short term PD, which was defined as less than 30 hours, was shown to have positive outcomes for adults when the courses were designed in alignment with Knowles' adult learning theory (Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett, & Buchting, 2014). Likewise, Saadatmand and Kumpulainen (2014) found that the use of connectivist principles in Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) had positive outcomes for participants. However, there is no research available on the experiences of attorneys with online PD. This lack of research poses an interesting problem, as this research could bridge the gap between the current trends in online PD and CLE. Thus, my case study sought to understand how attorneys experience online CLE in light of both adult learning theory and connectivist theory.

Social Context

This case study can be beneficial for attorneys, local and state bar associations, law schools, the legal practice community, as well as society in general. By examining how

attorneys perceive online CLE, and relating adult learning and connectivist principles, development of CLE courses may be tailored to enhance the benefits and efficacy for the CLE participants. This in turn may provide great flexibility for attorneys to satisfy their CLE requirement, assist governing bodies in setting requirements and expectations for CLE, and instill confidence in ongoing attorney education for potential clients.

Situation to Self

As a technology trainer in a law firm, as well as an education major, I value adult education. Among my duties as a trainer, I create and deliver professional development materials and content to everyone working in the firm. As such, I find great value in the information I have gleaned as a student in the school of education. I also hold a Master of Science in instructional technology, as well as a certificate in distance education, which serve me well in my work. It has always been my belief that learning is a lifelong process; therefore, I work diligently to support this learning in the form of continuous professional development for the adult learners at the law firm. My motivation for this study is to understand how my background in instructional technology and formal education can be utilized for the ongoing learning needs of the attorneys I train.

I approached this study from a social constructivist worldview, which relies heavily on the viewpoint of the participants to develop meaning from their experiences (Creswell, 2013). As such, I utilized research methods that gathered participants' views of the direct experiences they have had with CLE and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences. In conducting my research, I acknowledged several assumptions that framed the study. I hold the ontological belief that reality is made up of varying views, and therefore gathered data from various participants and data sources (Creswell, 2013). In addition, my epistemological assumptions are

that in order to gather subjective evidence (Creswell, 2013), I needed to spend direct time with participants of the study, observing and interviewing in person. Axiologically I acknowledge that the value I place on both ongoing education and utilizing technology played a role in my interpretations of the data gathered.

Problem Statement

Licensed attorneys are required to pursue continuing education each year in order to maintain their license to practice (American Law Institute, 2012). Studies show that professional development is an important part of staying current in the knowledge and skills needed for a professional job (Collin et al., 2012; Lauer et al., 2014; Pool, Poell, & ten Cate, 2013). For attorneys, CLE is not only a requirement for licensure; it is also a way to enhance their standing as an authority on the law (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015). In the state of North Carolina, CLEs can be delivered through a variety of mediums; as of 2014 this includes online delivery (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). With the allowance of online CLE being so new and technology tools being so necessary for modern day attorneys (Johnson, 2013), there is a need to understand how CLE can take advantage of technology like online course delivery. While there have been various articles and studies that address taking online classes while in law school (Friedman, 2010; Susskind, 2014), and online PD for other professional disciplines such as education and health (Bennetts et al., 2012; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Conradie, 2014), it has been difficult to find an article or study that addresses how attorneys experience online CLEs. Searches of recent legal journals both in print and online, as well as discussions with legal and CLE professionals at firms in North Carolina, yielded minimal results for research on the subject of the attorneys' experience specifically in online CLE. The ABA model rule regarding CLE states that every state must have a CLE committee charged with administering that state's CLE

requirements (American Bar Association, 2018); the model rule does not suggest a limit on how many CLE credits can be taken online. In speaking to the Assistant Director of the NCSB Board of Directors it was discovered that the NCSB's limitation of online CLE was a decision made by the board and based on the premise that attorneys would get more from the collegiality and interaction that face-to-face CLE would provide (D. Holland, personal communication, May 3, 2018). The problem for this study is that attorneys are limited in the number of online CLE credits that apply to the NCSB annual mandate.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this holistic single case study is to describe the experiences of practicing attorneys in North Carolina completing CLE courses online. The case is active NCSB attorney members, from which a sample was taken of 15 practicing attorneys who have taken at least one CLE online and at least one in person in the last year. For the purpose of this study, online delivery of CLE is defined as synchronous or asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars attended by the attorney alone or in a small group (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). The theories guiding this study are Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory and Siemens' (2005) connectivist theory, as they respectively address how adults learn and how the use of technology connects learning.

Significance of the Study

The requirement for attorneys to participate in professional development is set forth by the NCSB and supported by the NCBA; however, it was not until 2014 that online CLE hours were accepted in pursuit of fulfillment (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). This study examined the theoretical implications of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) on the professional development of attorneys. Adult learning theory states that adult learning differs in

several ways from that of children. These differences are attributed to the assumption that an individual's self-concept changes as he or she approaches adulthood to be self-directed (Knowles, 1973), which would be useful when taking an online course. Another important difference between pedagogy and adult learning, also called andragogy, is the readiness to learn for adults, which is driven by the need for knowledge appropriate to their role in society (Knowles, 1973).

Another theory to consider is the connectivist theory. Put forth by Siemens (2005), this relatively new theory posits that making connections between sources of information is central to modern learning. The ability to create connection patterns is essential because learning environments are constantly changing in today's world, making it impossible for learners to gather knowledge through experience (Siemens, 2005). The catalog of legal knowledge is vast, and attorneys must be able to connect CLE course content to their practice of law. One of the principles of connectivism is that "learning may reside in non-human appliances" (Siemens, 2005, p. 5), and one of the tools that can be used to locate knowledge is online courses.

A practical significance of this study was to provide law firms with valuable information about the most effective way to assist attorneys in the CLE process. This study may also be of use to both the NCSB and the NCBA as they seek to accredit CLE courses delivered online. In addition, individual attorneys seeking to fulfill the CLE requirement may find use in a study that reports on an under-used method of ongoing PD. Likewise, the legal practice community, such as judges, paralegals, and corporate legal departments, may utilize findings from my study to identify methods by which they can further their own knowledge of the practice of law. Potential clients may also find value in understanding how their legal representatives stay up to date on legal matters and the practice of law.

The CLE requirement is an integral part of maintaining a license to practice law in North Carolina; therefore, it is advantageous to ensure that attorneys are finding value in receiving these courses online. Empirically, this study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding PD and practicing attorneys. At this time there is no literature available that discusses CLE delivered online and how attorneys perceive them.

Research Questions

The goal for this holistic single case study was to understand practicing attorneys' experience with CLE courses delivered online. Online delivery for this study was defined as synchronous and asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). In light of this goal, the central research question (CQ) for this study was as follows:

CQ: How do practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience online CLE courses?

The following research sub-questions (RQ) were also pursued:

RQ1: What meaning do practicing attorneys ascribe to CLE?

RQ2: What benefits and concerns do attorneys identify with CLE delivered online?

RQ3: How do attorneys connect CLE content to their legal practice?

The first sub-question (RQ1) assisted with understanding the adult learner's approach to the CLE process, in consideration of Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory. The second sub-question (RQ2) helped to identify the way the participating lawyers connect sources of information to promote ongoing learning, as discussed in Siemens' (2005) connectivist theory. The third sub-question (RQ3) was designed to explore Siemens' (2005) theory that learners create meaningful connections to assist in their daily activities.

Definitions

The following terms will be used throughout this case study:

1. *American Bar Association (ABA)* – national organization which supports the legal profession with resources to improve the administration of justice and law school accreditation ("ABA timeline," 2016).
2. *Andragogy* – principles of adult learning, separate and distinct from pedagogy (Knowles, 1973).
3. *Connectivism* – learning theory that states learning is aided by connecting sources of knowledge outside of the individual (Siemens, 2005).
4. *Continuing Legal Education (CLE)* – courses accredited by the NCBA and accepted by the NCSB to satisfy the requirement to practice law in the state of North Carolina (North Carolina Continuing Legal Education, 2016).
5. *Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs)* – free online courses with open registration, a public curriculum, and open-ended outcomes; these courses integrate social networking and online resources and promote learner engagement and self-organized participation (Saadatmand & Kumpulainen, 2014).
6. *North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA)* – a voluntary organization in the state of North Carolina comprised of legal professionals; NCBA provides Continuing Legal Education opportunities for North Carolina lawyers (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014).
7. *North Carolina State Bar (NCSB)* – the government agency that regulates the legal profession in the state of North Carolina (North Carolina State Bar, 2016a).
8. *Online delivery* – synchronous and asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars (American Bar Association, 2016).

9. *Practicing Attorney/Lawyer* – for the purposes of this study, practicing attorney/lawyer refers to those licensed to practice law in the state of North Carolina.
10. *Professional Development (PD)* – the method used to maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the professional lives of workers (Collin et al., 2012).

Summary

Chapter One presented the background on existing studies of adult learning and professional development. With limited current research on how attorneys experience CLE, including courses delivered online, the justification was made for this study. The significance of the study was also presented in this chapter as was my role as the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Because there is a lack of research on how practicing attorneys experience online CLE, the purpose of this study was to examine this experience from the perspective of practicing attorneys in North Carolina. Chapter Two presents a discussion of literature related to adult learning theory, connectivist theory, professional development (PD), and online PD. There is a presentation of the theoretical framework guiding the case study and how both andragogy and connectivism relate to continuing legal education (CLE). Literature related to the purpose, principles, and delivery methods of professional development in various professions is also presented, as well as literature related to attorney education. The exploration of existing literature is a necessary step in case study as it assists in determining not only what is known about these topics, but also in developing insightful inquiry (Yin, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is based on two distinct theories – Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory and Siemens' (2005) connectivist theory. These theories apply to this case study in several ways. Adult learning principles are distinctly different from the learning principles recognized for children (Knowles, 1973). These principles are at play in CLE, which is created for an adult population. Attorneys take CLE courses in order to keep up to date on their profession, which is the primary objective of PD (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Collin et al., 2012; Pool et al., 2013). The assumptions of andragogy include the learner's self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973), all of which apply to ongoing learning opportunities for attorneys. Connectivist theory discusses the importance of using tools, such as technology, to create connections to knowledge that cannot necessarily be

experienced by the learner (Siemens, 2005). These connections are made with various resources, including people and non-human instruments such as computers (Siemens, 2005), connections which apply to attorneys taking CLE courses online.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory was advanced by Malcolm Knowles, who sought to distinguish the learning of adults from that of children. He postulated that practices had not evolved from what they were when education of children was formalized during medieval times (Knowles, 1973). Knowles believed that in order to be effective adult educators and human resource developers, the principles of pedagogy would have to be compromised to some degree: “People who have been working primarily in the education of adults, where no degree is involved . . . have known for a long time that they had to violate some of the assumptions and concepts of pedagogy” (Knowles, 1973, p. 42). His theory of adult learning, also called andragogy, addresses these differences.

There are four assumptions about learning that set andragogy apart from pedagogy: changes in self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973). Self-concept changes as an individual matures, moving from dependency to being more self-directed. Self-directed individuals resent any position where they may be treated as a child (Knowles, 1973) and, therefore, cannot learn in an environment where they are not allowed to self-direct. In response to questions about self-directedness, Knowles (1980) stated that adults exhibit this trait anytime they seek knowledge on their own, but that due to trends in education being primarily pedagogical, adults often leave their self-directedness at the door when attending a class or training session. When it comes to PD, professionals often engage in those courses that are part of a mandate or directive from a supervisor or governing body (Bennetts et al.,

2012; Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Collin et al., 2012). Knowles (1973) explained that moving into a professional career, such as becoming an attorney, is a demonstration of an individual's self-directedness.

With maturity also comes “an expanding reservoir of experience” (Knowles, 1973, p. 45) that creates individuals who are themselves learning resources. This would indicate that adult learners value a more interactive method of education whereby they not only gather knowledge but contribute to it as well. Legal education can be aligned closely with adult learning theory, as adult learners can tie new information to previous experiences for better retention and connection (Floyd, Griffin, & Sneddon, 2011). The role of such experience is a more important facet of adult education than education of children because individual experiences widen differences between people as they age (Knowles, 1973). Attorneys, therefore, are better able to learn from a CLE that connects to their experiences in some way. Experience also plays a role in connectivism, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

It is critical to align learning experiences with the adult learner's readiness to learn (Knowles, 1973). An adult's readiness to learn is not about biological development and academic pursuit, as is a child's readiness. As individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, they begin to seek knowledge that will support them in their roles in society. Learning becomes more a need than an expectation, and adults are more inclined to achieve learning when they can relate the information being shared to their personal or professional lives (Knowles, 1973). Attorneys and those who study law must see the real world application of their knowledge and skills (Floyd et al., 2011). Similarly, adults have a more practical orientation to learning than children do; adult learning is primarily problem-centered, seeking knowledge that can be applied practically and immediately (Knowles, 1973). This is not to say that readiness to

learn is passive; Knowles (1973) points out such readiness can be stimulated through motivation on the part of the educator or facilitator. Organizations also have motivation to foster adult learning in the form of human resource development, and this leads to a potential conflict over where control of learning objectives resides (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2014). PD is one aspect of human resource development, and although it is not the focus of this paper, it is worth mentioning in light of CLE requirements being governed by the NCBA. Motivation for adult learning will also be discussed in relation to connectivism.

The fourth principle of adult learning theory is the learners' orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973). Children learn what they are expected to know in order to move on to the next milestone in their lives, such as the next level in school. Adults, on the other hand, seek out learning that will assist them in their specific roles, such as being a parent or working in their chosen career (Knowles, 1973).

Several studies have examined andragogy and PD, including that by Zepeda, Parylo, and Bengtson (2014) who applied adult learning theory to PD practices for school principals, identifying several strategies that aligned with Knowles' (1973) theory. The study concluded that the PD course successfully utilized strategies that were problem-centered, relevant, and goal oriented. Adult learning principles were also demonstrated in a study by Fishman et al. (2013) in which the curriculum of a PD program was based on participants constructing and organizing knowledge, as well as motivating participation. Malik (2016) similarly conducted a study in which participants were introduced to the principles of andragogy that they were then to utilize in their work with adult learners. Findings of the study showed that many participants had unknowingly used strategies grounded in these principles prior to the PD; participants attributed this to their own life experiences as adult learners (Malik, 2016).

What sets Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory apart from traditionally pedagogical principles of learning is a matter of focus. Pedagogy is focused on content, where a teacher/facilitator decides what knowledge or skill is to be learned, as well as the method by which that content will be transmitted. By contrast, an andragogical approach is focused more on process than content. The teacher/facilitator utilizes procedures to involve the learners in several processes, including creating the learning environment, determining their own learning needs, and "designing a pattern of learning experiences" (Knowles, 1973, p. 102).

As noted earlier, adult learning is integral to PD for organizations but is not necessarily the goal, as organizations are focused primarily on advancing strategic goals and improving services (Knowles et al., 2014), which is also true of the NCBA. Table 1 below shows a brief summary of the assumptions of adult learning and their relation to attorneys' CLE.

Table 1

Knowles' (1973) Adult Learning Assumptions and Relationship to Attorney CLE

Principle	Assumption	Relationship to CLE
Self-concept	Adults are self-directed.	Attorneys must actively seek out CLE to satisfy the requirement for licensure; they are able to select topics that best meet their interests and needs.
Experience	Learners become a resource for learning.	Attorneys can use their individual experience to assist with identifying CLE courses to meet their interests and needs.
Readiness to Learn	Adult learners link learning to their roles in society and look for immediate applicability of knowledge gained.	Attorney CLE is a mandate of the profession; attorneys can take the knowledge from a CLE to apply in active practice.
Orientation to Learning	Adult learning is problem-centered.	Attorneys must comply with CLE mandates in order to maintain licensure.

Connectivist Theory

The theory of connectivism is a modern theory advanced by George Siemens, with significant contribution from Stephen Downes. Although some critics consider connectivism to be a concept as opposed to a theory, or as a theory with much room to grow (Clarà & Barberà, 2014; Conradie, 2014; Tschofen & Mackness, 2012), this paper will treat it as a new learning theory, supported by the work of Downes (2006), that can guide educational facilitators in their efforts to provide continuous learning to adults. Siemens (2005) describes connectivism as a theory that takes into consideration modern needs of teaching and learning based on the way technology has altered the manner in which people live, work, and learn. According to Downes (2006), “What we ‘know’ is embedded in our network of connections” (p. 10).

Connectivism approaches learning by considering modern trends, including the use of informal learning such as social and professional networks and work-related tasks (Siemens, 2005). Other trends include the use of technology tools to shape thought and the “know-where” aspect of learning that refers to knowing where to find knowledge. This theory is designed for a digital age and states that learning is the process of connecting sources of information, some of which are found in technological resources and other non-human appliances. People cannot directly experience things that will lead to the knowledge they need to act; therefore, they must create connections in order to acquire that knowledge. They must be able to form connections between information sources in order to create information patterns that lead to learning (Siemens, 2005). Downes (2010) supports this aspect of connectivism when he states that both facts, or content to be learned, and learners are not static; instead, both change and shift rapidly, making it difficult to design learning modules. Instead, “learning . . . occurs in communities, where the practice of learning is the participation in the community” (Downes, 2006, para. 76).

Connectivism states that the individual is the starting point, and the manager of, learning (Siemens, 2005), and Downes (2006) writes that the management of knowledge is the responsibility of the learner, not an institution. There are eight principles of connectivism:

- Learning is in the diversity of opinions
- Learning is the process of connecting sources of information
- Learning can be found in “non-human appliances” (p. 5)
- The ability to know is more important than what one already knows
- Creating and maintaining connections is imperative for continual learning
- The ability to see connections between concepts is a core connectivist skill
- The intent of all connectivist learning activities is accurate and timely knowledge

- Because reality is always shifting, what is known to be right today may not be right tomorrow (Siemens, 2005).

To put the principles of connectivism into practice, Siemens and Downes co-created and offered an online course entitled “Connectivism & Connected Knowledge,” wherein participants were encouraged to make their own choices about what they read, in order to help individuals develop distinct perspectives which they could then bring to the course discussions (Downes, 2008). Similar to the principle of self-directed learning discussed by Knowles (1973), the open structure of the course enabled participants to manage their own participation and learning. They were able to use personally created networks to help them identify what they needed to know, as well as to create links to resources and content that led to learning (Downes, 2008). This cultivation of personal learning networks has grown in importance, because the world we live in is changing continuously and it is not possible to predict the relationships between variables of the environment (Downes, 2010); thus, it is necessary that learners themselves change as well. The choices learners make, such as what they read, what they share, and with whom they interact contribute to the changing learning environment (Downes, 2010). This means that learners must be empowered to make autonomous decisions about their own learning (Downes, 2010), which is aligned with Knowles’ (1973) description of self-directedness and motivation of adult learners.

In addition to the writings of Siemens (2005) and Downes (2006, 2008, 2010), there are several studies that have looked at connectivist principles for adult learning. Garcia, Elbeltagi, Brown, and Dungay (2015) conducted a qualitative case study of a connectivist learning model using blogs as a teaching tool and concluded that the use of blogs resulted in increased peer critique, support, and guidance. Learners in their study, adults in a college course, appeared to be encouraged to use blogs to form connections which led to learning. Another study by

Conradie (2014) examined how higher education students perceived the use of connectivism in personal learning environments. Results of the study showed learners have higher motivation, improved engagement, collaboration, and self-actualization (Conradie, 2014). This study notes how the use of connectivist principles supports the self-directedness of the learners in the study. Table 2 below presents the findings from Conradie's study.

Table 2

Results of Conradie's (2014) Study

Factor	<i>M</i> (<i>n</i> =76)	<i>SD</i>
Motivation	3.61	0.92
Engagement	4.27	0.77
Collaboration	4.06	0.84

Another study by Dunaway (2011) examined how librarians and librarian-teachers could use connectivist theories in practice. The author stated that the evolving nature of the way individuals learn aligns with the changing face of information literacy, making connectivism an appropriate framework for librarians' understanding of student learning networks.

Understanding and applying connectivism is an appropriate way to guide and shape personal learning networks by demonstrating the value of various nodes in students' learning networks (Dunaway, 2011). The following quote best sums up the findings from Dunaway's (2011) study:

The importance of communication and connections to information literacy supports the theory that these concepts are central to learning; similarly, the idea that students learn through the formation of connections supports the idea that information literacy is central to lifelong learning. (p. 684)

Additional studies by Kennedy and Winn (2011), Cranton (2016), Kizito (2016), and Donnelly (2013) show connectivist principles at work in PD. Among Kennedy and Winn's (2011) findings were "video conferencing provides a sense of community . . . in that regional lawyers can be part of a synchronous connection with other lawyers from similar locations" (p.223). This statement is supported by Cranton (2016), whose study recognized the importance of collaboration in continuing PD education and how that collaboration must be incorporated into online PD. Kizito (2016) examined the effect of connectivism on the design of learning activities in African higher education by using blogs in a training program for teacher assistants. The study found that because interaction was not specified by the program activities, participant interaction was infrequent. These results led to a revamped program that better utilized blogging and connectivist principles. This was accomplished by introducing program facilitators to the concepts of connectivism and requiring participants to interact and share resources via the blogs. Likewise, Donnelly (2013) found that technology was helpful in enabling connections between participants and their ideas and knowledge.

In a study of the influence of connectivist principles on science and technology education and international collaboration, Trnova and Trna (2012) found the use of online video, audio, and other communication tools were effective motivators for students and teachers in different countries to collaborate and share information. Their findings are supported by the literature, as reported in a review by Kind and Evans (2015). That literature review on the use of social media to support lifelong learning in medical education students showed that social media allowed the students to share ideas, ask questions, and foster mentoring relationships.

These studies are indicative of the changes in teaching and learning to include technology tools, such as blogs, video conferencing, and social media. Siemens (2005) stated that

connectivist theory is a learning model that acknowledges the societal shift wherein learning has evolved from an individual activity. This shift is aided by the use of tools, including those integral to a digital era.

According to Downes (2006), what people know is rooted in the network of connections that they make with other people, resources, and the world in general. This is because individuals cannot know all they need to know at all times, and instead rely on their ability to create connections between various sources in order to make useful information patterns (Siemens, 2005). For this reason, the education community has begun to utilize such tools as blogs and other web tools in the classroom (Downes, 2006). CLE, as its very name states, is education and can and does certainly take advantage of these same tools and principles.

Motivation has already been discussed in light of adult learning theory. Connectivism can also be used as a motivator for adult learners. In a study by Trnova and Trna (2015) the motivational effect of technology on connectivist principles in science education was examined. Results indicated that there was an increase in motivation for students and teachers using communication technology, which led to the achievement of skills and knowledge intended by the course (Trnova & Trna, 2015). Kind and Evans' (2015) literature review concurs with these findings:

It is once individuals are beyond structured learning environments that they will need to recognize their own knowledge and skill gaps over time and be motivated to fill them and incorporate lifelong learning principles into their day-to-day practice. The use of social media and technology is one key way to do so, in today's information sharing society. (p. 130)

This would indicate that applying connectivist principles when designing and delivering educational content, as in the case of CLE, can be a motivational factor for participation and may ultimately lead to a positive experience and applicability.

Andragogy and Connectivism Applied to CLE

Both adult learning theory and connectivism can be found and applied to PD, including CLE. Hogg and Lomicky (2012) explored higher education students' experiences in online classes from a connectivist perspective. Student participants in the study reported that the online environment encouraged them to utilize various technologies to communicate and collaborate. In addition, autonomy and the student-centeredness of the online delivery were reported as highly prevalent (Hogg & Lomicky, 2012), which shows that online courses offer ample opportunity for students to control their own learning.

Adult learning theory and connectivist theory are two different approaches to learning; however, they share many similarities. While they did not refer to connectivism as described by Siemens and Downes, Knowles et al. (2014) recognized that technology caters to self-directed learners, giving them the ability to customize their learning experiences to fit their prior experiences and real-world problems. "Traditional learning hierarchies could go away as learners jump in where they want to and when they get stuck a computer-based diagnosis would direct them to the appropriate remediation" (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 216).

Approaching my case study, these two theories framed the research. PD and CLE seek to keep professionals knowledgeable in their field (Collin et al., 2012); therefore, partakers are expected to have gained useful and applicable knowledge by participating. As such, it is worthwhile to connect adult learning to CLE. Likewise, in considering CLE delivered online, the connections made by participants are essential to the learning process. The connectivist

theory of learning addresses technology and modern ways of teaching and learning, such as online CLE. “Self-directed learning, supported by the [andragogical] approach of connectivism . . . is postulated to be a crucial skill set for the 21st century learner” (Conradie, 2014, p. 254).

Related Literature

CLE is known to be an important part of an attorney’s ongoing professional development (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015), and, therefore, it is worthwhile to understand how attorneys perceive it. Ongoing PD has traditionally focused on training in a classroom setting, and the transfer of knowledge to the work environment has not always been effective (Collin et al., 2012). With the ongoing changes in law, it is important that practicing attorneys stay abreast of what is pertinent to the field in order to best serve their clients (American Bar Association, 2016; Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015).

PD, including CLE, is not without its challenges. In the field of nursing, a review of literature identified several studies which showed that older workers were less likely to participate in PD (Pool et al., 2013). This same study discussed the differences in performance between older and younger workers, as defined by chronological, functional, psychosocial, and organizational age. In some cases, older workers were considered to be less able to understand and apply newly trained techniques (Pool et al., 2013) While my case study does not address the factor of age in relation to ongoing PD or the CLE requirements, it is interesting to note in light of andragogy and its focus on the changes in learning principles as people age.

Challenges specific to online PD have been identified as the cause of reluctance for some individuals to embrace technology (Rienties, Brouwer, & Lygo-Baker, 2013) and the possibility for an over-abundance of availability (Bates, Phalen, & Moran, 2016). In a study by Rienties et al. (2013), many participants were reluctant to take an online PD course, but those who did

showed increased skill with the topic of the course – technology in the classroom. This indicates that online PD can be a valid option, while at the same time supporting the need for regulatory bodies such as the NCBA to ensure that the PD course or CLE course provides valuable learning opportunities that meet the definition of effective PD. There are few studies available regarding the value of CLE and limited studies on the value of online delivery of professional development (Militello, Gance-Cleveland, Aldrich, & Kamal, 2014; Rhode, 2015), which is a challenge as well. Criticism has been expressed about the necessity to mandate CLE (Rhode, 2015); this present study that examines how attorneys describe the efficacy of CLE contributes to such a discussion.

Professional Development/Continuing Legal Education

The terms professional development and lifelong learning have been used interchangeably to describe the method by which people maintain the knowledge and skills they need for their professions (Collin et al., 2012). In light of CLE, Chakraborty and Ghosh (2015) pointed out that the main objective is to “enhance the capacity of the members of the bar for ensuring better dispensation of justice” (p. 34). While not unique to the legal profession, professional development is as important in that field as it is, for example, in the medical and teaching fields.

Professional Development can be aligned with adult learning theory, as lifelong learning is not possible without the employee’s ability to identify the qualities that are required for success. A study by Bennetts et al. (2012) determined that the use of andragogy as a foundation for continuing PD was beneficial to public health practitioners by equipping them to be innovative and to meet challenges of the profession. However, one of the challenges of PD is that the developmental needs of the professional are not always reconciled with the learning

needs defined by employers/professional organizations (Collin et al., 2012). This points to the necessity for organizations like the NCBA to ensure that the requirements placed on attorneys for CLE should be appropriate for the stage of their career and experience. Chakraborty and Ghosh (2015) stated their belief that traditional methods of attorney education are not adequately preparing modern attorneys for practice in the 21st century and argued for CLE that will keep practicing attorneys up to date on the best ways to serve their clients. Adult learners understand the importance of learning opportunities that directly relate to their current professional needs (Knowles, 1973), which supports the theory of Chakraborty and Gosh. The next section of this chapter presents information on whether the delivery method of such education materials is as important as the content.

Further demonstrating the efficacy of adult learning theory in designing PD is a study by Chitanana (2012). This study examined an online PD course for teachers and found that the intentional inclusion of activities to foster sharing and constructive knowledge to be an important aspect of successful PD. Participants in the study reported that the ability to collaborate with peers from diverse educational and geographic backgrounds was a positive part of the course, as was the opportunity for reflection on the learning experience. Such interaction is a correlation to Knowles' (1973) postulation that adult learners prefer interactive learning environments. Another aspect of adult learning theory found in this study was the inclusion of real-life problem-based projects, which participants and facilitators identified as a component making the program a success (Chitanana, 2012). The ability to apply learning to their profession is a known motivator for adult learners seeking educational opportunities (Knowles, 1973).

Also considering how PD and CLE for attorneys are related to the use of adult learning theory, Zepeda et al. (2014) conducted an exploratory multiple case study of four school

districts' principal PD. Findings showed several PD practices that were common among the four cases, including connecting PD to career development, individualizing learning, and aligning PD to practice. Andragogical characteristics that were found across these common practices were motivation, relevancy, and goal orientation. Zepeda et al. (2014), Chakraborty and Ghosh (2015), Chitanana (2012), and Bennetts et al. (2012) have all shown how various principles of adult learning fit into successful PD. These findings further demonstrate the applicability of adult learning theory to CLE.

Principles of the theories of adult learning and connectivism can be found in discussion of PD delivery methods. These principles include self-directedness, motivation, and connections. Several studies demonstrate that delivery of PD can be accomplished using various technologies, which can lead to satisfying and successful experiences for the participants (Farrell et al., 2012; Fishman et al., 2013; Gandhi, 2014; Garcia et al., 2015; Holmes, 2013; Kennedy & Winn, 2011; Militello et al., 2014).

After reviewing the literature on computer-mediated continuing education for health care professionals, Militello et al. (2014) concluded that computer-mediated continuing education was beneficial in promoting individual learning, flexibility, accommodating various learning styles, and participant satisfaction. According to Gandhi (2014), with the ever-increasing workload of general healthcare practitioners, technology can help save valuable time while pursuing important PD. Courses taken online allowed for flexibility regarding when the course was taken as well as the content of the course since practitioners were not bound by time or location. This flexibility can be a motivator for adult learners who wish to balance their search for continued learning opportunities with their busy schedules. Garcia et al. (2015) also concluded that the use of blogs as well as other technology tools like social media were embraced by both students and

teachers in a college arts degree course, leading to increased motivation and satisfaction when used in conjunction with other teaching methods. The connectivist theory states that knowledge can be found in non-human appliances (Siemens, 2005), such as blogs and social media posts. The ability of learners to seek out such content from sources not confined to the learning course gives them the control to create their own virtual learning environment, an important aspect of both adult learning theory and PD. After researching the effect of online and in-person PD on teachers and students, Fishman et al. (2013) found that there was no difference in how each method reported improved content knowledge, increased confidence, or student achievement. Each of these studies demonstrates how the learning environment does not have to be limited to a traditional classroom but can be created using technology, allowing connections that transcend face-to-face interaction.

Farrell et al. (2012) described the lessons learned from a pharmacist continuing education program in Canada which was comprised of several online learning modules as well as one face-to-face workshop. The study discussed the importance of collaboration among stakeholders and facilitators when designing the program in order to garner support. The paper also stressed the importance of designing program objectives linked directly to the learner competencies being fostered. This combines aspects of andragogy, particularly the principle of self-directedness whereby adult learners seek learning opportunities directly related to their professional goals, and aspects of connectivism, including creating connections between knowledge devices and learners.

Collaboration is a way of creating connections to sources of knowledge, which can include other learners as well as technological resources that store information (Siemens, 2005). Illustrating the importance of collaboration, Stewart (2014) conducted a study on how

collaborative learning communities could improve PD for teachers. The study found that PD is most effective when the learning community provides opportunities to collaborate with peers (Stewart, 2014), a possibility with online PD that reaches diverse locations and participants. Frydenberg and Andone (2014) described the collaboration between a United States university and one in Romania, where learners used synchronous and asynchronous communication to complete a collaborative project. That project put into operation the connectivist principles of the diversity of opinions and the connection of sources, or nodes, of information. The authors concluded that by modeling the use of online communications such as Skype, Facebook, and Google Hangouts as learning tools, the instructors created a safe environment that allowed learners to explore tools they could later incorporate into daily professional use (Frydenberg & Andone, 2014).

In their study of how strategies explored in an online PD program transferred to the practices of pharmacists, Marks et al. (2014) concluded that the online PD facilitated sustained positive changes in the participants' practices. Kennedy and Winn (2011) explored options for increasing PD opportunities in rural areas of Australia using synchronous video conferencing. Participants in the video conference were observed by the seminar presenter to be more willing to ask sensitive questions than those who attended in person. Remote participants also reported satisfaction with the experience and noted they likely would not have attended the seminar at all if the video conference had not been an option. From reports like these, it seems that connectivism is a natural fit for online PD, as they show how learners can locate sources of knowledge and create connections to the knowledge needed. Likewise, the principle of self-directedness in adult learners (Knowles, 1973) was evident in the Frydenberg and Andone (2014)

study, as students were in control of determining which communication tools to use to accomplish the objectives.

Additional studies conducted by Vu, Cao, Vu, and Cepero (2014), Teräs (2016), and Dash, deKramer, O'Dwyer, Masters, and Russell (2012) further support the use of online PD. In a study that looked at the factors which contributed to participants' success in an online PD course for teachers, Vu et al. (2014) determined that self-discipline, administrator expectation, and the ability to learn autonomously were ranked the top three factors of success in the course. Each of these three factors points to the adult learning principles of self-directedness and motivation (Knowles, 1973), and the connectivist principle of knowing how to locate knowledge (Siemens, 2005). A qualitative narrative study by Teräs (2016) examined the experiences of teachers in Finland ($N=7$) in an online PD program, and their perceptions of the program's impact on their professional growth. Results showed that, despite challenges presented by different learning needs and expectations of the learners, online PD may lead to "significant professional growth" (Teräs, 2016, p. 258). This study confirms the importance of self-directedness in adult learning, as learners were able to utilize the knowledge they received to enhance their professions. Further confirmation of how online PD can positively affect the careers of learners, Dash et al. (2012) studied the effect of online PD on the content knowledge and practice of fifth-grade math teachers. The study found that teachers in the online program had significantly higher scores for content knowledge and practice than those who did not take the course online.

Supporting the findings of these studies (Dash et al., 2012; Frydenberg & Andone, 2014; Garcia et al., 2015; Teräs, 2016; Vu et al., 2014), from their review of the literature, Militello et al. (2014) suggested that successful computer-mediated continuing education be used in

conjunction with other delivery methods in order to be successful. Although technology as a delivery tool for PD offers many benefits, it should not be the only method, particularly in light of connectivist learning principles. This may be a contributing factor to the decision of the NCBA to limit the amount of online CLE credits accepted each year (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). Due to continuously changing job qualifications, the employee who is able to maintain the knowledge needed to meet those qualifications is best able to perform in the workplace (Collin et al., 2012); if the individual is the starting point and the manager of making learning connections (Siemens, 2005), then it is necessary to vary instruction to allow for greater success. This is also a demonstration of the connectivist principle stating that reality, and therefore knowledge, is not static (Siemens, 2005), making the ability to locate timely knowledge a valuable career trait.

Studies have also been conducted to help determine what makes an online PD program or course successful. Prestridge and Tondeur (2015) conducted one such study which looked for the necessary elements of an effective online PD program for teachers. Findings indicated three important elements of success: active research, reflection, and constructive discussion (Prestridge & Tondeur, 2015). Active research, or investigation, refers to participants actively finding information that they could then use to link the project to professional use: “It seems to be the case that online professional development had to be centered on their needs, but that the teachers had to create that need” (Prestridge & Tondeur, 2015, p. 208). The importance of the concept of self-directedness was also reported by McConnell and Monroe (2012), who shared lessons learned after creating an asynchronous online program to share PD with 4-H volunteers in the state of Florida. Each of these studies support the adult learning principle of self-directedness, motivation, and orientation to learning (Knowles, 1973).

Providing opportunity for reflection helped the participants of the study by Prestridge and Tondeur (2015) to create an online presence and connect program objectives to their daily professional activities. Discussions were the third most effective element of the online PD program, as it encouraged community building and critical questioning interactions among participants (Prestridge & Tondeur, 2015). Each of these elements can be related to adult learning theory and connectivism, particularly self-directedness, motivation, and connecting to sources of knowledge.

Online Professional Development/Continuing Legal Education

The changing face of education in general is reflected in the changing face of both PD and CLE with regard to technology. Articles by Boothe-Perry (2016), Cahak (2012), and Chachra (2015), among others, speak to the necessity for legal education to better incorporate technology in the process of educating lawyers. While little is known about online CLE, there have been studies written about the need for change in legal education in light of technological advances. Legal education in the 21st century should adapt content and delivery to the unique needs of the age (Binford, 2013). At this time, however, the ABA limits the use of online or distance learning for law students to no more than 12 credit hours, provided that the student has completed the first year and spreads out the 12 hours over several semesters (Bennett, 2014). It is possible that the limited use of online CLE is a reflection of the ABA stance on distance education. Yet, if the value of online and other distance learning can be demonstrated as positive, in time the ABA may sanction such methods of delivering educational content (Bennett, 2014).

The practice of law has changed and is likely to continue changing, due to advances in technology that allow for more automation of tasks; it stands to reason that educating lawyers

should change as well (Chachra, 2015). In order to reach modern learners, technology must be considered as a method of student engagement (Boothe-Perry, 2016). These views are supported by the connectivist principles of using technology, or non-human appliances, as a tool for locating and storing knowledge (Siemens, 2005). In addition, adult learning theory describes the need for adult learners to be self-directed, with the ability to apply knowledge directly to their professional growth (Knowles, 1973); modern learners are familiar with a variety of technological tools that were not prevalent in day-to-day life but can now be utilized as educational tools (Boothe-Perry, 2016). These tools include online delivery of educational material.

There has been some research on the efficacy of online delivery methods for PD, and much of the findings have been that computer technology is not a hindrance to improving understanding and performance of adults in the workplace (Bahner et al., 2012; Hoffmann & Dudjak, 2012; Kenefick et al., 2014; Thepwongsa, Kirby, Schattner, & Piterman, 2014; Wu, Liu, Zhang, & Ji, 2016). In an article that described the challenges and successful strategies for delivering online learning in nursing education, Hoffmann and Dudjak (2012) shared that a major obstacle was the belief by facilitators and participants that content was best shared via traditional face-to-face delivery methods. Thepwongsa et al. (2014) similarly reported in their review of medical PD studies that many healthcare providers, given the option, reported a preference for traditional face-to-face PD over online delivery methods. This is not an insurmountable obstacle, however, as there are additional studies that report participant preference for, and satisfaction with, computer-assisted delivery of PD and other learning programs, including the majority of studies reviewed by Thepwongsa et al. (2014).

Bahner et al. (2012) examined the effectiveness of using Twitter, Facebook, and other web technologies to push curriculum concepts to medical education learners, as a supplement to a face-to-face medical school course. Most respondents (88.9%) reported the use of Twitter to be an effective way to disseminate educational information. In addition, more than half of all respondents stated a desire to receive other medical education content utilizing the push method. One result that was reported was unexpected; the program was designed for and targeted to students attending the researchers' local university; however, data revealed that followers of the Facebook page were located in six different countries (Bahner et al., 2012). The findings support the connectivist principle of making connections to various sources of learning (Siemens, 2005), as well as the adult learning theory principle of self-directedness (Knowles, 1973). Adult learners, being motivated to seek learning that will be applicable and beneficial to their current career development (Knowles, 1973) demonstrated in this study that they were drawn to the knowledge sharing methods in the study by Bahner et al. (2012) even though they were not the intended audience. The use of online resources to deliver the content gave the additional learners the opportunity to use connectivist techniques of using computer technology to locate knowledge they found valuable.

The ability to reach diverse audiences is often touted as a benefit of online delivery. Kenefick et al. (2014) identified constraints on financial and human resources that made online PD a viable option for public health workers. In their study, participants indicated they would recommend the offered online modules for other workers, highlighting the ability to work at their own pace as a positive. Similarly, Zaghaf, Maldonado, Whitehead, Bartlett, and de Bittner (2015) conducted a study on whether online asynchronous PD could prepare healthcare workers to improve competencies, using andragogy as a guiding principle. The majority of participants

in their study agreed that the course was applicable to their real-world work and ultimately reported higher confidence in making decisions in the workplace after participating in the course (Zaghab et al., 2015).

These studies point to the capability of online delivery of PD to be built around adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) with positive outcomes. In addition, Thepwongsa et al. (2014) reported in their review of studies on the effectiveness of online PD for general healthcare practitioners that participants in the online PD modules reported to be very satisfied with the experience, with no significant difference in reported performance or knowledge improvement between online and face-to-face participants. DeRosier, Kameny, Holler, Davis, and Maschauer (2013) identified similar results. In their study that examined achievement in social, behavioral, and mental health researchers participating in a PD program, DeRosier et al. (2013) found no significant differences across the online, hybrid, or face-to-face delivery methods of the program, with all participants showing improvement. The lack of differences indicate that principles of adult learning theory can be combined with principles of connectivism to create effective PD. Both learning theories note the importance of learner motivation (Knowles, 1973; Siemens, 2005). The learners in the studies by Kenefick et al. (2014), Zaghab et al. (2015), Thepwongsa et al. (2014) and DeRosier et al. (2013) benefited from learning modules that were directly applicable to their professional development, with the added benefit of making a connection to the knowledge using technology.

The above-mentioned studies come from the field of healthcare; however, findings can be applied to legal practitioners as well. Online CLE has a number of benefits. The Arkansas Bar Association found value in online CLE because it was less expensive, offered greater accessibility, could be monitored and updated to maintain integrity of the content (Brescia,

Jackson, Tarvin, & Ott, 2004). Also, the Wisconsin State Board of Examiners agreed in November 2016 to consider a proposal to increase the number of allowed online CLE credits from 10 to 15, including up to six hours related to client communication, trust accounts, and other topics (Strebel, 2016). In support of online CLE, Chakraborty and Ghosh (2015) suggested that CLE should utilize flexible teaching methods such as distance education, web-based lectures, and online programs in order to meet the professional demands of attorneys. Bennett's (2014) suggestions are similar, as he states the expense of live CLE classes make webinars, teleconferences, and lecture downloads popular and effective. The reasons offered in favor of online CLE do not take into account the educational benefits of this delivery method, although it is clear that they exist as discussed above. Allowing attorneys the ability to make connections to the knowledge they need to enhance their practice as well as the ability to cultivate a learning environment conducive to the acquisition of such knowledge is an unrecognized advantage of online CLE.

To ensure that these benefits are realized, it is important that individuals who take an online legal education class or CLE be able to function in the online environment. In a study of e-learning legal education courses in Victoria, British Columbia, participants noted that without IT support, e-learning courses were not a very attractive option (Dracup & Coverdale, 2015). Law schools, organizations, and individuals who utilize technology must understand the need for support. In the study by Brescia et al. (2004), the need to have someone be available to address technical problems when an online CLE is taken was supported. While it is apparent that learners need a comfort level with the tools used for online delivery of learning, it is also true that many learners of the millennial age are so familiar with technology that ignoring it as a delivery method limits their learning (Chachra, 2015). The principles of adult learning express

the importance of making learning applicable to the learner's profession (Knowles, 1973), while the theory of connectivism expresses the need to recognize that technology has changed the way individuals learn (Siemens, 2005). Based on the literature, online PD combines these theories effectively (DeRosier et al., 2013; Kenefick et al., 2014; Thepwongsa et al., 2014; Zaghab et al., 2015).

Delivering PD via online technology is not enough; it is equally important that online education modules be properly developed for that delivery method. Dewhurst, Keyes, and Zariski (2013) examined the production of open educational resources (defined as free materials in any format, including digital, that are used to facilitate learning) and identified the major challenge as adapting materials typically used in traditional learning delivery methods. Yet, despite the challenges, there is no doubt that "the emerging omnipresence of digital technologies in legal education is inescapable" (Binford, 2013, p. 158).

While there is not an abundance of data regarding online delivery of legal education, researchers such as Cahak (2012), Schrag (2014), O'Sullivan-Gavin and Shannon (2014), Colbran and Gilding (2014), and Wolff and Chan (2016) present compelling findings on the subject. Studies by both Cahak (2012) and O'Sullivan-Gavin and Shannon (2014) agree that online legal education makes it possible to reach diverse learning populations. With legal education information available in digital and open formats, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), law schools can provide options for legal edification to economically disadvantaged learners as well as those with varied life experiences (Cahak, 2012). In addition, instructors and learners can benefit from online or hybrid learning environments with enhanced technology, critical thinking, and communication skills (O'Sullivan-Gavin & Shannon, 2014). Consideration of these studies in conjunction with the writings of Chachra (2015), Collin et al. (2012) and

Chakraborty and Ghosh (2015) show that continuing education for attorneys in the digital age can best be supported with digital methods of delivery.

Technology enhanced methods of legal education delivery will possibly increase in the near future. Schrag (2014) pointed to a dramatic decline in law school applicants between 2010 and 2013, which led to a slimming of school faculty. He posited that for that reason, legal education could benefit from the use of MOOCs. Colbran and Gilding (2014) offered several possible reasons for legal education institutes to utilize MOOCs:

- the opportunity to engage communities and offer outreach programs
- provide networking opportunities for participants
- allow participants to develop or improve their technology skills
- allow for national and international links
- allow potential students to try a course before enrolling
- encourage access to justice for non-legal citizens that previously required hiring a lawyer
- provide a component for mandatory CLE (Colbran & Gilding, 2014).

The reasons stated above support the Adult Learning and Connectivist principles of learner motivation, diversity, and connections to nodes of information (Knowles, 1973; Siemens, 2005). However, there are a number of challenges to using courses like MOOCs in legal education, including acceptance by not only schools but also by governing bodies. Currently, the ABA accrediting body requires graduation from an accredited law school in order to be licensed to practice in most states (Schrag, 2014). However, open courses can offer benefits to institutions by helping to avoid duplicating efforts and decreasing costs to produce educational materials (Colbran & Gilding, 2014). Reports by O'Sullivan-Gavin and Shannon (2014) and

Wolff and Chan (2016) discuss how legal educational institutes can take advantage of non-traditional course delivery.

Digital platforms used in online and hybrid courses allow for expanding the scope of assignments to include additional resources such as audio, video, or links to external resources (O'Sullivan-Gavin & Shannon, 2014). At the same time, it must be noted that due to the rapid changes in the law, maintaining digital resources can be a time-consuming task (Wolff & Chan, 2016). Making connections to these nodes of knowledge allows learners to revisit those resources frequently to retrieve the information needed, a staple of the connectivist theory on how modern learners obtain knowledge (Siemens, 2005). If the principles of connectivism are incorporated with the creation and maintenance of the digital resources used in both traditional and online learning environments, learners will be able to locate updated and timely information from their own personal learning environments (Downes, 2010). Additional benefits of incorporating technology delivery methods in legal education are as follows:

- flexibility
- increased technology literacy
- improved learning outcomes
- increased student satisfaction (Wolff & Chan, 2016).

Summary

The findings reported in studies of online professional development in teaching, healthcare and legal education are easily applied to CLE. The principles of both andragogy (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) are evident in PD in general as well as attorney education, and by extension, CLE. The literature shows how adult learning differs from that of children, which should be taken into consideration when discussing ongoing education for

adults in the workforce. Adult learners are motivated by real world application of the knowledge they acquire (Knowles, 1973), which is one of the goals of CLE (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015). In order for CLE to be effective, therefore, lawyers should to be able to select learning courses that are delivered in a way that best meets their needs. For modern learners, this includes the use of technology to store and deliver the knowledge needed for career success (Cahak, 2012; Chachra, 2015; Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015).

Timely and relevant learning opportunities are beneficial to attorneys, as the law is constantly changing (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015); such timelines are the very intent of connectivist learning activities (Siemens, 2005). Online CLE offers attorneys the ability to expand their learning communities beyond the traditional learning environment. Downes (2006) described the practice of learning as participating in these communities, which are always changing. The theory of connectivism also shows how learning has changed in light of modern technology. Learners often use online and digital resources for legal research (Wolff & Chan, 2016), which shows that even if they do not know it, lawyers create connections in their personal learning networks (Downes, 2008; Siemens, 2005) as they conduct their business. Using online delivery of CLE is one way to allow lawyers to use these skills. This is especially important for lawyers who are part of the millennial age of digital learners; the exclusion of such resources and learning methods is disadvantageous for learners who are unfamiliar with a time where such resources were not the norm (Chachra, 2015).

Both adult learning and connectivist theories discuss the self-directedness of adult learners (Knowles, 1973; Siemens, 2005), which can be supported by online CLE by allowing attorneys to create networks of resources and content that lead to the timely learning they need.

Adult learners have shown higher motivation and engagement in courses designed using the principles of connectivism (Conradie, 2014; see Table 2).

The literature reviewed supports the use of adult learning and connectivist principles in the planning and delivery of educational content for adults. Understanding that adult learners approach learning activities, especially PD, differently than children requires planning and an approach appropriate to that audience (Knowles, 1973). Likewise, the prevalence of technology tools in the everyday lives of millennial learners (Cahak, 2012; Chachra, 2015; Chitanana, 2012; Colbran & Gilding, 2014; Downes, 2010) necessitates their inclusion in delivery of learning content (Chachra, 2015). The studies of Dunaway (2011), Kennedy and Winn (2011), Kizito (2016), and several others have shown the efficacy of designing PD based on connectivist principles.

Though there is no question that there are challenges present for PD in various industries, its importance cannot be disputed. With regard to CLE, there is a need for more research. When seeking to understand how attorneys receive CLE, the theoretical principles of adult learning and connectivist theories should be considered. There is clear indication that PD on the whole is a valuable and necessary component of maintaining a profession (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Collin et al., 2012), and CLE is imperative to practicing attorneys' ability to be effective in the modern judicial system.

Associations like the ABA and NCBA have made clear their support for continuous education of legal practitioners by the mandates they set and monitor for attorneys (North Carolina State Bar, 2016b). Literature on the topic of CLE is limited, as is research on CLE delivered online. There is no doubt about the need for PD, however, not only for attorneys but in

other industries as well. Relating the CLE process delivered online to the learning theories of andragogy and connectivism will inform the legal community on its usefulness.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this holistic single case study was to describe the experiences of practicing attorneys in North Carolina receiving CLE courses online, which is defined as synchronous or asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars attended by the attorney alone or in a small group. The theories guiding this study are Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory and Siemens' (2005) connectivist theory, as they address how adults learn and how the use of technology connects sources of knowledge. In this chapter I identify the research design, setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures for the case study.

Design

The study design is a qualitative holistic single case study. This approach was selected because the goal of the study was to explain the experiences with online CLE of attorney members of the NCSB. Qualitative studies seek to explain or explore rather than quantify or measure, which would be more appropriate in a quantitative study. Creswell (2013) explained that qualitative research is most appropriate when a problem needs to be explored, and the researcher wishes to understand the context. To explain how practicing attorneys experience online CLE thus required a qualitative design.

Case study was selected as the design approach because, according to Creswell (2013), case study should present an in-depth understanding of the selected case, which this research sought to do regarding online CLE for NCSB attorney members. In addition, case study is appropriate for research where the central question is a "how" or "why" question (Yin, 2014). This research design necessitates multiple forms of data collection (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Collecting data from multiple resource is one of the primary strengths of case study research (Yin, 2014) as it allows the researcher to build an in-depth case (Creswell, 2013). I collected data using interviews, observations, and focus groups.

To further refine the research design, a holistic single case study approach was selected based on the methodology of Yin (2014). A holistic case study is one in which there is a single unit of analysis; the unit being analyzed is attorneys who have taken CLE online and in person. In discussing the decision to conduct a single case study, Yin (2014) pointed to several rationales for selecting this design. A critical case is one that is critical to the theories, where the case can be used to confirm, challenge, or extend those theories (Yin, 2014). Using the theories of adult learning (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) as the framework to explore the experiences of attorneys with online CLE can confirm or extend these theories by applying them to professional development for attorneys. Another rationale for single case study is the common case, where the circumstances of a routine activity are explored (Yin, 2014). CLE is a common activity for attorneys in North Carolina as it is a requirement for licensure by the NCSB (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014; North Carolina State Bar, 2016b). Yin (2014) also stated that a single case study is appropriate if the case is revelatory. This study presents an opportunity to empirically explore how attorneys experience online CLE, a phenomenon not previously examined.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was as follows:

CQ: How do practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience online CLE courses?

The following sub-questions were also pursued:

RQ1: What meaning do practicing attorneys ascribe to CLE?

RQ2: What benefits and concerns do attorneys identify with CLE delivered online?

RQ3: How do attorneys connect CLE content to their legal practice?

Setting

The setting for this study is the North Carolina State Bar (NCSB). The NCSB was formed in 1933 by the North Carolina General Assembly as the regulatory agency for the legal profession in the state. The agency is governed by a leadership council made up of 62 member attorneys who were elected by attorneys from their home communities. There are also three non-attorney members who are appointed by the governor and other elected officials in order to represent the public's interest. There are currently more than 27,000 licensed attorneys governed by the NCSB (North Carolina State Bar, 2016a). In 1987 the NCSB council adopted mandatory CLE rules requiring two hours of ethics or professionalism courses as well as 10 hours on general topics (North Carolina State Bar, 2016b). North Carolina is also home to the North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA), which is a voluntary organization that was founded in 1899. The NCBA has conducted CLE in North Carolina since 1944, and continues to offer courses for attorneys to satisfy their NCSB requirements (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014). Not all CLE is provided by the NCBA; however, the organization does provide a myriad of courses on an ongoing basis, as well as methods for attorneys to track their progress (North Carolina Bar Association, 2014).

Most of the attorneys I work with are members of the NCSB. The state of North Carolina was selected because it is my state of residence, making it possible to reach many participants in person as well as via electronic communication. This setting is also appropriate as the NCSB sets the CLE requirement for all practicing attorneys in the state. The NCBA is also considered a setting, as the organization offers many CLE courses both in person and online. The size or

physical location of participants' law offices or law firms within the state played no role in the study.

Participants

This study included 15 participants from a purposeful sample with maximum variation. Purposeful sampling is described by Creswell (2013) as the selection of participants because they can purposefully inform the study. In addition, participants were selected to provide maximum variation in the study. Participants were selected to bring a diversity of viewpoints on the subject of online CLE. The diverse criteria determined in advance of the study (Creswell, 2013) were length of time as a member of the NCSB, gender, and self-reported comfort with computer technology and the Internet. All participants are referred to using pseudonyms to conceal identities. Any mention of a specific law firm, practice, or other identifying entity is also referred to using pseudonyms. Demographic information of participants is also provided, to show maximum variation which enhances transferability of findings of the study (Creswell, 2013). The reported demographics are gender, age, legal practice area, and length of time as an NCSB attorney.

A brief survey was used to assist with identifying participants in the study. This survey introduced the research topic and asked for demographic information as well as CLE participation information. A copy of this selection survey can be found in Appendix A. To ensure validity, I asked a peer to review the questions and conducted a pilot questionnaire with a small group of attorneys at the firm. Collecting this information early in the process helped guide the creation of interviews, which focused on direct experiences of the participants.

Twenty surveys were returned, from which 15 participants were randomly selected. There were nine men and six women that participated in the study. The participants ranged in

age from 27 to 59 broken down as follows: three participants from 27-29, six from 30-39, three from 40-49, and three from 50-59 years old. There were five practice areas represented among the participants: four participants in finance law, four in business/corporate law, four in employment law, two in immigration law, and one in litigation. The participants also represent a variety of NCSB membership times: seven were members for one to four years, four were members for five to 10 years, and four were members for more than 20 years.

Procedures

The first step in completing this research was to obtain approval from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C). No data collection began before completing this necessary step. Subsequent to receiving IRB approval, the study continued with the selection of participants. Selection began with attorneys I work with and continued by referral, known as snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013). Selection methods included both paper and emailed surveys. Paper surveys were distributed at the end of both a group viewing of an online CLE and in-person CLE events. An electronic version of the same survey was emailed to attorneys in various North Carolina firms, inviting attorney members to participate in the study.

The purpose of the survey was to identify possible participants based on interest in the study, the maximum variation categories identified above, and participation within the last year in at least one online CLE and one in person CLE event. Finally, all surveyed attorneys were encouraged to identify other attorneys to invite to participate. Referrals were made by sharing my contact information with other North Carolina attorneys, sharing the emailed survey, or providing me with contact information. The survey questions can be found in Appendix A. A list of 20 survey respondents who met the minimum criteria for participation was used to randomly select 15 study participants. The next step in the process was to collect data, followed

by data analysis and reporting the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Data collection in a case study requires utilizing multiple methods (Yin, 2014). This study collected data from interviews, observations and focus groups. Information on data collection and analysis is located below.

The Researcher's Role

I have worked in a North Carolina law firm for 12 years, seven as a technology trainer. Among my duties is the creation and delivery of professional development materials and content to everyone working in the firm. I also hold a Master of Science in Instructional Technology, as well as a Certificate in Distance Education, which give me some insight into the process of creating course content for online delivery. It has always been my belief that learning is a lifelong process; therefore, I work diligently to support this learning in the form of continuous professional development for the adult learners at the law firm. I have a firm belief in educating adults in the workplace on the use of computers and technology to aid in their daily jobs, as well as tools for professional development and learning. As a result of my role in the law firm, I have personal knowledge of the learning styles and comfort with computer technology of many of the participants. For this reason, I took measures to ensure maximum variation by selecting several participants from outside my place of work.

In this study I needed to ensure that I maintained objectivity and bracketed my beliefs about the importance and efficacy of online learning environments. I also needed to ensure that my experiences with creating online courses and professional development materials did not influence the data collection and analysis process. This was accomplished through the efforts to ensure trustworthiness in the study, as described later in this chapter. As a learning advocate in a law firm, I needed to ensure that I did not base participant selection or the analysis of certain

participant data on personal knowledge. This required strict adherence to the methods of participant selection and data analysis, coupled with measures taken for trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

As an employee in a North Carolina law firm, I am related to the setting in that all of the partner attorneys in the firm are members of the NCSB. Some of the participants are partner members of the law firm where I work; thus, I have a direct professional relationship with them although not as a subordinate nor superior. My relationship to other participants is as a member of the same professional organization for legal technology, although there was no direct interaction between myself and those participants prior to the study.

Data Collection

In case study research, it is necessary to gather as much data as possible from various sources in order to thoroughly describe the case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Data collection methods for this study included the use of interviews, observations, and focus groups. The order of data collection was purposely selected so that subsequent collection methods were guided by the previous data. This was done to maintain a chain of evidence, which is explained by Yin (2014) as establishing the ability for an observer to follow how evidence in the case was derived. Prior to collecting data, all participants received an IRB approved consent form to sign. A copy of that consent form can be found in Appendix D.

Interviews

Yin (2014) identified interviews as one of the most important sources of data in a case study. This was the primary method of data collection for my study. To ensure the validity of the interview questions, an interview pilot was conducted. The pilot questions were used as a formative exercise (Yin, 2014) to ensure that the desired information would be elicited. All

interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted face to face, and all were conducted individually. The one interview not conducted face to face was conducted over the telephone, as the participant was located in another North Carolina city and travel was impractical for either of us. Each interview was semi-structured to allow for clarifying questions and discussion in order to enrich the data, a fluidity supported by Yin (2014). Interviews were audio recorded, with informed consent, and later transcribed for analysis. Here are the interview questions:

1. Can you describe the aspects of the CLE requirement that you like most? Least?
2. When deciding which CLE classes to take, how often do you seek out courses for the specific purpose/intention of developing a new area of practice competence or addressing a perceived deficiency in your knowledge of a topic? Are there examples of what prompts you to do so?
3. How does the format of the CLE (in person, synchronous or asynchronous webinar, live webcast, video replay, or audio streaming) influence your decision to take the course?
4. Under what circumstances have (or would) you seek out CLE/PD opportunities *not* related to the NCBA annual requirement?
5. How does the NCSB mandate affect whether you take an online (synchronous or asynchronous webinar, live webcast, video replay, or audio streaming) or in-person CLE?
6. When viewing online CLE, where do you prefer to view (home, work office, conference room, other)? Why?
7. What aspects of *group viewing* of online CLE would you describe as positive? Negative?

8. What aspects of *individual viewing* of online CLE would you describe as positive?
Negative?
9. Please share some of your experiences with synchronous or asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming CLE courses.
10. How would you describe your attitude toward online CLE?
11. If you have attended a group viewing (as opposed to viewing alone) of a synchronous or asynchronous webinar, live webcast, video replay, or audio streaming, please describe its benefits. What were the disadvantages?
12. If you have experienced both live and pre-recorded webinars, webcasts, videos, or audio streaming CLE, do you prefer live or recorded courses? Why?
13. Describe a situation where you have sought additional resources during or immediately after a CLE. How did you locate those resources (computer, conversation with other attendees or the facilitator, other)?
14. What resources have you found from a previous CLE that you now find invaluable?
How do you think you might have found or pursued that information had you not attended the CLE?

The purpose of the first four questions was to gather information about the participants' self-concept, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning, which are andragogical principles identified by Knowles (1973). Questions 5–9 sought feedback related to the adult learning principles of experience (Knowles, 1973) and the connectivist principles of learning environment and sources of learning (Siemens, 2005). In addition, questions 10 through 14 also relate to connectivist principles of learning environment and non-human resources for learning (Siemens, 2005). The interview questions were deliberately designed to identify theoretical principles that

may be linked to attorney experiences with online CLE. Responses helped to explain how attorneys experience online CLE, which is the central research question of this study.

Observations

Observations of attorneys participating in an online CLE course were conducted as a non-participant observer, which Creswell (2013) defined as being outside of the group being studied while recording data without direct involvement in the activity. Two observations of online CLE were completed and one observation of an in-person CLE event was completed as well.

Observations did not extend through the entire event; however, a minimum of the first hour of each CLE was spent in observation. One of the strengths of direct observation is the immediacy of data in context (Yin, 2014). An observation protocol form was used to ensure that data were captured uniformly in each observation. The observation protocol form includes both descriptive and reflective notes of the activity observed (Creswell, 2013). The observation protocol form is attached as Appendix B.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a form of interviewing wherein a small group is convened, and the researcher moderates discussion about the case study (Yin, 2014). Two focus groups were conducted with three participants in each. One focus group took place at the end of a group viewing of an online CLE and the other after a face-to-face CLE event. The questions put forth in these sessions incorporated principles of both adult learning and connectivist theories in the CLE process. The focus group questions were as follows:

1. Why did you attend this particular CLE?
2. Why did you attend with a group instead of viewing alone?
3. What resources have you received today that you find most valuable (personal

connection, online resource, recommendation, other)?

4. What would have made this CLE a more positive experience?
5. Please share your ideal group viewing event.

Questions 1–2 were designed to elicit responses related to the adult learning theories principles of motivation and self-directedness. Questions 3–5 sought responses related to the connectivist principles of environment, connections, and learning resources.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of “examining, categorizing . . . or recombining” data collected in order to produce findings (Yin, 2014, p. 132). Analysis of the data was consistent with qualitative methods as described by Creswell (2013) and Yin (2014). This analysis was assisted by the use of the software program QDA Miner 4 Lite.

Yin (2014) stated that an analytic strategy must be identified in order to avoid getting stuck in the analysis phase of the study. This can be done by searching for patterns or concepts that can frame the analytic strategy (Yin, 2014). Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers begin by organizing the data in order to read and memo, which can lead to the identification of codes by which the data can be classified. Codes were formed after searching for patterns in the data (Yin, 2014) and were based on the proposition that online CLE has a bi-directional relationship with the principles of self-directedness and making connections.

In analyzing interview data, I had an impartial individual transcribe the interviews; this individual signed a confidentiality agreement. I used the transcription along with the audio recording of each interview to code and identify themes in the data. During focus groups I used memoing in addition to having the audio transcribed for coding. I also journaled at the conclusion of both interviews and focus groups, which I also used to identify themes in the data.

Observations used the protocol form found in Appendix B, on which I employed memoing and journaling before coding and reporting on the themes of the data.

The qualitative analysis software QDA Miner 4 Lite was utilized to aid in data analysis. Data analysis software can be a valuable tool in creating codes and categorizing data (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). While the program assisted with locating themes among the data, I created and justified the codes and patterns for it to find (Yin, 2014). There are several software programs available for analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014); QDA Miner 4 Lite was selected for its ease of use and its ability to organize files (Creswell, 2013). Using this software, I imported the transcribed interviews, the observation protocol notes, and focus group transcriptions and notes. This gave me a central location to read and re-read the data, during which I was able to make short notes, or memo (Creswell, 2013), to identify themes. As themes emerged, I created codes in QDA Miner 4 Lite, which I then assigned to the data. Once codes were assigned, I utilized the software to group the data into common groups that I then related to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or validation (Creswell, 2013), is an important aspect of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Several strategies were employed throughout the study to address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to how believable the study is, and several steps were taken to ensure that the contents of the report were sound. Credibility for the study was achieved by employing various methods to ensure the validity of data. The use of multiple methods, known as triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014), assures that the findings of the study are credible.

Triangulation was accomplished by the collection of data from multiple sources including observations, interviews, and focus groups. Credibility was further established by the use of peer reviews and member checks of transcriptions and analysis of interviews and focus groups. I utilized my peer trainers and legal staff to review my methods and findings to ensure that the research process described was being followed (Creswell, 2013). Member checks sought participants' views of the findings (Creswell, 2013) and were accomplished by convening a small group of participants and presenting the data interpretations and findings to request feedback. Credibility of the study is essential to ensure that reality is reflected in the report and analysis of the data.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data both during collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). To ensure that the data is consistent I employed triangulation, which is in accordance with qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple sources, with the goal of corroborating findings (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). I also kept an audit trail, recording the time, date, and location information for each interview, focus group, and observation. Transcriptions were also detailed and precise, with member checks as described above used to validate the accuracy.

Like dependability, confirmability refers to data stability (Creswell, 2013). Several steps were taken to enable confirmability. I used an audit trail to ensure that each step taken was recorded and related to the data analysis and findings. In addition, member checks allowed participants to confirm that data were recorded and interpreted correctly (Creswell, 2013). Finally, I had a peer review my data collection, analysis, and findings in order to confirm their accuracy and dependability.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability for findings in a study to be transferred to other settings outside of the study (Creswell, 2013). This single case study, while limited in geography, can be transferred to other states' bar associations. The use of triangulation, member checks, peer review, and maximum variation in sampling was employed to foster transferability to other cases. In addition, I employed rich, thick description by describing, in detail, the setting and participants, allowing readers of the study to determine the transferability of this study to other settings (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

As with all research, there were several ethical considerations that were addressed. With case study research, it is important to maintain the confidentiality of participants (Creswell, 2013). This was accomplished by using pseudonyms for all participants, their specific law firm, and specific location within the state. Another ethical consideration was the security of all data collected in the course of the study. Electronic data were secured on an encrypted hard drive with password protection. All paper files printed or handwritten were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in conducting this case study. It established that the study is a qualitative single holistic case study, describing how attorneys experience online CLE. The NCSB is the setting for the study, and participants were selected from attorney members of the group. The data collection was conducted by the use of interviews, observations, and focus groups; data were then analyzed with assistance from the QDA Miner 4 Lite software.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the findings based on the analysis of data collected from interviews, observations and focus groups. There is a rich description of the participants followed by a response to each of the research questions, based on themes identified in the data. The analysis was completed in order to support the purpose of this case study: to describe the experiences of practicing attorneys in North Carolina completing continuing legal education (CLE) courses online. The analysis was conducted using the guiding principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005).

Participants

Participants in the study were all members of the NCSB and varied in age, practice area, length of time in the NCSB, as well as self-reported comfort with computer technology and the Internet. Each participant signed a consent form to participate, a copy of which is located in Appendix D. To protect privacy, all participants are referred to using pseudonyms. Table 3 displays the demographics of the 15 participants.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Years in NCSB	Legal Practice Area	Comfort with computers
Andrea	F	38	10	Employment	Very comfortable
Charles	M	41	2	Immigration	Somewhat comfortable
Caryn	F	49	10	Business/Corporate	Very comfortable
Henry	M	27	1	Finance	Very comfortable
Joshua	M	54	22	Employment	Very comfortable
Lisa	F	34	10	Finance	Very comfortable
Matthew	M	47	26	Finance	Very comfortable
Neil	M	29	3	Litigation	Very comfortable
Warren	M	38	3	Business/Corporate	Somewhat comfortable
Cheryl	F	27	1	Business/Corporate	Very comfortable
Michael	M	37	8	Finance	Very comfortable
Anna	F	57	28	Immigration	Somewhat comfortable
Corey	M	31	3	Employment	Very comfortable
John	M	32	3	Business/Corporate	Somewhat comfortable
Amy	F	50	26	Employment	Somewhat comfortable

Andrea

Andrea was a 38-year-old employment law attorney who has been a member of the NCSB for 10 years. Her busy schedule did not deter her from participating in the study, and she

gladly made time for our interview. In an office of attorneys in business attire, Andrea wore jeans and a sweater and exhibited a very casual demeanor. Andrea expressed her support for my study but admitted she does not enjoy the CLE process or requirement. Her words were very matter of fact as she shared her perception that mandatory CLE was more a waste of her time than a benefit. Andrea prefers online CLE and shared her belief that the convenience of online delivery far outweighs the potential for interacting with other attorneys in person. For this attorney CLE is an inconvenient requirement that she participates in solely for the purpose of maintaining her license to practice law.

Charles

This participant was a 41-year-old male who has been a member of the NCSB for two years. His legal practice area is litigation, and he described himself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. Charles' interview was conducted over the telephone, as he was working from his home and not in the office. His tone was even as we talked; however, his voice got a little sharper as he shared his displeasure with the CLE requirement as a whole. Despite his belief that CLE is not very helpful for him as an attorney, he does appreciate the convenience of online delivery of CLE. The value of being able to view a replay of a CLE on his own time, coupled with the fact that he prefers to view several in close succession for credit, means that online CLE is a perfect fit for Charles. Although Charles has taken CLE courses in person, he found no difference between the live CLE and video replays.

Caryn

A 49-year-old female attorney practicing business/corporate law, Caryn has been a member of the NCSB for 10 years. She is very comfortable with computers and the Internet, and has mixed feelings about CLE. While interviewing Caryn in her office, she expressed her

appreciation for online CLE, stating that the delivery method often plays a role in her choice to attend specific CLEs. She was especially eager to share her experiences with an online CLE she recently completed; leaning across the table Caryn shared how excited she had been to locate the topic related to a case she is working on. Because traveling to the CLE was impractical, being able to attend remotely allowed her to take a CLE applicable to her practice, just at the time it would be most useful to her.

Henry

Henry was a male finance attorney, age 27, and a member of the NCSB for one year. Henry was very busy prior to our interview; however, he agreed to meet in his limited free time. Although he understands the purpose of the CLE mandate, Henry worries that over time they will become repetitive and lose value. From discussions with his colleagues who have been in practice longer, Henry sees online delivery of CLE as a way to multitask while getting the credits required by the NCSB. The ability to pause a video replay in order to complete other work or address distractions is a significant advantage for Henry over in-person CLE courses. Currently the firm Henry works at assists him with keeping up with his CLE requirements, which means he often finds himself attending group sessions of both in-person and online CLEs. These group viewings do not appeal to Henry because they negate his ability to take a CLE at a time he finds convenient. However, group viewings of online CLE, particularly video replays, do not negate Henry's ability to multitask even though he is not able to pause the replay of his own volition.

Joshua

At 57 years old and with 22 years membership in the NCSB, Joshua is one of the most experienced attorneys in the study. As an employment law attorney, he described himself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. The interview with Joshua took place in

his office, a few hours after the observation of a group viewing of an online CLE which he attended. During the interview, Joshua's body language matched his words of enthusiasm for online CLE, which he described as a vast improvement over previous years when in-person CLE was the only option. Referencing the CLE he viewed that same morning, Joshua explained how he is now able to attend a CLE at a moment's notice rather than having to spend resources such as time and money on travel. It should be noted that the CLE viewing was held at the firm where Joshua practices and was only an elevator ride away from his office. However, he noted that if that were not the case, he would still have been able to view it because it was an online video. That convenience, along with the expanded catalog of CLE topics offered online, makes that delivery method a useful option for Joshua.

During my first observation of a group viewing of an online CLE, Joshua was one of the first to arrive and sat close to the display monitor. Placing a notepad and pen on the table in front of him, Joshua spent several minutes reading through the handout material, a spiral bound notebook. Once the replay began, he did not open the book again during the observation period. He also did not appear to take any notes on the notepad he brought, although he sat facing the display monitor throughout the observation period and was not observed using a cell phone or other distraction from the replay. Joshua did not interact with any other attorneys in any way, neither prior to or during the replay observation period.

Joshua also attended the observation of the in-person CLE. For this session, Joshua arrived just moments before the presenter was introduced and selected a seat in the middle of the room. Again he placed a notepad and pen on the table in front of him but was not observed using it during the presentation. Joshua also placed the course handouts on the table in front of him but did not look at them until they were referenced by the presenter toward the end of the

session. As the presenter moved about the room, Joshua appeared to be attentive as evidenced by his body language, including visually following the presenter's movement and nodding his head. Although he did not ask any questions, he responded to questions posed to the entire audience as well as volunteered personal background information at the presenter's request.

A focus group was held the same day as the second observation and Joshua agreed to participate. During this discussion, Joshua admitted that he misread the firm's calendar regarding the observed in-person CLE, expecting a different topic. Because the presenter was live, he stayed and engaged out of professional courtesy, even though he was not initially interested in the topic and had already satisfied the ethics requirement for the year. He did state that some of the presentation piqued his interest but attributed that to the presenter, not the topic. He did not feel that the resources would be useful although he planned to file them with other CLE handouts in his office instead of throwing them away. Agreeing with another focus group participant, Joshua prefers small group sessions both for in-person and group viewings of online CLE. He believes both types of sessions would benefit from a group debriefing or discussion as a way to encourage attendees to engage and process the information shared in the CLE.

Lisa

Lisa was a 34-year-old female finance attorney with 10 years as a member of the NCSB. She described herself as very comfortable with computers and the Internet. During the interview in her office, Lisa was relaxed and expressed interest in my study. She enjoys CLEs and appreciates that the NCSB requires attorneys to continually educate themselves. While Lisa is in favor of the CLE mandate, she worries that attorneys take irrelevant topics simply to check off their 12 hours of service each year. While online CLE offers convenience for attorneys to select

CLEs related to their practice areas, it also provides a way for attorneys to select CLEs simply to fulfill the requirement rather than enhance their practice.

Matthew

Matthew was a male finance attorney, 47 years old with a 26-year membership in the NCSB. He described himself as very comfortable with computers and the Internet. Interviewing Matthew was very quick, as he stated that he had been thinking about the topic and reflecting on his experiences with online CLE since agreeing to participate. While he sometimes thinks of CLE as a burden, he does agree the mandate forces him and his colleagues to stay up to date on their practice and requirements of the legal profession. Typically, when selecting CLEs to attend, Matthew searches for those related to his practice area; however, he did admit to attending both online and in person CLEs unrelated to finance law simply because he needed the hours. Matthew also teaches CLE courses, primarily because he can get credit toward his own requirement by doing so. Some of those sessions were recorded for video playback by others who were unable to attend in person.

During the observation of the in-person CLE, Matthew attended and appeared attentive to the presenter. He arrived a few minutes early but did not interact with other attendees in the room. While the presenter was speaking, Matthew seemed attentive, but he did not volunteer responses to the presenter's questions. I did not observe Matthew viewing the handout materials, and when the hour was over Matthew was among the first to leave the room.

Matthew also participated in the first focus group held the same day as the in-person CLE observed. In that discussion Matthew stated that he attended the CLE because he needed the credit. While he did not feel that this particular CLE was useful for him, he was glad that the session was small. The ideal group size for Matthew is 25 or less. Like in the observed session,

smaller groups allow for more interaction between the presenter and attendees, making the session more applicable to each individual attorney. Matthew's lack of participation stemmed from his not truly having interest in the topic; however, he stated that he felt if he could better relate to the topic he would have been inclined to participate more with the presenter and other attendees.

Neil

At 29 years old, Neil has been a member of the NCSB for three years. A litigation attorney, Neil described himself as being very comfortable with computers and the Internet. His interview took place in his office while he ate a quick lunch before travelling out of town. Neil was distracted during the interview several times, but as we had already rescheduled twice he chose to complete it at that time. Neil expressed his belief that, although the CLE mandate is in place to keep attorneys from becoming stagnant in their practice, the ease with which they can earn credits allows the educational aspect to get lost. Neil prefers online video replays so that he can pause, rewind, and even work on other things while the video plays in the background.

Warren

Warren was a 38-year-old business attorney with a three year membership in the NCSB; he described himself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. Warren was very relaxed during his interview, leaning back in a reclining chair with his feet up in his office. He expressed his interest in the results of my study, as he stated that CLE in general, and online CLE in particular, was not very useful for him as an attorney. Warren shared that he has found very little CLE content that he could apply to his practice. He does prefer in-person CLE to online delivery, however, as the online format allows him to lose focus and takes away from the

experience. Warren usually selects online CLE when he is in need of credits, as they are a convenient way to earn credit quickly and with minimal time and cost.

Warren attended an observation of a group viewing of a CLE video replay, where he arrived just before the start of the session. He selected a seat near the rear of the room and immediately set up his laptop. Warren placed the handout materials from the CLE in his bag and took out another folder. Throughout the observation he referred often to the papers in the folder and his laptop, glancing occasionally at the replay monitor. There was no clear evidence that Warren was engaged with the CLE at all.

A focus group was held not long after the observed CLE in which Warren participated. He attended the CLE because he needed the credits, but stated he had no real interest in the topic. The fact that the replay was held in a conference room at Warren's law firm made it convenient for him to simply bring work from his office, attend, and sign off for credit.

Cheryl

Cheryl was a female business attorney, 27 years old, and described herself as very comfortable with computers and the Internet. She has been a member of the NCSB for one year. Her interview was held in her office not long after she returned from lunch. Cheryl was very pleased to be a participant in the study. Many of the CLEs she attended to date were scheduled through the law firm as part of their new lawyer professional development; the schedule included both in-person and online CLEs. Cheryl had no preference for one over the other, although she found the social aspect of in-person CLE more enjoyable although not necessarily more useful for her practice.

As an attendee during my observation of a group viewing of an online CLE, Cheryl arrived several minutes early and took a seat in the middle of the room. While waiting for the

replay to begin, she looked through the handouts and set a notepad and pen on the table in front of her. Her laptop bag was with her, but she did not take access it during the observation period. When the replay began, Cheryl appeared attentive with her body turned toward the replay monitor much of the time. She was observed looking at the handout materials when they were referred to in the video.

In the focus group that convened shortly after the observed CLE, Cheryl explained that she attended the replay because she was scheduled by the professional development team at the firm. The topic was a requirement for her both by the NCSB and the firm, and it was the first time she had attended a CLE on that subject. Cheryl was appreciative of the handouts but did note that she missed the interaction that takes place during an in-person CLE. She felt that because there was no one present to lead a discussion it was too easy for attendees to lose focus. Cheryl would have preferred to view the CLE alone rather than in a group, as she felt there was no benefit to being with the other attendees and would have been able to pause for a break when she wanted one.

Michael

This participant was a 37-year-old male practicing finance law. His membership in the NCSB spans eight years, and he described himself as very comfortable with computers and the Internet. Michael was very interested in the literature regarding professional development and adult learning, so was happy to participate in the study. He prefers online delivery of CLE not only because of its convenience but also because of the breadth of topics available to him. Michael typically takes CLEs on subjects that he finds somewhat interesting but are not necessarily related to his practice area. Because he can view them in his office, he often multitasks as they play. Michael found in-person CLE to be more time consuming, simply

because he feels he must give all of his attention to the presenter out of professional courtesy; this means he cannot give attention during the course to any work-related matters so the time seems to be wasted when the topic does not relate to his practice area.

Anna

The most veteran attorney participant was Anna, who at 57 years old is a female immigration attorney. She has been a member of the NCSB for 28 years and described herself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. Anna was welcoming during her interview and stated that she was surprised there was so little research on this topic. In her almost 30 years of practice, Anna has seen a shift from primarily in-person CLE to online delivery and believes this shift has devalued the educational value of professional development for attorneys. Because it is so easy for attorneys to simply play a CLE in the background and not necessarily give it their full attention, she questions how much actual learning is taking place. Anna admitted to not giving her full attention to online CLEs she has taken and attributed the lack of focus on both the repetitive nature of the courses and the fact that no one was there to command her attention.

Corey

Corey was a male employment attorney who at 31 years old has been a member of the NCSB for three years. He described himself as very comfortable with computers and the Internet. Cory was running rather late for his interview as his work day became unexpectedly busy; however, he was glad to take a break for something he deemed interesting. Like Cheryl, Corey attends CLEs that are scheduled for him by his firm's professional development team to comply not only with the NCSB mandate but that of the firm as well. Because his hours are divided equally among in-person and online CLE, Corey found value in both delivery methods

and had no preference for one over the other. He did state that online CLE viewed in a group seemed to lack interaction among attendees, and it was easy to identify the veteran attorneys who were attending merely for credit. Those attorneys typically paid little to no attention to the CLE, appearing to work on other things. In the last year Corey has found himself among that group, particularly for topics that were already repetitive for him, such as the NCSB annual ethics requirement.

During the observation of the in-person CLE, Corey arrived approximately 15 minutes before the presenter began. He selected a seat toward the front of the room and placed the handout materials on the table without looking at them. While waiting for the session to begin, Corey introduced himself to the presenter and several attendees. During the session, Corey appeared to be attentive to the presenter and interacted by answering questions posed to the audience. As the session came to a close, Corey exchanged business cards with the presenter and one other attendee. Corey was unable to attend the focus group held later the same day.

John

John was a 32-year-old male attorney in the business practice area. He has been a member of the NCSB for three years and described himself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. John's interview took place in his office not long after he arrived for the day, and he was relaxed and interested in the purpose of the study. John prefers online CLE because he finds them convenient and less time consuming than in-person CLE, which often requires travel. He typically prefers to view online CLE alone; however, he has found some group viewings to be beneficial. The most beneficial group viewings have been with the attorneys in his own firm and practice area because they were able to discuss how the CLE

content translated to their practice. These discussions did not take place in group viewings where the group was made up of attendees from differing firms and practice areas.

John attended the observation of a group viewing of an online replay where the group was made up of attendees from several law firms and practice areas. He arrived a few minutes before the replay began and selected a seat near the back of the room. John looked briefly through the handout materials before placing them in his bag and taking out his laptop. Once the replay began, John seemed to pay little attention to the viewing monitor, glancing up only occasionally. He accessed his laptop often, although there was no clear evidence that this was in any way related to the CLE.

After the observed CLE, John participated in the focus group where he expressed that he took the CLE because he needed the credit. He reiterated his preference for groups limited at least by practice area, but only for topics that relate to business law. For more general topics, John prefers to view replays alone so that he can control the video himself, such as pausing for breaks.

Amy

Amy was a 50-year-old female attorney practicing employment law. She has been a member of the NCSB for 26 years and described herself as somewhat comfortable with computers and the Internet. Amy attended the in-person CLE that was observed, as well as the focus group for that observation. This was prior to her interview. During the observed CLE, Amy arrived just as the presenter began and took the first open seat near the door. She appeared out of breath and apologized for being late. Amy did not have the handouts that were placed outside the door and was not observed going to pick them up. Her attention was on the presenter although she did not respond to questions posed to the attendees or interact in any other way.

In the focus group after the observation Amy stated that she attended the CLE at the invitation of Anna, who knew Amy needed the credit for her ethics requirement. Although she would have preferred to view the topic online, the CLE was joint sponsored by the county and the host firm, therefore, free of cost to Amy. An ideal CLE group size for Amy is less than 25 to discourage distractions and allow for more meaningful discussion.

Amy agreed to meet me in her office for an interview, as she heard about my study from Anna. It was a rainy morning, and Amy was running late. When she was ready to see me, she was pleasant, but her attention was split between the interview and her cell phone alerts. Amy finds CLE inconvenient and impractical, particularly after so many years of practice. Her preference is online CLE simply for the convenience, although she does feel that face-to-face CLE offers more opportunity for interaction and social learning.

Results

The results of the data analysis are presented in relation to each research question. Data from each interview, observation, and focus group were examined thoroughly and coded to identify themes for each research question. Finally, the research questions were answered based on the identified themes.

Theme Development

In order to identify themes in the data, the transcriptions and observation notes were entered into QDA Miner Lite. After reading and re-reading the data, numerous codes emerged. Ten themes were then identified based on the code frequencies. The themes and codes are identified in Table 4.

Table 4

Code Frequencies

Themes	Codes	Frequency
RQ1:		
Professional Development	Professional Development	19
Application	Application	17
Time Commitment	Time Commitment	17
	Helpful	8
	Frustration	8
	Useless	3
RQ2:		
Convenience	Convenient	21
Focus	Focus	19
Effectiveness	Ineffective	19
Control	Control	16
	Multitask	8
RQ3:		
Resources	Resources	8
Usefulness	Usefulness	7
Collaboration	Collaboration	5
	Repetition	4
	Team Development	2

In describing their experiences with online delivery of CLE, convenience was the most common theme to emerge. According to adult learning theory, adult learners are self-directed and thus seek knowledge on their own (Knowles, 1973). This is enhanced by the fact that most attorneys noted that online delivery of CLE allows for selection of courses from a more diverse catalogue of topics than is practical for courses delivered in person. Because learning can also be found in “non-human appliances” (Siemens, 2005, p. 5), connectivism is also enhanced by the

use of online delivery of CLE. Attorneys recognize that it has become more convenient to use computers and the Internet to access the professional education courses that they need in their profession.

Professional development was the next theme identified from the data. Considering the adult learning theory principle which states that adults seek learning that assists them in their specific role in society (Knowles, 1973), the use of online CLE exhibits how valuable this is to attorneys. The data show that attorneys seek CLE that can be applied to their individual practice area or to maintain their professional standing. These data also show adults' readiness to learn, another principle of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973). Online CLE supports these principles, as attorneys identified how the delivery method allows them to continue their professional growth, either because they can locate sessions that apply to their practice area or at the very least to meet the state-mandated CLE requirements. A connectivist principle states that the ability to know is more important than what is already known (Siemens, 2005). The data show this to be true as the attorneys described how they use online CLE to find what they need when they need it.

The same connectivist principle is seen in the theme of focus. Because attorneys can search for the knowledge they need when they actually need it, they easily lose focus during mandatory CLE courses, especially those taken online. This lends to attorneys multitasking during online CLE, which is shown in the data. This trend may be related to the fact that adult learners do not do well in learning environments where their ability to self-direct is denied (Knowles, 1973), such as when a CLE is taken simply to satisfy a requirement. The data show that attorneys primarily view online CLE as a means to satisfy the NCSB requirement and thus find themselves focusing on other work.

This same result is seen in the theme of effectiveness, where the data confirm attorneys seek out online CLE mainly to satisfy their requirements. Adult learning is problem-centered (Knowles, 1973), and online CLE supports that principle. Attorneys are able to see the connection between online CLE and its effect on their professional development requirement, supporting the key connectivist skill of the ability to see connections (Siemens, 2005).

Applicability appeared numerous times in the data as well. The adult learning principle that adults are self-directed learners (Knowles, 1973) is exhibited here, because attorneys select CLE topics that best meet their individual interests and needs. The data also show that attorneys prefer online CLE that applies to their reality; however, since reality is always shifting, what is known as right today may not be right tomorrow (Siemens, 2005). Attorneys find the repetition of CLE requirements to be detrimental to online CLE; however, the topic may be more applicable as laws and reality change.

The next theme that is prevalent in the data is time commitment. Attorneys value their time and find that CLEs perceived as wasteful take away from their practice. Adults prefer to direct their own learning and often find no value in mandated courses they cannot apply effectively to their practice. The intent of connectivist learning activity is accurate and timely knowledge (Siemens, 2005). The data show that attorneys do not experience this with online CLE, although they do accept that it is the intent.

Control was another theme that appeared throughout the data. The self-directed learner thrives when he can control his learning (Knowles, 1973), and the data show that online CLE promotes this principle. Attorneys recognize the value of self-directedness and prefer online CLE for this reason. They also experience the connectivist principle that learning is the process

of connecting sources of information (Siemens, 2005) as shown by the propensity to choose online CLE that meets their needs.

A less prominent but still relevant theme emerged regarding resources. Connectivism has principles that state the individual is the starting point of learning and the ability to know is more important than what one already knows (Siemens, 2005). Attorneys' experience with online CLE resources promotes these principles, as the data show attorneys are selective regarding which resources they connect with and when.

Another less prominent theme in the data is usefulness. Knowles (1973) theorized that adults often abandon their self-directedness when attending educational activities designed with a pedagogical basis, which the data show in that attorneys do not find online CLE useful for practice. However they do find it useful to satisfy the mandatory credit requirement for professional development, supporting the connectivist theory that accurate and timely knowledge is the intent of connectivist activities (Siemens, 2005).

The final theme to emerge was collaboration. Based on the data, online CLE does not promote collaboration, which inhibits the adult learning principle that adults possess a depth of knowledge and value collaborative educational activities where they can be both seekers and contributors to learning (Knowles, 1973). Online CLE further impedes the connectivist principle stating learning is in the diversity of opinions (Siemens, 2005), as the data show no collaboration takes place in online CLE. Connectivism also states that creating and maintaining connections is imperative for continual learning (Siemens, 2005)

Research Question Responses

CQ: How do practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience online CLE courses? The response to this central research question comes from the review of themes

emerging from the three sub-questions. These themes were related to the theoretical principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) in order to describe the attorney experience with online CLE. Based on this analysis, attorneys find online CLE to be a convenient vehicle to satisfy the NCSB mandate for professional development, but largely ineffective, with little transfer to the practice of law.

RQ1: What meaning do practicing attorneys ascribe to CLE? Responses to the interview questions, observation notes, and responses and notes from the focus groups were analyzed and coded in order to identify themes for this research question. The theoretical principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) informed the coding process. The themes that emerged in relation to RQ1 are (a) professional development, (b) practical application, and (c) time commitment. These were identified from the codes presented in Table 4.

In the individual interviews, professional development was mentioned numerous times. Most participants noted that the NCSB mandate is theoretically sound; however, most also expressed that the intention is not fully realized. Caryn stated:

I think for many of us it becomes more about fulfilling a certain number of hours, than actually learning. If we were actually learning, maybe that would be meaningful but the pressures of our clients and practice means that we often jam at least some of it in a way that is not necessarily pertinent.

This theme also came up during the focus group sessions. According to John, when a CLE is targeted to a specific practice area, “it opens up dialogue about how to improve the team and individual practice of each attorney.”

Most participants also discussed the practical application of CLE during the individual interviews, with some finding CLE highly applicable and others not at all. There was no trend among age or practice area for either viewpoint. Joshua, who has been practicing more than 20 years, stated that “there's enough options now that you can choose the topics that are really helpful and meaningful for your practice.” However, Amy, who has also practiced for more than 20 years in the same practice area as Joshua, noted that “after so many years, CLE is very repetitive, and it is generally not applicable to my actual practice.” During a focus group discussion, Cheryl discussed practical application as well, stating that “I thought the handout was a great resource that I will be able to refer back to as I continue to grow my practice.”

All of the participants mentioned the time commitment of CLE during the individual interviews as well. Most mentioned that they often chose CLEs that fit their schedule rather than arrange their schedule to attend a CLE. According to Michael, “An hour of CLE credit can actually take several hours away from billable time because of travel, and if it's live I can't just pause and move on to real work.” Time commitment came up only once during the focus group convened after an in-person CLE, where Matthew stated, “While I can't say it was a complete waste of time, it certainly took time from my day that I would rather have devoted to billable work.” This seemed to be borne out in the observations, as most attendees appeared to be working on other tasks during the online CLEs observed but were completely attentive to the presenter of the observed live CLE.

RQ2: What benefits and concerns do attorneys identify with CLE delivered online?

Responses to the interview questions, observation notes, and responses and notes from the focus groups were analyzed and coded in order to identify themes for this research question. The theoretical principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens,

2005) informed the coding process. The themes that emerged in relation to RQ2 are as follows: (a) convenience, (b) focus, (c) effectiveness, and (d) control. These were identified from the codes presented in Table 4.

Each participant mentioned convenience as a benefit to online CLE during the individual interviews. Two participants noted that the convenience of online delivery was also a concern. The availability of topics and the ability to view CLEs when time allowed were considered the most convenient aspects of online delivery. Two of the participants with more than 20 years of membership in the NCSB pointed out that online delivery of CLE vastly improved the availability of topics over what they had access to earlier in their careers. Joshua stated that online CLE “dramatically improved the options of CLEs” over what was available earlier in his practice, and “specifically allows you to tailor your CLEs to matters that are meaningful and important for your practice area and stay up on the latest trends or more importantly the latest legal requirements.” Anna echoed the sentiment that there are more topics available for CLE now because of online delivery; however, she noted that “attorneys can just grab any video to satisfy their requirement, so you have to wonder how valuable is this legal education.” With regard to the flexibility of when to view an online CLE, most participants discussed that online CLE was the most convenient to view when it fit their schedule. This was expressed by Michael who stated that “online CLE saves me so much billable time. A couple hours of credit can actually cost me up to four hours of billable time, factoring in travel,” a statement he reiterated during his focus group. This sentiment was echoed in the response from Lisa who stated, “The online ones usually allow me to do them from my desk, when I can do it,” making online CLE much more convenient when it comes to time spent. These responses show that most

participants appreciate the convenience of online CLE for satisfying the professional development requirement, not for the educational value.

The theme of focus was also very prevalent throughout the interviews, with most participants listing it as a concern in relation to online CLE. Several mentioned the ease with which an online CLE could be played in the background while other work was being completed, as evidenced by a statement from Warren: “I find that if I'm sitting there watching it on my computer then I'm just going to be doing other stuff.” This lack of focus during an online CLE was evident during the observations of the online CLEs, where most attendees were using laptops or phones or going over paperwork that they brought with them rather than showing attention to the replay monitors. Focus also came up during the focus group convened after the in-person CLE. Amy shared her belief that having a presenter in the room “discourages distraction because no one wants to be rude to another legal professional taking their time to speak with you.” Cheryl’s comments during the focus group convened after a video replay were very similar to Amy’s:

It was so easy for people to focus on other things, so I wish there had been someone in the room who could lead a discussion. Maybe if there had been, people wouldn’t have spent all of their time doing other work.

The theme of effectiveness was identified as often as that of focus throughout the data. Most of the participants mentioned effectiveness as a concern for online CLE, while only a few noted it as a benefit. During her interview, Anna discussed her view that online CLE allowed attorneys to “just take anything for credit, even if it doesn’t apply to their practice area. How effective can that be?” Joshua had an opposing view, however, as evidenced by his statement that “there's enough options now that you can choose the topics that are really helpful and

meaningful for your practice” from the vast catalog of online CLE, thus making it easy to take things effective for practice. In observing two online CLEs it was difficult to find evidence of effectiveness; most attendees paid little observable attention to the replay itself, and there was no evidence of note-taking. The observations were confirmed during the focus group convened after an online CLE, where John said, “I only came because I need credits for the year. I can’t say I’ve gotten anything out of the CLE that was new or useful for my practice,” a statement with which Warren agreed. However, when Cheryl mentioned having a person to lead discussion might have led to more engagement, both Warren and John agreed. John admitted that he arrived for the CLE expecting it to be ineffective, thus he “brought things that were more applicable to what I do.”

Control also came up often in the data as a recurring theme regarding the benefits of online CLE. Most attorneys prefer online CLE because they can, as Henry described, “pause the presentation if something comes up that needs my attention. I also like that I can view from my desk, which means I am not inaccessible of someone is trying to reach me.” During the observations of online CLEs, participants exhibited control in when they arrived and where they focused their attention. While no study participants exited and re-entered the room during the observation time frames, several other attendees did take it upon themselves to step out periodically. Control also came up during Cheryl’s focus group, where she shared that she “would have preferred to view [the CLE replay] alone in my office so I could decide when it was time for a break.”

RQ3: How do attorneys connect CLE to their legal practice? Responses to the interview questions, observation notes, and responses and notes from the focus groups were analyzed and coded in order to identify themes for this research question. The theoretical

principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) informed the coding process. The themes that emerged in relation to RQ3 are as follows: (a) resources, (b) usefulness, and (c) collaboration. These were identified from the codes presented in Table 4.

The most common theme to appear in the data was that of resources. In the interviews, several participants pointed to the handouts and CLE-provided resources as ways the participants connect the CLE to their practice. Caryn share that she will often “print out at least some portion of the written materials that seem pertinent . . . and keep it on my shelf for some period of time, along with the other statutory books and review items” so that she could find it when she wanted to review something. Lisa also found that the resources for many of the CLEs she attends were a valuable way to connect CLE to her practice, as she finds immense value in “having those materials in hand, so if I do need to negotiate [the points covered in the CLE] six months after the CLE I can refresh my memory.” Not everyone agreed that the handouts are a useful way to connect CLE to practice, however; according to Andrea, the resources really had no impact on her practice after the CLE. “For a long time I’d make these little binders [of CLE resources] but then I found that I almost never went back to them.” During the observations many attendees were seen looking briefly through the resources and then setting them aside. Only a few, like Warren, were observed placing the handouts in their bag, indicating that they planned to keep them for at least some period of time. In the focus groups, the limited applicability of resources was supported by a comment from Joshua who does “keep the resources, but they really just sit on the shelf until I replace them with next year’s resources.” Joshua, Matthew, and Amy agreed that while they appreciate the presenter providing resources, most of the time it is not anything that they actually use in practice.

Usefulness appeared numerous times in the data as well, with many participants noting that few CLE courses can be connected to their practice. A common sentiment was expressed by Anna, who said “to require me to get 12 hours of continuous legal education in my field . . . I mean, there aren't 12 hours' worth of information out there most years!” There were exceptions, such as Joshua who expressed in his interview that online CLE in particular allowed attorneys access to so many topics that finding one to connect to their practice is easier than ever. Like the theme of resources, evidence in the observations indicated that only a few participants would potentially connect the CLE to practice, as none were seen taking notes but some did place the handouts in a personal bag. In a focus group, limited connectivity was indicated by a statement from John that “general CLE topics really don't help me in my practice, but when there are ones targeted to my practice with like participants, it leads to more beneficial discussion and take-aways.”

This statement by John during the focus group also exhibits the theme of collaboration. During interviews, several participants made statements that very little collaboration happens during in-person CLEs and almost none at all during those delivered online. Neil observed: “In my experience, interaction is minimal in a group [viewing of a CLE]. Most people are doing other work. A lot of times, they are just there because they have to be.” Collaboration was mentioned by Warren as being evident during in-person CLEs where “there's Q&A where you have the opportunity to ask questions which isn't as easy in online CLEs.” The only mention of positive interaction in online CLE came from Joshua, who stated,

I think the anonymity of doing [CLE] via the web maybe gives people more confidence and they're not concerned about their question because they can ask it anonymously. I

would have thought it would be easier in person but I think that web format equally promotes that and may in fact be better at it.

When I observed the in-person CLE, collaboration was evident by the interaction between the presenter and attendees, while there was only one instance of observed collaboration between two attendees. This took place when Corey was seen exchanging business cards with another attendee at the close of the session.

Summary

Chapter Four provided a description of each participant in narrative form before identifying the themes which emerged from the data. Finally, the central research question and three sub-questions posed by this case study were answered. The chapter described how participants responded in the interviews, observations, and focus groups. Each research question was answered by identifying the themes present in the data, which were found through open coding of the data. The themes were used to describe the attorney experience with online CLE.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this holistic single case study was to describe the experiences of practicing attorneys in North Carolina completing continuing legal education (CLE) courses online. This chapter will present a summary of the findings from the study, followed by a discussion of how the study relates to previous research of adult professional development. Also presented here are the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study; the delimitations and limitations of this study; and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

There were one central research question and three sub-questions that the data addressed. The central research question asked, How do practicing attorneys in North Carolina experience online CLE courses? Findings show that attorneys' experiences align with both adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973) and connectivism (Siemens, 2005) in various ways. The most prominent principle of adult learning theory present in online CLE is the self-directedness (Knowles, 1973) of attorneys as they select online CLE primarily in order to satisfy the requirement for attorney development, and to a lesser extent to expand their knowledge of the practice of law. As Knowles (1980) stated, adults exhibit their self-directedness any time they seek knowledge, which attorneys do by selecting the CLE courses needed to satisfy the state requirement or to increase their knowledge of legal practice. Knowles (1973) also pointed out that pedagogical approaches to education often result in adults abandoning their self-directedness. This is evident in the data as many participants shared that they seldom find use in CLE courses that do not apply to their actual practice of law but take them merely to satisfy the mandate. This finding is aligned with several studies (Bennetts et al., 2012; Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015; Collin et al.,

2012) that found that professionals often attend professional development, including CLE, because of a mandate instead of attending to advance knowledge.

Another prominent theoretical principle is the importance of knowing where to locate knowledge, a connectivist principle (Siemens, 2005). The study participants did this regularly by taking advantage of online CLE. Downes (2006) stated that what modern learners know to be true is embedded in the network of connections curated by the learner. Attorneys in the study repeatedly referred to using the Internet to locate needed CLE topics as well as resources shared or referred to by CLE presenters.

The first sub-question asked, What meaning to practicing attorneys ascribe to online CLE? Findings of the data show that online CLE is considered highly valuable primarily as a method by which attorneys can satisfy the NCSB mandatory CLE requirement. It is also valuable in helping attorneys save time when attending CLE as well as locating courses to apply to their individual practice areas.

The second sub-question asked, What benefits and concerns do attorneys identify with CLE delivered online? The findings show that attorneys consider the convenience of online CLE to be the most important benefit of the delivery method. Findings also show that the biggest concern is the lack of focus that online CLE promotes, rendering it relatively ineffective as a professional development tool.

The third sub-question asked, How do attorneys connect CLE to their legal practice? Findings indicate that resources and useful topics would be ideal ways to connect CLE to practice; however, this is rarely the case. Likewise, the lack of collaboration in most CLE, especially those delivered online is another inhibitor to connecting learning activities to practice.

Discussion

The theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two is primarily contradicted by the findings of this study. Theoretically many studies found that principles of adult learning theory in professional development (PD) made for applicable and useful learning; however, this study did not find such effective transfer. This is despite findings that such principles are indeed present in online CLE. According to Militello et al. (2014), healthcare professionals reported that online continuing education promoted not only flexibility but also overwhelming participant satisfaction. While attorneys reported appreciation for the flexibility that online CLE offers, there was little satisfaction with online CLE. This minimal attorney satisfaction is evident in the observations as well as statements from several participants regarding their propensity to multitask during online CLE. During the observations few participants were engaged with the course and reported during focus groups that there was no value in attending aside from satisfying the NCSB requirement. Likewise, several participants noted that online CLE was valuable primarily for the flexibility of time or travel.

Unlike the findings by Farrell et al. (2012), attorneys in my study reported little to no connection between the objectives of online CLE courses and their practice. Farrell et al. (2012) determined that continuing education delivered online should be designed around objectives linking learner competencies to practice; this link is not evident in the data obtained from attorneys in my study. Instead, participants like Anna noted that attorneys often simply watch a video on “any topic” to satisfy the mandate, even if it does not relate to their practice.

Additionally, in considering adult learning theory and online CLE, I looked at the focus of online CLE. Knowles (1973) identified focus as a key difference between traditional pedagogical learning principles and adult learning theory. Learning activities that rely on the

teacher or facilitator to decide what knowledge to impart neglect the adult learner's self-directedness and ability to apply the knowledge to practice. Amy confirms this, noting that, particularly after many years of practice, the online CLE classes she takes almost never apply to her area of practice. This affirms Knowles et al. (2014) assertion that, while adult learning is integral to PD for organizations like the NCSB, it is not necessarily the goal. Instead, the objective is to ensure attorneys keep current with changes in the law while simultaneously instilling public confidence in attorneys' ability to ensure justice is carried out (Chakraborty & Ghosh, 2015).

Principles of connectivism are also highly present in online CLE, and again this study fails to corroborate the literature on how these principles lead to effective use of online CLE. Unlike the studies by Garcia et al. (2015) and Conradie (2014), online CLE fails to utilize connectivist principles to promote collaboration or engagement for attorneys. The study by Garcia et al. (2015) found that using computer resources such as blogs increased interaction among participants. Attorneys in my study reported that interaction was minimal, whether in online or face-to-face CLEs. While observations of online CLE showed participants utilizing computers, none were used in support of the attended CLE. Several participants, including Cheryl, found that online CLE in particular offered more opportunity for distraction than interaction.

Similarly, Conradie (2014) found that connectivist principles in adult learning activities supported self-directedness, engagement, and motivation of learners. However, after observations of online CLE, it seems the only connectivist aspect of the sessions was the delivery method. Some participants noted that they occasionally sought resources outside of the CLE, but this was not a common response. For example, Andrea noted that although she once kept

resources from CLEs, she found that they were never useful after the course and so discontinued the practice of saving them. More importantly, she shared that she never seeks additional resources based on a CLE.

Several participants mentioned during interviews that they are never prompted by a CLE to locate additional resources for knowledge of the topic. Warren noted that CLE is seen primarily as a requirement and not a way to enhance his practice. Instead, if he needs “information for a case, I know where to locate it,” which he clarified to be online research databases targeted to the legal profession. Although outside the scope of this study, the statement indicates that at least one attorney uses connectivist learning principles to acquire the knowledge he needs when it is needed.

Results of the study are equally inconsistent with the empirical literature regarding online PD. While there is little hesitation for attorneys to participate in online CLE, unlike in the study by Rienties et al. (2013), the efficacy of that participation is not being realized as in the studies by Kennedy and Winn (2011), Marks et al. (2014) and Stewart (2014). This study provides previously unexplored data regarding how effective online CLE is for attorneys, which does not align with findings regarding online PD in other fields.

At the conclusion of the study by Rienties et al. (2013), participants showed increased skill with the topic of their online PD course. This is an indicator that online adult learning courses can be effective, however the data from my study does not support Rienties et al. (2013) findings. One participant, Lisa, shared how she utilizes CLE in her practice, stating that she often takes online CLE to prepare for an upcoming case. Lisa was alone in her views on the efficacy of online CLE, however. Several participants indicated that they believe CLE is a good way to keep them up to date on ethical standards, but most see CLE as an NCSB mandate only,

with no transfer to their actual practice. Online CLE was most often reported to be a convenient means to satisfy the requirement.

Like Renties et al. (2013), a study by Kennedy and Winn (2011) found that online CLE, in the form of synchronous video conferencing, led to satisfactory experiences and community building among participants. Marks et al. (2014) found that online PD facilitated positive changes in the pharmacist participants' practice, and Stewart (2014) found that the most effective PD (including that delivered online) includes collaboration among peers. My study found no interaction or collaboration during online CLE and little to no transfer to practice for attorneys.

Implications

There are theoretical, empirical, and practical implications based on the findings of this study. The findings also hold implications for several stakeholder groups regarding attorneys: law firms, governing bodies like the NCSB and NCBA, and clients.

Theoretical Implications

Studies have shown that principles of adult learning theory, when incorporated into PD, lead to effective learning for adults. However, this study indicates that it is not enough to incorporate such principles in conjunction with a professional requirement. Although online CLE promotes self-directedness, the NCSB mandate appears to negate it as attorneys attend because they are required to. PD activities that are mandatory limit the learner's ability to select PD that is useful and can be immediately applied to professional practice. Attorneys have reported that because CLE is mandatory, there is little autonomy related to the selection of CLE courses.

Connectivism has also been shown to make PD effective for learners. Although online CLE utilizes the connectivist principle of using non-human appliances, other principles are

absent from CLE. Incorporating methods by which attorneys can interact, collaborate, and make connections to resources would make online CLE more effective.

Empirical Implications

Because there is so little empirical research on the attorney experience with online CLE, this study should stand alongside that of Kennedy and Winn (2011) in order to provide a more rounded view of the subject. Online CLE can certainly be effective as the study by Kennedy and Winn (2011) shows; however, few attorneys describe their experiences as such. Additional studies are needed to expand the research. This study shows that the inclusion of adult learning theory and connectivism are not enough to make online CLE a useful tool for attorney PD.

Practical Implications

The results of this study show that attorneys do not find online CLE to be effective for the practice of law, despite the limited inclusion of adult learning and connectivist principles. Many participants indicated that they consider CLE an inconvenient requirement rather than an enhancement to their professional development. There is a lack of collaboration, interaction, and connection to sources of knowledge. Including these aspects in online CLE would render them more effective for attorneys.

Additionally, attorneys appear to resent the mandatory requirement that forces them to attend CLE courses that are useless and time consuming. While it is necessary for governing bodies like the NCSB to require adherence to high standards, it is worthwhile to explore the specificity of those requirements.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

This study presents findings that may assist law firms with PD departments designed to keep attorneys accountable to the CLE mandate while also seeking to ensure that compliance

also results in practical use. Firms may consider holding discussion groups regarding online CLE to assist with retention and transfer, or scheduling practice area specific viewings with like participants to foster collaboration.

Governing bodies like the NCSB and NCBA that implement mandates on CLE can find value in the findings regarding the convenience, usefulness, and collaborative effects of online CLE. They may consider adding a component to online CLE requiring some type of reflection or focus group discussion to ensure engagement and transfer to practice. Knowing the value of convenience for online delivery, allowing additional credits may be considered as well, if applicability can be more strongly supported.

This study presents findings that attorneys take ongoing CLE primarily out of obligation, and the knowledge seldom transfers to the actual practice of law. This should be of interest to clients who expect legal professionals to keep current through the use of CLE. Clients may be encouraged to do their own research on changes in the law in order to ask questions of their representatives to ensure that the intent of CLE is realized.

Delimitations and Limitations

CLE requirements vary from state to state, making it necessary to include delimitations on the scope of this study. Delimiting the study to one state's bar association was done to ensure that all participants were held to the same standards and requirements. North Carolina was selected because it is my state of residence and allowed for greater interaction with participants. This study was also delimited to practicing attorneys in order to ensure that all participants pursue CLE in order to satisfy the NCSB requirement. Participants were additionally delimited to those holding a current license to practice law in the state of North Carolina. Setting this delimiter ensured that all participants and CLE courses were a part of the NCSB.

There are several ways in which this study was affected by limitations. The use of volunteer participants ensured that only those willing to be interviewed and observed were included, possibly limiting the natural behavior of the participants. This could be addressed by conducting unannounced observations before the interviews in order to see if the behaviors expressed matched those observed. Another limitation was that eight of the participants came from similar sized law firms, where they had access to a PD team to help keep them current on their CLE requirements by scheduling courses and making attendance convenient. Replications of this study should seek to include participants from various firm sizes and private practices, as the experience may be different.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results from this study indicate an opportunity to explore the unique field of PD specifically for attorneys. While this study addressed online CLE, a study should be conducted regarding effective practices for continuous professional development that can be transferred to practice for attorneys. Likewise, the study should be replicated in other settings to determine if the findings are unique to the NCSB. Another recommendation is that a study be conducted to examine how CLE presenters engage attendees, ensure applicability, and promote transfer of knowledge to legal practice.

Summary

Attorneys' experiences with online CLE indicate little transfer of knowledge to practice, blocking the intent of CLE to keep attorneys up to date on the law. This is despite the inclusion of theoretical principles proven effective for PD in other fields. Knowing this, law firms and governing agencies should investigate more effective ways to keep attorneys accountable for continuing their legal education throughout their practice years.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT SELECTION SURVEY

The goal of this survey is to identify possible participants in a case study about the online Continuing Legal Education (CLE) process. The purpose of the case study is to explain how attorneys experience online delivery of CLE, in hopes that the study might inform future CLE delivery decisions. Please complete the information below. Only those interested in participating in the study have the potential to be contacted for an interview, participation in a focus group, or other discussion pertinent to the study. Any questions about the study can be directed to Kimberly Thomas using the contact information at the end of this survey.

Name: _____ Age: __ Male Female

Legal Practice Area: _____

Firm Size (number of attorneys): _____

Contact email: _____

Contact telephone: _____

1. Are you interested in participating in my case study? Yes No
2. Have you completed at least one online CLE in the last year? Online CLE is defined as synchronous and asynchronous webinars, live webcasts or video replays, or audio streaming seminars. Yes No
3. Have you attended at least one in-person CLE in the last year? Yes No
4. How comfortable are you with using computer technology and the Internet?
 Very comfortable Somewhat comfortable No at all comfortable.
5. What year did you become a member of the North Carolina State Bar?

6. How many CLE courses have you taken in the last 12 months?
- _____
7. How many of those courses were taken via synchronous and asynchronous webinar, live webcast or video replay, or audio streaming?
- _____
8. Please provide three dates/times in the next two weeks that you will be available for an interview. Interviews are expected to take approximately 30 minutes.
- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you know of any other North Carolina attorney who may be interested in participating, please share my contact information.

Kimberly Thomas

_____ (email)

**If chosen as a participant for this study, I will provide an informed consent document for you to sign at the time of the interview.*

APPENDIX B**OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

Observation Date/Time: Location:	Type of CLE observed: Online or In Person	Number of Participants in Attendance:
	Notes:	Reflections:
Environment		
Evidence of self-concept		
Evidence of readiness to learn		
Evidence of self- directedness		
Evidence of human connections		
Evidence of non-human connections		

Evidence of participant attitude toward CLE		
Interactions or community building		

APPENDIX C**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

Dear Kimberly Thomas,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to this approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX D

IRB-APPROVED CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/26/2018 to 7/25/2019
Protocol # 3368.072618

CONSENT FORM

ATTORNEYS' EXPERIENCES WITH CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION DELIVERED ONLINE: A HOLISTIC SINGLE CASE STUDY

Kimberly A. Thomas
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on how attorneys experience Continuing Legal Education (CLE) delivered online. You were selected as a possible participant because you expressed interest in participating, have taken an online and in-person CLE in the last year, and are a member of the North Carolina State Bar. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kimberly Thomas, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of practicing attorneys in North Carolina with CLE that is delivered online.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Allow the researcher to use responses from the screening survey in her data analysis.
2. Participate in an interview (approximately 30 minutes), which would be audio recorded for transcription purposes.
3. Possibly participate in a focus group (approximately 45 minutes), which would be video recorded for transcription observation purposes. Focus group participants will be selected at random from the pool of surveys already collected.
4. Review the transcriptions of your interview and focus group for accuracy (approximately 20 minutes).
5. Be observed while attending an online CLE (approximately 1 hour).

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include confidence in those chosen to represent the public, stemming from the understanding of the methods by which lawyers deepen and expand their knowledge of the law.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/26/2018 to 7/25/2019
Protocol # 3368.072618

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the North Carolina State Bar. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kimberly Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Andrea Beam, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date