Remote Research Bootcamps: What have we learned?

By E. Alana James, Ed.D. &

pd.education
by **DOCTORALNET**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Prior to the pandemic in 2020, research bootcamps were held each year on university campuses around the world. The most usual model was a week-long intensive open to a limited number of PhD students. The usual model suffered from three challenges: 1) it was not scalable as it was limited by personnel resource and space requirements, b) frequently either its cost was prohibitive to some or only a small percentage of students could access the resource, and c) preproposal students were frequently in attendance with those who had collected data and were writing to finish.

In the summer of 2020, DoctoralNet Ltd, tested changes to that model. Two series of synchronous webinars were augmented by open office hours, 10-weeks for the preproposal audience and 8-weeks for those who had data and were working on completing their degree. Research Masters students were allowed to sign up and attend both of these groups. Hereafter, these two options of 10-weeks preproposal and 8-weeks postdata with a mix of Research Masters students will be discussed as the "Wide Open Remote Professional Development (WORPD) Bootcamp.

In addition a third small group (n=22), enrolled by their university due to their being in their EdD program seven or more years and still preproposal. These students engaged in a 10-week program with the same content but with sessions and office hours provided exclusively for their group.

This whitepaper discusses the outcomes and findings from those three options. Remote bootcamps for this study are defined as a series of weekly synchronous and asynchronous events designed to lead early career researchers through the intricacies of thesis and dissertation research design and writing.

Methodology

This study employed mixed methods of data collection and analysis. Student attendance in two types of synchronous events each week were recorded as were the numbers who watched one or both of those events as recordings. In addition, pre and post bootcamp surveys were offered and series of interviews were conducted at the end of the study.

Key Findings

Key Finding #1 Stalled Students & the Need for Structure

Most of the students who attended did so because they were stalled in the progression of their research.

Of those who filled out surveys… 81% of those attending the WORPD bootcamps reported that they felt stalled. 100% of the EdD group reported being stalled. Discussing why they attended, interviewees added that they felt the needed the support of regular meetings in order to ensure regular progress. Following are representative snippets from the interview data…

> *"I came to the boot camp because I wanted to have something structured that would see me through the summer. And the way my program is set up is once you're finished with your preliminary orals, the next time anybody talks to you unless you happen to talk to them. The next deadline is your dissertation defense and that seem to leave me in some large ocean waters that I wasn't entirely comfortable with it. Um, having said that, I can always go back to my advisor, but I was looking for something "Think structured", at least for the next 10 weeks in that particular."*

> *"I thought, okay, I'm gone to be on my own this summer, and, and then I got your email. And I was like, okay, you know, and I took the survey, and then I said, Oh, this is different, and when I went on to PD education, I was like, whoo hoo, I was a kid in the candy store. -- so much stuff. I was excited."*

> *"I was a little apprehensive because I needed direct science specific formatting help. And I had all these random questions, and I wasn't sure when to ask them or if they were okay to ask in this kind of seminar format. It's clear now that everyone is comfortable saying anything – it helps"*

Key Finding#2 Outcomes Are Closely Related to University Enrollment

Quantitative data are clear:

Of the 22 EdD preproposal students enrolled by their university, were no-shows (18%). Of those who participated to a greater or lessor extent (n=18) eight are working towards proposal hearings by January (a 44% success rate with students stalled for seven or more years). Participation by their university included notifications from the Dean of the Graduate School and/or the students' supervisor, and regular meetings between DoctoralNet staff and the Dean. The engagement enjoyed during the summer continued over the fall with an average of eight students attending open office hours at what is 5am in their time zone because that would be before they left for their work as administration and faculty in schools.

Of the 927 students who signed up for information on the WORPD bootcamps, 370 participated (40%) but only 36 (>1%)participated enough to compete in outcomes with the participating EdDs. Of that 1% though 65% continue to engage in the research community by attending webinars and open office hours.

In summation of outcomes the following interview data makes the value of the experience clear.

"I would say it's an excellent program to keep you on track. At the exact time that you need help staying on track.   For me, it gave me HOPE again that I could finish.

If a person was asking me about it, I would actually ask back: well, are you specifically stuck? Have you not been writing for a while and now you need to start writing again, on Have you been spinning your wheels for the last six months and you can't get a hold of your advisor, this is going to get you back on track, you're going to have an hour where you know you're supposed to be, you're gonna have an assignment, that is a doable assignment.

You're going to have to work but that's exactly. If you are signing up for this boot camp. you're signing up to get yourself working, either continuing or back on track. I actually think, it would be super helpful for people who just have finished their courses and have been left loose and have no idea what to do next, or for those who have almost lost the will to continue."

Key Finding #3-Two Reflections from the Leaders' Perspective

As the leader of the three types of experience, Dr James kept a reflective journal that merged with the suite of slides and webinar notes and transcripts throughout the 10-week bootcamp experience. Those data make two things abundantly clear:

1. Both the 10-week preproposal and 8-week postdata bootcamp would not have been as rich an experience for students without the full suite of pd.education website videos, writing, interactive self-assessments, and opt-in resources to draw upon. Every synchronous session had a least a dozen and frequently more than that pd.education resources to allow these early stage researchers to delve more deeply during the homework for the following week.

2. Because of the asynchronous aspect of webinars that registrants could watch later by recording, ten students (<10%) participated to the level to earn endorsements without ever attending a live session. One of those was an EdD student who is third to have a date set for her proposal hearing by her supervisor.

As was clear from her journal…

"It just goes to show that in an online learning environment the teacher is less able to correctly judge who is learning and who is not. Engagement needs to be measured in multiple ways to make up for this deficiency."

Visual Data

Data Collected	1st University–EdDs	Pre-Proposal	Post-Data	Research Masters
How Registered	By University – Supervisors choice?	Student Self Registration / # Active (%)	Student Self Registration / # Active (%)	Student Self Registration / # Active (%)
949 students / n= 388 attended (40%) / endorsements	22 / 18 (81%) / 81%	355 / 228 (64%) / 19	387 / 142 (38%) /17	185 / 89 (48%)
Initial Survey (n=) % who said they were stalled	100% stalled	85% stalled	76% stalled	81% stalled
Their content options…	Synchronous or Asynchronous + Office Hours	Synchronous or Asynchronous + Office Hours	Synchronous or Asynchronous + Office Hours	Synchronous or Asynchronous + Office Hours
Outcomes	12 planning on going to proposal in next 4 months (55%)	15 Continuing to attend live community meetings	14 Self reports on progress from community meetings	
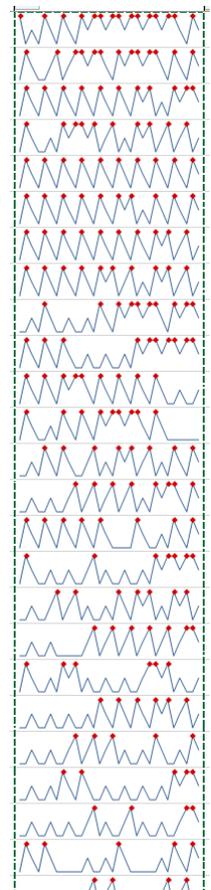
As indicated by the double red dots on the top of the sparklines data to the right,
It was frequently seen that the most engaged students both came to the
webinars and watched the recordings.

Data by client university Carnegie classification or graduate population type...

Type of University/ Bootcamp Program	#s who Attended Synchronous	#s Who Attended Asynchronous	Totals / Notes
Special Class for EdDs	16	19	35 / 65% watched both
Research Universities/ Both Bootcamps	25 "with data" 44 "preproposal"	29 "with data" 64 "preproposal"	162 students /some watching both
Masters Dominant Universities/ Both Bootcamps	10 "with data" 24 "preproposal"	9 "with data" 22 "preproposal"	65 students / some watching both

Conclusion

Clearly, remote research bootcamps have a place in the future of postgraduate and graduate education due to their ability to scale, reach students where they are in the preproposal to postdata continuum. In order to move past the tendency of students in an online setting to disengage, closer monitoring and enrollment by the university is suggested. Next steps seem to indicate a range of models from the WORPD bootcamp to the very intense and personalized EdD programs discussed here.

Key Takeaways

- **Takeaway #1:** Remote research bootcamps meet the needs of students who are looking for direction to finish their thesis or dissertation or who are stalled out on that journey.
- **Takeaway #2:** Big self-enrollment does not garner the same results as enrollment targeted and supported in part by the university. There is room for a new model that benefits from the scale of WORPD yet with the personalization of intent of the EdD model described here.
- **Takeaway #3:** Students who are engaged over the summer are likely to continue their engagement in communities in the fall and spring. This is especially important in regards to the EdD population who fall off once the schools they are employed in start in the fall.

For more information on how specialized courses in academic writing, getting published or research bootcamps might work on your university campus, feel free to write Michael@doctoralnet.com to set an appointment for a 30 minute free consultation.

pd.education
by **DOCTORALNET**