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Constructing Pedagogical Approaches Among Part-Time Community College Faculty Members: A Grounded Theory Research Study

By

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

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An Abstract of

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Although community colleges serve close to half of the undergraduate students in the United States, there is a lack of empirical literature about teaching in community college settings (Grubb, 1999; Moriarity 2007). More specifically, existing research is lacking on what is known about part-time instructors at community colleges, who teach millions of students each year and represent 70% of the instructional workforce (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). Although community colleges rely heavily on this contingent workforce to teach our most diverse and at-risk populations of students, very little is known about how they teach, how they arrive at their approaches to teaching, and the potential impact of these teaching methodologies and practices (Sperling, 2003). Through a grounded theory methodology, this study examined a small group of part-time community college faculty members to discover how they arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their classroom instruction. A series of semi-structured interviews generated data that were analyzed using open, intermediate, and advanced coding methods. Data analysis resulted in the development of a theory explaining the pedagogical decision-making process of part-time community college
faculty members. The study produced two major conclusions: (a) the lived experiences of (part-time community college) instructors and existing environmental factors are not just static elements in the teaching process but are integrated through a central concept – connections in the teaching process; and (b) instructors are learners who make connections between new and old information to construct new knowledge and create meaning as they encounter people, things, and events in the teaching process.
For Amy, Sammy, and Mick
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Chapter 1

Introduction

On Friday, February 3, 2012, Harvard University hosted the inaugural Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching (HILT) Symposium, which was designed, in part, to promote pedagogical innovation in higher education through identification of students’ current and future needs while building on research in the assessment of existing approaches to teaching. According to then Harvard President Drew Faust, higher education must “redefine teaching based on the ideas, evidence, and technology of today’s world” (Harvard University, n.d.). At LaGuardia Community College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, Faust’s dictum is exemplified through a year-long Designed for Learning seminar for faculty members. Among the goals of the teaching and learning seminar was to empower faculty members at the college to develop new classroom strategies and engage in dialogue about pedagogy to enhance student learning (LaGuardia Community College, n.d.). The innovative teaching initiative at LaGuardia Community College illustrates how pedagogy can be leveraged to create powerful learning experiences for students in community college classrooms. Unfortunately, the idea of pedagogy and teaching in most community colleges is “either neglected or poorly conceptualized and thus not well understood” (Levin, 2008, p. 455).

Traditionally in American higher education, teaching (i.e., pedagogical approaches to instruction) is considered to be part of content expertise (i.e., discipline and subject matter knowledge). Many educators share the common assumption that if a faculty member holds sufficient knowledge of an academic discipline, then the faculty member possesses the ability to teach (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). Over time, and
primarily within the last 50 years, teaching has come to be recognized “as a skill associated with, but separate from, content expertise” (Wilkerson & Irby, p. 388) with a focus on “how instructors teach rather than what they teach” (Grubb, 1999, p. 27).

Within the higher education teaching panorama during this time, different pedagogical approaches began to emerge in association with changing theories of how students learn (Lazerson, Wagener, & Shumanis, 2000) and, as is particularly applicable in community colleges, learning needs of diverse populations of students. As such, it is impossible to examine teaching in higher education in isolation from learning. While this study clearly focused on pedagogical approaches in higher education, and more specifically among part-time community college instructors, it did so within the broader context of pedagogical content knowledge and emerging empirical evidence of how students from diverse populations learn.

**Community Colleges**

Community colleges are distinctive institutions within higher education, especially when considered in terms of history, mission, and identity (Levin, 2008). A traditional conception of community colleges draw attention to academic skills development and job training and places them near the bottom of a tiered educational system (Levin, 2008). While these are in fact elements of the community college mission, it only scratches the surface of the evolving identity of these institutions, whose multiple purposes go well beyond traditional conceptions. The progressive nature of these institutions presents “conditions for faculty [that] affect approaches to and practices of instruction” (p. 457).

**Instruction at community colleges.** Instruction at community colleges is
increasingly challenged by changing demographics and ever more diversity. According to Vigil Laden (2004), students from progressively more diverse backgrounds create a cultural transformation that is being felt in nearly every two-year institution. Their dominant presence is forcing faculty members and administrators to rethink their traditional modes of teaching and learning and explore new ways of ensuring that institutional access, academic success, and equal opportunity for social and career mobility are available and culturally appropriate for these groups. (p. 1)

There is a growing concern about whether or not college curricula, student services, co-curricular activities, community outreach, and pedagogy are changing to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community college student population (King, 1999; Vigil Laden, 2004). As more and more students from diverse backgrounds populate 21st century classrooms, the effectiveness of the community college system, in part, depends upon faculty members who understand the needs of their diverse student populations and how those students learn (Grubb, 1999; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Saenz, 2004); and consequently, adapt their teaching methods to align with these underlying forces.

According to Palmer (2002), 88% of community college faculty members – both full-time and part-time – indicate that lecture/discussion is the primary instructional method used in some or all of their courses. When compared to other instructional methods (i.e., other than lecture/discussion), survey results “drop off precipitously” (Palmer, p. 12) and are consistent across academic disciplines with the exception of vocational areas. Instruction in other career-related areas (e.g., engineering, computer science, health technology) show slightly lower percentages as compared to their liberal arts counterparts but the difference is not statistically significant. The literature on the science of learning provides abundant documentation that didactic instruction that stresses content over teaching method often dismisses the importance of social and
cultural contexts in learning (see, for example, Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000), which includes the impact of prior knowledge in new knowledge acquisition and meaning making. Needs of diverse student populations and factors affecting educational success of students within these populations will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this study.

**Community college faculty.** Historically in higher education research, faculty members in community colleges have received very little attention yet their importance cannot be overestimated (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Community college faculty members teach approximately 37% of all undergraduate students in America, which includes about half of all 4-year college freshmen and sophomores (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). Consider the following statistics in determining the potential impact community college faculty members have on students, higher education, and the broader community and workforce:

1. Community college faculty members teach thousands of students each year, which includes nearly half of all minority and first year college students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2014) and many high school students through Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) (Twombly & Townsend, 2008).

2. Community colleges enroll 47% of all college students with disabilities, 44% of all single parent college students, 50% of all college students over the age of 30, 46% of all college students who work at least part-time, and 50% of all first-generation college students (AACC, 2014).
3. Many 4-year college graduates take community college courses as part of their baccalaureate degrees (Twombly & Townsend, 2008).

**Part-time faculty members.** While higher education is experiencing a considerable increase in the number of part-time faculty members being hired at the undergraduate level across academic disciplines and institution types (Fagan-Wilen, Springer, Ambrosino, & White, 2006), the highest proportion of part-time faculty members – 41% (as compared to 33% at public four-year institutions and 26% at private four-year institutions) – are found at our nation’s community colleges (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). At community colleges, this percentage (41%) represents an incredible 70% of the instructional workforce (American Federation of Teachers) and, based on current financial constraints and projections of decreases in state funding for public higher education, this percentage will only increase in the next decade and beyond. Clear flexibility and budgetary advantages exist for employing a part-time instructional workforce but aspects of concern exist as well; these include inexperience in the classroom, difficulties with the mechanics of teaching, a lack of mentoring in the methodology of teaching, limited support, and little guidance prior to entering the classroom (Wickun & Stanley, 2000).

Unmistakably, part-time faculty members play a critical role in educating students at American colleges and universities; however, “the data and research on part-time/adjunct faculty members have tended to be pretty spotty” (American Federation of Teachers, 2010, p. 3), especially with regard to our nation’s community colleges. Understanding more about community college pedagogy and the increasing role of part-
time instructors in teaching our nation’s most diverse student body is an academic imperative in American higher education.

**Community college classroom learning environments.** In college classrooms, instructors provide the framework within which interaction occurs between them and individual students, between them and students as a group, and between and among students in the class (Hirschy & Wilson, 2002). Instructors shape the classroom climate through the ways they interpret and govern these interactions and structure the learning environment (Hirschy & Wilson). Instructors must create classroom cultures and learning environments where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, are welcomed, supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2006). For example, Delpit (1997) explained that when significant differences exist among classroom norms and students’ cultures, “teachers can easily misread students’ aptitudes, intent, or abilities” (p. 167) which is often attributed to a “difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns” (p. 167). These conflicts also may be attributed to incongruence between student appearance, sense of identity, and expectations, and instructor assumptions and stereotyping (George, 2002). Delpit (1997) also contended that instructors’ methods of instruction may be at odds with the customs, ideas, and needs that these students bring to the classroom, which often manifests in recalcitrant student behavior. The preceding examples are not meant to be value statements of right versus wrong but illustrations of the disconnect that exists between certain approaches to instruction and the needs and expectations of a diverse community college population of students.
Statement of the Problem

As mentioned earlier, there is a growing concern about whether community colleges are adapting to effectively meet the needs of their constituents as open access institutions (King, 1999; Virgil Laden, 2004). One such concern (see Grubb, 1999) contends that current approaches among segments of the community college professoriate are outdated and increasingly ineffective, especially among diverse populations of students. As community colleges continue to expand in role and scope, they also will continue to (a) attract a tremendously diverse population of students with a variety of learning needs and (b) rely on part-time faculty members to perform the majority of classroom instruction. Although community colleges rely heavily on this contingent workforce to teach our most diverse and at-risk populations of students, very little is known about how they teach.

In general, a lack of empirical literature exists about teaching in community college settings (Grubb, 1999; Moriarity 2007) and, more specifically, research is lacking on what is known about part-time community college instructors and how they arrive at classroom methodology and practice (Sperling, 2003). Gaining insight into the ways part-time instructors arrive at pedagogical approaches to teaching may accomplish a number of things: (a) allow for a deeper analysis of the perspectives and factors that guide their pedagogical decision-making; (b) examine how they perceive that their pedagogical approaches influence the learning environment in their classrooms; and (c) formulate a theory that helps to explain these phenomena. Within this context, this research study was pursued on the assumption that learner-centered classrooms (defined later in this chapter) are the optimal environments in which classroom learning occurs. As
such, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover the ways in which part-time community college faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their classroom instruction; additionally, this grounded theory study will develop a general theory to help explain how instructors’ perceive their pedagogical approaches shape the classroom learning environment at a large, urban-serving community college.

**Nature of the Study**

Faculty members in American higher education are assumed and/or expected to be well-informed in the principles of effective teaching practices to ensure that optimal conditions for learning exist for all students (Bransford et al., 2000; Shulman, 1987). At most colleges and universities, but especially at community colleges, the diversity of the student population continues to grow. Coupled with the unique history and expanding missions of community colleges, teaching takes on added dimensions to a process already rich in challenges and complexity. In addition to the many challenges presented by these added dimensions, community college instructors many times are required to assume multiple support roles during the teaching and learning dynamic. Expectations and responsibilities of faculty members at community colleges have evolved beyond the practice of solely delivering content knowledge to providing students with content knowledge expertise within a framework of pedagogical content knowledge (Grubb, 1999). However, it appears that few instructors have adjusted their teaching approaches to meet the added demands of community college instruction and needs of the most diverse student population in our nation’s history (Grubb, 1999; Moriarity, 2007; Sperling, 2003).
This study examined a small group of part-time community college faculty members to discover perspectives and factors contributing to pedagogical decisions that guides classroom instruction. This study further investigated how these forces may act as influencers in arriving at overall pedagogical approaches that may impact classroom learning environments. Consistent with qualitative research and a grounded theory methodology, a series of initial open-ended questions shaped future questions of participants after researcher “exploration” and “reflection” (Creswell, 2007). The development of a theory behind the pedagogical decision making process of part-time faculty members helped to explain practice and/or provide a framework for further research in community college teaching and learning, which may ultimately improve the learning process and positively impact success, persistence, and completion rates for students.

**Research questions.** As such, research questions guiding this study were as follows:

Central Research Question

- How do part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction in community college classrooms?

Sub-questions

- What internal perspectives and external conditions influenced their decisions? What experiences influenced their choices?
- How do they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom learning environment?
- What theory explains how they make pedagogical choices and decisions?
Definitions of Key Terms

It is instructive at this point in the introduction to provide the reader with a definition of terms and key concepts that appear regularly throughout the research study.

Constructivism: The meaning of constructivism varies based on “one's perspective and position” (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002, para. 5). Within an educational context, there are many interpretations and conceptions of constructivism, including psychological constructivism (Piaget, 1967), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1995), and constructivist epistemologies. In this study, the concept of constructivism was viewed as a paradigm for both learning and teaching and converged through constructivist theories of learning and constructivist pedagogy. As such, constructivism as applied within this study blended the definitions of constructivist learning and constructivist pedagogy below.

Constructivist Learning: In psychology and education, learning theories are attempts to describe how people learn, thereby helping us understand the inherently complex process of learning. A range of explanations (i.e., theories) for how people learn exist within the literature, as no one single way can define learning. Constructivist learning is one such theory that suggests “individual learners actively construct the meaning around phenomena, and that these constructions are idiosyncratic, depending in part on the learner’s background knowledge” (Richardson, 2003, p. 1625).

Constructivist Pedagogy: As applied to this study, constructivist pedagogy focuses on the “creation of classroom environments, activities, and methods that are grounded in a constructivist theory of learning” (Richardson, 2003, p. 1627).
Grounded Theory Research: Grounded theory research is defined as a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Learner-Centered Classrooms: Throughout this study, learner-centered classrooms refer to learning environments where instructors “are aware that learners construct their own meanings, [which include] the beliefs, understandings, and cultural practices they bring to the classroom” (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 136) and include practices that “focus on what students need to be [successful]” (Grubb, 1999, p. 33).

Part-time Faculty Members: For the purposes of this study, part-time faculty members are defined as non-bargaining unit instructors at the study site carrying a teaching load of 11 credits or less, per semester, per institution, at the time of the study.

Pedagogy: While many different meanings can be applied to this term, for the purposes of this study pedagogy is defined as “a set of strategies implemented by teachers [part-time faculty members] that is intended to facilitate student learning in an academic setting [community college classrooms]” (Walvoord & Pool, 1998, p. 35). In Anglo-American culture, pedagogy is a broad, umbrella term used to refer to the dimensions of the educational process of students of all ages, thus comprising both children and adults (Smith, Edwards-Groves, & Brennan Kemmis, 2010). Pedagogy is further defined in this study through the concepts of pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical decision making.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge: Pedagogical content knowledge is defined as the knowledge formed through the synthesis of subject matter, pedagogical, and contextual knowledge bases (Shulman, 1987).
Pedagogical Decision Making: At this stage of the research, pedagogical decision making will generally be defined as the influences and perceptions behind instructor decisions relative to pedagogical processes employed in their classes.

Conceptual Framework

First and foremost, the foundational underpinning of this research study is the concept of constructivism. According to Creswell (2007), individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, the research goal of which is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation under study. As applied to research on teaching, constructivism generally refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves; that is, individual learners construct or find meaning based upon their belief systems, the way they see the world, and their prior experiences, which in turn becomes knowledge (Boghossian, 2006). In addition to traditional student “learners,” in the context of this research study, part-time faculty members represent “learners” who construct knowledge of teaching based upon their perceptions related to the teaching and learning process, which, in turn, influences their pedagogical approaches.

Two forms of constructivism have emerged in the literature that focuses on the learning aspects of classrooms: social constructivism and psychological constructivism. According to Phillips (1995), social constructivism embodies “human constructs” which are determined by external forces, such as “politics, ideologies, values, the exertion of power and the preservation of status, religious beliefs, and economic self-interest” (p. 6). This broad area of constructivism centers on how knowledge is created through critical theory issues and holds decidedly democratic and social activist ideologies as part of a broader social movement (Richardson, 2003). While this conception of constructivism
has been predominantly associated with the term, it is a second, divergent approach that was applied within this study. Psychological constructivism refers both to a set of revelations about how students learn and, consequently, to explanations of how teachers should facilitate classroom learning (Phillips, 1995). Psychological constructivism focuses on “the ways in which meaning is created within the individual mind” and “how shared meaning is developed within a group process” (Richardson, 2003, p. 1625). In other words, psychological constructivism recognizes the dynamic interplay of forces that influence instructors’ pedagogical approaches within college classrooms, which involves the social nature of group process in formal knowledge development. As summed up very concisely by Phillips, “knowledge is made, not acquired” (p. 7). As such, this conception of constructivism guided this study and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

**Significance of the Study**

Although community colleges have developed into a symbol of educational access and opportunity since they appeared on the higher education scene after World War II, current and projected demographic shifts are challenging their resiliency as open-access institutions (Saenz, 2004). Community colleges draw from populations that are historically among the most poorly served, least economically successful, and most underprepared for college level work. While these students, often the nation’s most at-risk, present a number of challenges to community colleges, there is a tremendous opportunity to re-think traditional approaches to teaching to better serve their diverse needs.
According to Twombly and Townsend (2008), “the ultimate justification for knowing more about community college faculty members is their impact on the higher education system through the teaching of so many students” (p. 21). It seems fitting that community colleges, often touted as “teaching” institutions, should be the focus of more studies on the pedagogical approaches of faculty members. As Bailey and Morest (2004) pointed out, little is known about the success of students in community colleges and what might be done to improve rates of success. Although many factors contribute to student success, “the quality, preparation, and pedagogical skills of the faculty members have to be central” (Twombly & Townsend, 2008, p. 20) to the work performed at community colleges. As such, the results of this study add to a limited base of literature on pedagogy in higher education and community colleges, deepen the knowledge base about the perceptions and pedagogical approaches of part-time faculty members in community colleges, and have implications for policy and practice through new and re-conceptualized ways of supporting part-time faculty members at community colleges. In this context, the study will be of interest to researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and instructors.

Summary

General patterns of college classroom instructional practices are picked up and perpetuated generation after generation without much question (Cross, 1990). While previous research studies have applied constructivist perspectives to students in the context of how they learn, this research study explored how faculty members arrive at meaning in the process of teaching within a multidimensional, diverse community college setting. Through a grounded theory research approach, this research study examined a
small group of part-time community college faculty members to discover perspectives and factors influencing the dynamic process of pedagogical decision making; decisions that may influence the learning environment in community college classrooms.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Educational research on community college faculty members is less extensive than that of their 4-year counterparts. Some reasons for this lack of attention may include:

- Educational research is primarily conducted at research universities as part of the tenure and promotion process; faculty members conducting research at these universities tend to write about what they know (i.e., the research university).
- Faculty members at community colleges are not required to do research, which most likely would involve what they know (i.e., community colleges).
- Research that does incorporate community college faculty tends to be part of larger studies that use them as a comparison and, as a result, tends to diminish their importance.
- Community colleges in general are undervalued in the higher education hierarchy (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Regardless of the reasons, “community college faculty members merit attention and respect” (p. 7) based on the number of students they teach. Furthermore, research on part-time faculty members is warranted as over two thirds (approximately 70%) of all community college faculty members are part-time, representing “the highest percentage of any higher education not-for-profit institutional type” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, p. 24).

According to Twombly and Townsend, (2008):

Whether studied locally or nationally, quantitatively or qualitatively, community college faculty members have primarily been examined in terms of the following
What appeared to be missing in the literature is an investigation of conceptions of pedagogy at community colleges and, more specifically, pedagogical approaches among part-time community college faculty.

Based on the sheer numbers (see Chapter 2, Section: Profile of Community College Faculty Members), the majority of instruction at community colleges is performed by part-time faculty members. However, a closer look revealed that although the professoriate in community colleges is dominated by part-time instructors (in terms of head count), “the majority of courses and number of credit hours are taught by full-time faculty members” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, pp. 30-31). This finding may be due to the fact that approximately half (51%) of all part-time faculty members are employed elsewhere in non-teaching jobs, with more than two-thirds (61%) working more than 30 hours a week at those jobs (Guerra, 2012). These survey results notwithstanding, part-time community college faculty members by their large numbers and the courses they teach “have a tremendous influence on the reputation of the college” (Wallin, 2005, p. 6) – for many students, part-time faculty members are the college – and tend to be overrepresented in key introductory and developmental courses that are “so critical to ultimate student success” (Lyons, 2007, p. 1). Clearly, part-time faculty members are “central, not peripheral, to the community college enterprise” (Levin, 2008, p. 458) and worthy of our attention and research efforts.

What follows is a review of the literature on teaching in community colleges,
including a profile of community college faculty members, faculty work in the context of community colleges, and better understanding part-time community college faculty through various role expectations. Once this foundation is situated, the literature review will proceed with a historical overview of pedagogy in higher education with an emphasis on the modern conception of pedagogical content knowledge. A brief discussion of pedagogical reform initiatives follows, which contributes to the rise of constructivist approaches to teaching in American higher education. The literature review concludes with an examination of the emerging science on how students learn with corresponding pedagogical implications for classroom instruction in community colleges.

Teaching in the Context of Community Colleges

As a prelude to an examination of teaching in community colleges, it is necessary to better understand the context within which community college faculty members work. As such, the following section provides a brief history of the founding of community colleges in the United States, while providing a contextual overview of the work environment through a discussion of mission and purpose, diversity of the student population (including barriers traditionally encountered by students from diverse backgrounds), and a profile of both full-time and part-time community college faculty members. The section concludes with a summary of the research on community college faculty members, which includes a discussion of a foundational work upon which this research study is positioned.

Community Colleges in American Higher Education

Community colleges in the United States trace their history to turn-of-the-
twentieth century educators, such as William Rainey Harper, and Joliet Junior College. During this time, secondary school enrollments were increasing rapidly and creating greater demand for access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). While this demand could have been accommodated by expanding capacity at the nation’s colleges and universities, some university educators wanted to “abandon their freshmen and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions, to be called junior colleges” (Cohen & Brower, p. 7). Other educators saw the greater demand for access to higher education as an opportunity to follow the European system of higher education, where universities assume responsibility for “higher-order scholarship” and lower schools “provide general and vocational education to students through age nineteen or twenty” (p. 7). In 1901, William Rainey Harper, the president of the University of Chicago, and J. Stanley Brown, the principal of Joliet High School, collaborated to found Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois in order to expand educational opportunity (AACC, 2010). In essence, junior colleges became an extension of high schools when Joliet Junior College added a fifth and sixth year of courses to a high school curriculum in an effort to prepare first and second year college students (“underclassmen” in the parlance of the time) for the rigors of university work.

During the early part of the twentieth century, junior colleges had expanded into all but five states with a total enrollment of approximately 70,000 students (Cohen & Brower, 2008, p. 15). Although junior colleges and their missions of providing the first two years of a four-year higher education remained prevalent into the 1940s, their popularity and practicality began to wane in lieu of an emerging view of an expanded role for junior colleges: meeting the total needs of communities beyond high school.
Primarily shaped by such forces as the employability needs of veterans returning from World War II, the budding need for skilled workers in a changing economy, and the democratic and American ideal that “all individuals should have an opportunity to rise to their greatest potential” (p. 11), the Truman Commission report of 1947 recommended a national expansion as a way to provide higher education to the masses and marked the first general use of the term *community college* (AACC, 2010).

**Truman Commission and Establishment of Community Colleges**

In the summer of 1946, President Harry S. Truman appointed a commission on higher education lead by George F. Zook, the president of the American Council on Education, along with 28 other members. At the time, President Truman asked the Commission to “re-examine our system of higher education in terms of its objectives, methods, and facilities; and in the light of the social role it has to play” (Truman, 1946, para. 2). The resulting six volume series, referred to as *Higher Education for American Democracy*, proposed sweeping changes in American higher education, which included the abandonment of European concepts of education and the development of a curriculum attuned to the needs of a democracy (Truman, 1947). The Truman Commission (referred to hereafter as Commission) report, as it is commonly called, changed the course of higher education in the United States from “merely being an instrument for producing an intellectual elite” (AACC, 2010, August, p. 1) to becoming “the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult, is enabled and encouraged to pursue higher learning” (p. 1). A key recommendation of the report regarding college access was driven by the Commission’s findings that access to higher education in the post-World War II era was not equitable, and was “too heavily dependent on student ability (with a strong bias
toward the upper end of the ability spectrum), family and community circumstances, race, gender, and religion” (Gilbert & Heller, 2010, p. 2). As a result, the report urged that, among other things, higher education in the United States establish a network of public community colleges as a way to address access to and equity within the system for otherwise qualified individuals. In addition to popularizing the term “community college” in the higher education lexicon, the Commission helped shape the future of two-year institutions in the United States.

Access and equity within higher education was a prescient point of emphasis appearing in the Commission’s report. With respect to college access, members of the Commission “strongly believed that at least 49 percent of the population had the ability to complete a minimum of two years of higher education, while 33 percent had the ability to continue to an advanced liberal degree or specialized professional education” (Gilbert & Heller, 2010, p. 1). At the time, and equally applicable today, Commission members argued that college costs represent a hindrance for a high percentage of potential students and recommended that the federal government assume leadership in addressing this financial barrier (through restructuring and expanding how the federal government funded higher education institutions). For Commission members, removing probable barriers to access included “making public education equally available to all students regardless of their race, creed, sex, or national origin” (Gilbert & Heller, p. 2). In an effort to increase enrollments, the Commission recommended ending discrimination based on race and religion, eliminating antifeminism, and removing financial barriers through the development of scholarship programs (for undergraduate education). At the same time, the Commission realized that increasing access to higher education would not
be possible without a commensurate expansion to the higher education system to accommodate the corresponding need. The concept of community colleges, institutions geographically, financially, and academically accessible to all citizens, were “particularly appealing as a means of handling student expansion because the two-year colleges could be constructed quickly and were generally viewed as being more cost-effective” (p. 3). In essence, junior colleges were re-conceptualized as community colleges, complete with a renewed sense of purpose and function for higher education and tuition structures that are fundamentally different than their four-year counterparts. The term *community college* is intentional and symbolic; it is reflective of a moving away from the *junior* college notion of a singular purpose and outcome (i.e., four-year college enrollment) and moving toward fuller integration into the life of the community in which the college resides in an effort to meet “total post-high school needs” of its citizens. The Commission believed that improving access to higher education for millions of Americans would occur through and involve the expansion of the two-year college system (Gilbert & Heller).

**Expanded Roles of Modern Community Colleges**

Today, there are 1,165 community colleges (991 Public, 143 Independent, and 31 Tribal) in the United States (AACC, 2014). Generally, modern community colleges remain defined by their commitment to being open access institutions, a philosophy that has endured since the Truman Commission report in 1947. Traditionally, academic preparation served as the core function of the community college. However, many community colleges have evolved into “comprehensive educational institutions with a wide array of offerings to meet the diverse needs of students” (Levin, 2008, p. 456).
Modern community colleges have assumed a variety of educational functions, which include remediation of academic deficiencies, basic skills development, preparation for transfer to 4-year institutions, service to and within the local community, and partnerships with other organizations and institutions (Levin, 2008). According to Levin, community colleges “combine characteristics of social service agencies, adult education center, rehabilitation center (think of prison education), and community developer among other roles” (p. 457).

Over time, gradual shift towards vocational education, job training, and programs catering to the economic community have expanded the missions of community colleges even further. In 1988, the Nationwide Commission on the Future of Community Colleges recommended that community colleges assist communities through the creation of partnerships with employers for the purpose of providing workforce training (Combs, 2012). According to Kasper (2002-03), “Today, community colleges supply vocational training programs that terminate in certificates, coursework leading to associate degrees, remedial educational services, and customized, or ‘contract,’ courses designed to meet the needs of local employers” (p. 16). Workforce training and preparation services have fostered alliances between local companies and community colleges, which is important to local economic development.

**Diverse Student Populations at Modern Community Colleges**

As the diversity of the youth population grows and the role of community colleges expands and becomes more central to our nation’s economy, the community college system will serve a much more varied population of students than in the past. Lopez (2006) indicated that substantial increases will occur in the population of
Americans who historically have been among the most poorly served, least economically successful, and most underprepared for college level work (see Figure 1). According to the American Association of Community Colleges web site (2014)

Community colleges serve close to half of the undergraduate students in the United States, which included more than 6.5 million credit students in the fall of 2005. The comprehensive mission of community colleges makes them attractive to a broad range of people who seek particular programs or opportunities of special interest. Community colleges are the gateway to postsecondary education for many minority, low income, and first-generation postsecondary education students. Since 1985, more than half of all community college students have been women. In addition, the majority of Black and Hispanic undergraduate students in this country study at these colleges.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of 2-year college enrollment, by race/ethnicity: Comparison of years 1990, 2009. Adapted from Digest of Education Statistics, Table 237: Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010. Copyright by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
Additionally, community colleges attract many non-traditional students (average student age is 29) who work while enrolled in classes (almost two-thirds of students attend part-time) (see Figures 2 and 3). Although community colleges serve a high percentage of non-traditional students, they serve an increasing number of traditional age and direct-from-high school students as well, illustrating the incredible diversity in community college enrollments. The diversity of today’s student body poses many educational challenges for community colleges (Rhoads & Valdez, 1996). Stage and Manning (1992) argued that the diversity of the student body (specifically cultural diversity) adds complexity to an already multifaceted educational endeavor and requires a re-examination of traditional policies and practices in community colleges.

Figure 2. Numerical distribution of 2-year college enrollments, by attendance, Fall 2011. Adapted from Digest of Education Statistics, Table 237: Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010. Copyright by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
For the purpose of illustration, I will briefly consider one such dimension: *culture*. In general, Stage and Manning (1992) believe that American higher education is largely based on Eurocentric cultural norms. From this perspective, community colleges operate through a monocultural (projecting one culture as superior to all others) lens which, by definition, acts as a barrier for these institutions to consider other cultural traditions and views when designing curriculum, developing policy, and carrying out practices. In other words, a monoculturalist perspective perpetuates the canon from which established organizational beliefs, structures, and practices continue to predominate at our nation’s community colleges (Rhoads & Valdez, 1996). While it is not the intent of this study to examine community colleges from a critical democratic perspective, the views of Stage and Manning emphasize the need for fundamental change in supporting students from...

*Figure 3.* Percentage distribution of 2-year college enrollments, by age range, Fall 2011. Adapted from *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 237: Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010. Copyright by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
non-white and non-traditional backgrounds, an emerging majority, on community college campuses.

**Barriers to student success.** A brief examination of the student population reveals some alarming trends involving diverse student populations at community colleges. Low degree attainment among ethnic minority students continues in our nation’s community colleges; of the over 230,000 associate degrees conferred in 2000, the vast majority (71.8%) were awarded to white students (Vigil Laden, 2004). While community colleges have low graduation rates in general, the rates are much lower for ethnic minority students. For instance, as stated through The Education Trust (2009), an organization whose goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement for students from low income and/or ethnic minority families, “Although 80 percent of community college freshmen intend to earn a bachelor’s degree, roughly 7 percent of minority students who enter community colleges earn bachelor’s degrees from system institutions within ten years” (para. 12). These low degree completion rates for ethnic minorities “are disturbing, especially when compared to these students’ rising numerical and proportionate representation in community colleges” (Vigil Laden, p. 9). Over 80% of community college students are employed either full- or part-time, with over one-third responsible for dependents and one-quarter single parents (Vigil Laden). Over 60% of incoming community college freshmen require some form of remedial or developmental education, making this population of students among the most difficult to serve (AACC, 2010). Many community colleges are “focusing more attention on evidence that sheds light on what works and what does not to promote student success” (AACC, 2010, p. 8)
as well as data collection and analysis of innovative and successful practices and opportunities to address barriers.

Although community colleges embody core values of access and opportunity for diverse populations of students, they have operated within a structure of “systematic barriers that marginalize or disadvantage portions of the student population” (Vigil Laden, 2004, p. 11). Some of these barriers to success include complex bureaucracies and systems, inadequate funding and financial aid, inadequate academic advising and guidance, lack of highly developed soft skills (personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions and job performance) among faculty and staff, onerous general education requirements, large class sizes/over-enrollment, limited course offerings, the fast pace of classes/programs, under preparation for the challenges of online courses, lack of adequate tutoring, and the lack of out-of-class time with faculty members (Lake Research Partners, 2011). Other obstacles may be less apparent but equally impactful to the success of community college students and include the following: clash of cultures between students’ home/community environment and college culture/expectations (e.g., lack of understanding of college community norms); cross-cultural conflict, stereotyping, and misunderstandings among instructors and students (leading to students’ feelings of alienation); and lack of rapport among instructors and students in the classroom setting (includes ineffective management of classroom interactions) (Delpit, 1997; George, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Townsend, 1993). While students and student success are not the focus of this research study, each serves as a motivating factor to learn more about faculty members and classroom teaching; more specifically, this study explores how part-time community college faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches
that influence their instructional practices and contribute to classroom atmosphere. As such, the ensuing parts of this section provide a brief profile of the community college professoriate and instruction, research findings in the areas of part-time community college faculty members and pedagogical decision making before entering into a comprehensive discussion of the concept of pedagogy.

**Overview of Community College Faculty and Instruction**

The next part of the literature review provides general background information and demographic data on community college faculty members, presents a profile of part-time faculty members, and briefly examines instruction at community colleges before entering into a discussion of research findings.

**Community college professoriate.** According to Townsend and Twombly (2007), 43% of all faculty members in public, nonprofit institutions of higher education were employed at community colleges, teaching almost 40% of all undergraduates and an even higher percentage of students of color. As indicated in the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (hereafter referred to as NSOPF:04) dataset – a survey of 1,080 public and private not-for-profit degree granting postsecondary institutions with a sample of 35,000 faculty and instructional staff – an overwhelming majority (approximately 82%) of full-time community college faculty members are White, while Black (6.5%), Hispanic (5.4%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (3.7%) faculty members comprise the remaining full-time instructional workforce at public community colleges. These percentages are somewhat surprising given the demographics of the student body. In comparison, White students comprise only 54% of community college enrollments,
followed by Hispanic students (16%), Black students (14%), and Asian/Pacific Islander students (6%) (AACC, 2014).

Based on existing data sources (see, for example, NSOPF:04), the community college professoriate appears to be about evenly split between women and men, with men and women equally likely to hold the rank of instructor. Although this represents the most gender balanced grouping of faculty members in higher education, Twombley and Townsend (2008) point out that community colleges have the highest percentage of women who are full-time faculty members of any institutional type, and that women receive far more attention than do faculty members of color in the research. Research finds that many women faculty members intentionally choose to work at community colleges, perhaps due to their perception that a two-year institution will allow them to strike a balance between career and family (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). A more critical view of this phenomenon would suggest that this higher percentage is indicative of the marginalization of women faculty members at 4-year institutions.

According to the NSOPF:04, the average age of full-time instructional faculty at public two-year colleges in Fall 2003 is 49.9 years old. The highest percentage (68.6) of full-time instructional faculty is between the ages of 40-59, with the 4-year age range of 55-59 representing the highest proportion of faculty members (21.9%).

In most cases, a master’s degree is required of those faculty members who teach transfer-level courses; in contrast, an advanced degree is usually not required to teach courses that apply toward certificates, terminal programs, or career education (e.g., automotive). As illustrated in Townsend and Twombly (2007), in 2003, 63% of full-time community college faculty held a master’s degree and 19% held a doctoral degree. Of
the remaining full-time faculty members, 12% held a bachelor’s degree, 3.9% held an associate’s degree (or equivalent), and 1.9% held a professional degree.

**Profile of part-time faculty members.** The movement to employ part-time faculty members at community colleges began in the 1960s when there emerged a high demand for evening instruction (Wickun & Stanley, 2000). At the time, administrators had no alternative but to seek out assistance from members of the professional community to meet this shortfall; thus was borne the adjunct faculty member. These instructors are referred to using a number of different titles, “each with nuanced differences in meaning, depending upon the institution for which they teach and other factors” (Lyons, 2007, p. 2). In American higher education, terms used to refer to this segment of the faculty workforce are adjunct faculty, adjunct instructor, adjunct professor, contingent faculty, part-time faculty, and part-time instructors. In Canada, these positions are referred to as sessional faculty, a more descriptive term to indicate temporary, full-time faculty members. For the purposes of this study, this class of faculty is referred to as *part-time faculty members*, and defined as an individual teaching less than a full-time course load (< 12 credits) per semester, per institution at time of study. The trend of hiring part-time faculty members in community colleges continued into the 1980s, “when the budget crunch began to materialize, astute administrators and department chairs had to devise a method for continuing to meet instructional requirements while financial support declined” (Lyons, 2007, p. 2). While approximately 600,000 part-time instructors are employed regularly at our colleges and universities (Lyons, 2007), as stated earlier, the highest proportion of part-time faculty members – 41% (as compared to 33% at public four-year institutions and 26% at private four year
institutions) – are found at our nation’s community colleges (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). At community colleges, this percentage (41%) represents an incredible 70% of the instructional workforce (American Federation of Teachers). With such a large number of individuals with advanced degrees unable to obtain full-time teaching positions, this trend is likely to continue (Wallin, 2005).

In terms of demographic characteristics, the average age of part-time community college faculty members at public institutions is 49.3, essentially the same as their 2-year full-time and 4-year full and part-time counterparts. Along the age distribution scale, the highest concentration falls between the ages of 45-54, representing 30.4% of all part-time faculty members. Not surprisingly, nearly 84% of all part-time instructional staff is White, followed by Black (7%), Hispanic (4%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (3.2%). The gender balance seen among full-time community college faculty members is also reflected in part-time instructors, with women constituting nearly 50% of all part-timers. Part-time faculty members are most likely to hold a master’s degree as their highest degree and are more likely than full-time faculty members to hold a bachelor’s degree as their highest degree (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, p. 27). Overall, the demographic characteristics of part-time community college faculty members practically mirror those of full-time faculty members at public two-year community colleges.

Based on the high percentage of part-time faculty members being middle aged, it is expected that many will be advancing toward retirement in the coming years; this will create opportunities for college administrators to hire a more diverse pool of applicants than currently exist on community college campuses in an effort to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student population.
**Instruction at community colleges.** According to Vigil Laden (2004), students from progressively more diverse backgrounds create a cultural transformation that is being felt in nearly every two-year institution. Their dominant presence is forcing faculty members and administrators to rethink their traditional modes of teaching and learning and explore new ways of ensuring that institutional access, academic success, and equal opportunity for social and career mobility are available and culturally appropriate for these groups. (p. 1)

Vigil Laden contended that community colleges are challenged to transform their institutions in ways that provide, among other things, instruction and classroom practices “that facilitate and enhance students’ abilities to achieve their academic and career goals” (p. 16). According to Levin in Good’s (2008) 21st Century Education: A Reference Handbook, “teaching broadly conceived at community colleges is institutionally bound, contextualized not only by the students who are taught, but by the views and values of the faculty who teach these students” (p. 458). In The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life (1998), Palmer declared that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). For Palmer, identity and integrity are not just our “noble features” (p. 13); they are “subtle dimensions of the complex, demanding, and lifelong process of self-discovery” (p. 13) – which involves acknowledging the whole of who we are as individuals and instructors. Before this can occur, faculty must have a strong self-concept and sense of personal identity (e.g., individual epistemologies, ways of knowing, ways of viewing the world). Palmer believes that the discovery of self-knowledge is imperative for individuals to possess “a capacity for connectedness” (p. 11), an essential trait for good teachers. Instructors who possess a capacity for connectedness “are able to
weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so students can weave a world for themselves” (p. 11).

Within higher education, “student characteristics and institutional context – history, culture, missions, purposes, and organization – separate the community college from other educational institutions” (Levin, 2008, p. 461), making community colleges and the teaching that occurs within community colleges “clearly distinct from other sectors of education” (p. 461). Within this context, community college faculty “face staggering dilemmas which include the development, management, and governance of curricula, the evaluation and improvement of instruction, and faculty workloads and workload equity, among other matters” (p. 456). However, “most community colleges do little systematically to help their instructors improve their teaching” with isolation representing “a defining aspect of instructors’ lives in community colleges” (Grubb, 1999, p. 49). As a result, teaching becomes an individual activity devoid of cooperative relationships among colleagues, “varying enormously from person to person without apparent rationale” (p. 49).

Research Findings

Although the trend toward increased dependence on part-time faculty members in community colleges is clearly evident, research about them as a workforce and how they approach their work is wanting. Some research findings do exist – mostly within larger studies of faculty work and/or bundled together within studies of full-time community college faculty – and are discussed here.

Part-time faculty members. In response to changing student demographics, Richardson, Fisk and Okun (1983) conducted a field study of a community college and
found that some of the emerging student populations were not as academically prepared as students in the past. At the time, these populations of students were enrolling in community colleges in large numbers and, per the researchers, were having a distinct impact on curriculum and instruction at the institution. In referring to the same study, Levin (2008) indicated that the study is “foundational in announcing the arrival of new student populations to community college campuses” (p. 456) and that, as a result, “faculty have to alter their assumptions about both students and what constitutes the required curriculum” (p. 455). McGrath and Spear (1991) also concluded that these “new” students are increasingly underprepared and academically deficient in comparison to their community college predecessors and recommend that institutions evaluate their operations to accommodate their needs. In 1993, the first major research focusing on part-time instructors (albeit not community college part-time instructors) was released by Gappa and Leslie. In their work, entitled The Invisible Faculty, the researchers introduced a typology of part-time instructors based upon their lifestyles and motivation to teach. Gappa and Leslie’s (1993) typology of part-time instructors were categorized as follows:

- Specialists, experts, or professionals work full-time beyond their classroom teaching and are motivated by networking opportunities, inspiration from former faculty members, and a need to impart their expertise to others.
- Freelancers derive emotional gratification from teaching and hold multiple part-time positions (which may include more than one teaching assignment) simultaneously.
- Career enders, as their name denotes, are either retired or approaching the end
of their careers and seek vocational connection through teaching.

- Aspiring academics are highly-credentialed educators (or in the process of pursuing terminal degrees) seeking full-time teaching positions; they teach part-time largely for the income but also as an opportunity to build their academic portfolios and as a pathway to full-time (preferably tenure-track) positions.

Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron (1995) argued that part-time instructors, historically undervalued and marginalized, “should be integrated into the college community and recognized as increasingly important players in the teaching and learning process in the interest of providing quality instruction” (p. 120). Lyons (1996), in his study at a Florida college, found that part-time instructors require (a) a thorough orientation to the institution, its culture, and its practices, (b) adequate training in fundamental teaching and classroom management skills, (c) a sense of belonging to the institution, (d) both initial and ongoing professional development, and (e) recognition for quality work. In his seminal work Honored but Invisible, Grubb (1999) altered the discussion from what needs to happen to improve the quality of instruction at our nation’s community colleges to what is actually happening. Far from an endorsement of community colleges, the book borders on an indictment of what is wrong with community colleges, institutional culture, faculty members, and instruction. Compiling data from interviews with nearly 260 instructors at 32 community colleges, Grubb provided a comprehensive examination of teaching practices “ranging from wonderful classes – fast-paced, innovative in their [faculty members’] use of both in-class activities and assignments, highly engaging to the students – to the absolute worst” (p. 18). Touted as “teaching colleges,” Grubb pointed out that most of what occurs in the classroom is
invisible, occurring behind closed doors and out of sight of administrators and other faculty members. Grubb stated that community college instruction has never been a “subject of sustained description” or “analysis” (p. 11) and cannot be improved “without knowing more about what instructors do and what shapes their teaching” (p. 11).

The work of Grubb (1999) and his associates serves as the foundation from which this study is launched. In Chapter 1 of Honored but Invisible, Grubb talks about the complexity of teaching; that it is impossible to adequately capture the essence of teaching in any one description. The chapter illustrates that many faculty members whom were interviewed as part of the study find it equally difficult to discuss the principles of pedagogy, even when applied in the context of their own teaching. Grubb lays the groundwork for his 1999 study as an exploration of “approaches to pedagogy – with the instructor’s methods and strategies, which usually (but not always) incorporate theories of students learning” (p. 27) and “conceptions of pedagogy as distinct from content, with a focus on how instructors teach rather than on what they teach” (p. 27). This study builds on the research of Grubb as an exploration of approaches to pedagogy from participants who have directly experienced teaching at the community college level.

**Pedagogical decision making.** My initial research on pedagogical decision making began with a search through The Ohio Library and Information Network (OhioLINK), a consortium of 89 Ohio college and university libraries, plus the State Library of Ohio, which provides access to nearly 50 million books and other library materials, more than 100 electronic research databases, and millions of electronic journal articles. The specific databases used for my search of pedagogical decision making include: (a) OhioLINK Library Catalog (which contains almost 13 million unique titles
from its 89 member libraries and the Center for Research Libraries) and (b) the Electronic Journal Center (a collection of full-text research journals which contains almost 10,000 scholarly journal titles from approximately 50 publishers across a wide range of disciplines). Search of these databases yielded 227 results, 41 of which contained some form of pedagogy or decision making in the title (but not both); a total of 5 studies contained the terms pedagogical decision making (1), pedagogical decisions(3), or pedagogical reasoning ability (1). These five studies focused on postsecondary education in Spain, postsecondary science education in Australia, teacher decision making using Bayes’ Theorum in the US, early childhood education in Hong Kong, and using artificial intelligence to facilitate dynamic pedagogical decision making; three of the five studies take a qualitative research approach. None of the studies focused on community colleges or part-time faculty members.

I also conducted a search within the ProQuest Dissertation and Theses (PQDT) Database, which includes nearly 3 million searchable citations to dissertation and theses from around the world. The PQDT search used the following parameters: (pedagogical decision making) AND (community colleges) AND (adjunct OR part-time faculty) AND (grounded theory). At the time the search was conducted, these parameters generated 148 results. Of the 148, I narrowed the search by selecting those studies that fell under the subject of community college education and produced 25 studies. Of the 25 studies, one focused on community college faculty and represents the study most closely aligned with the focus of this study. Campbell’s study (2009) focused on community college faculty, their teaching methodologies, and congruence with student learning needs. While the purpose of the single-phase, descriptive mixed-method research study was to
explore faculty teaching and learning activities and better understand their teaching behaviors – specifically as they relate to perceptions of self-efficacy in teaching – Campbell chose the research method based on a pragmatism paradigm. This represents a point of departure for my study, the primary purpose of which is to move beyond description and generate a theory of how part-time community college faculty arrive at pedagogical approaches to instruction based on data from participants who have experienced the process.

What follows in the subsequent sections is a historical overview of pedagogy in higher education with an emphasis on the modern conception of pedagogical content knowledge, along with a brief discussion of pedagogical reform initiatives and constructivist approaches to teaching in American higher education.

**Pedagogy in Higher Education**

Since Colonial times, college teaching in the United States has remained stable and relatively unchanged (Feldman & Paulsen, 1994). While teaching research has occurred, the approaches to teaching during this time have experienced little advancement. Although there have been “deeper insights into learning processes reached by a tremendous amount of research, and the vast physical and social changes taking place on campuses, the teaching role has changed remarkably, and quite regrettably, little” (Feldman & Paulsen, p. 5). Research on college teaching has tended to focus on class size, lecture vs. discussion, student-centered discussion, independent study and peer learning, technology, assessment, and evaluation (Feldman & Paulsen). Although learning theory and research inform instructional improvement, “it is not common for college teachers to use formal principles of learning for planning their everyday teaching”
Recent research (see Shulman, 1987) expands the knowledge base for teaching and develops pedagogical knowledge that informs practice, which includes “learners and their diverse characteristics” (Feldman & Paulsen, 1994, p. 43) that impact learning. This section of Chapter 2 begins with a brief historical overview of pedagogy in higher education, culminating in a discussion of the concept of pedagogical content knowledge.

**Historical Overview of Pedagogy**

According to the online Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of *pedagogy* has French, Latin, British, Greek, and Spanish origins, and first appeared in the context of education and instruction in France circa 1495 (Pedagogy, 2005). Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the term pedagogy was also used to refer to a place of instruction (e.g., a school, a college, a university) and frequently used as a name for the universities of Glasgow and St. Andrews (Pedagogy). Other historical definitions include (a) “instruction, discipline, training; a system of introductory training; a means of guidance; (b) the art, occupation, or practice of teaching; and (c) the theory or principles of education; a method of teaching based on such a theory” (Pedagogy). The Greek form of the word comes from the ancient Greek *paidagogos*, a compound comprised of *paidos* (child) and *agogos* (leader). With the addition of the suffix *gy* – which is equivalent to *logic* – in simple terms, pedagogy denotes “the logic of leading children” (Hamilton, 2009, p. 6).

Emphasis on the Greek root *paidos* (child) has led some in the field of adult education (see Knowles, 1980) to invent an alternative term, *andragogy*, for the leading of adults. In the United States, the term andragogy began to receive attention in 1968 (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990) by Knowles, then a professor of adult education at Boston
University, who introduced the term (then spelled "androgogy") through a journal article. In 1970, Knowles published *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (a second edition was published in 1980), where he defined andragogy as *the art and science of helping adults learn*. Knowles believed there needed to be a shift from prescriptive content delivery to a more self-directed style of learning that recognizes the prior knowledge, life experiences, and interests of adult students. In a more modern context, what Knowles described as andragogy is similar to principles of teaching within a learner-centered paradigm, which emphasize creating classroom environments that focus on student needs, active engagement, individual difference factors, and creating a classroom culture that is cooperative, collaborative, and supportive (Huba & Freed, 2000). As such, in practical terms, andragogy is considered one of a number of pedagogical approaches with specific learner-centered principles for use among adult students. Even Knowles’ concept of andragogy – in relation to pedagogy – had evolved over time. In the 1980 edition of his previously referenced book, Knowles articulated that andragogy

is simply another model of assumptions about adult learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model of assumptions, thereby providing two alternative models for testing out the assumptions as to their “fit” with particular situations. Furthermore, the models are probably most useful when seen not as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum, with a realistic assumption (about learners) in a given situation falling in between the two ends. (p. 43)

The preceding quote illustrates that Knowles altered his position on the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy, with the child-adult dichotomy becoming less discernible. Even so, Hamilton (2009) contended that the notion of andragogy “not only diverts attention to (adult) males, it also neglects the idea of leadership” (p. 6) by focusing on the who (youth vs. adult students) as opposed to “where they are destined” (p. 6). Here, Hamilton is suggesting that the dualistic nature of pedagogy requires both
guidance (usually associated with children) and instruction (the structured teaching of adults). In addition to leadership, instruction, and guidance, Hamilton associated two other terms with the historical conception of pedagogy, both of European origin: didactics and curricula.

From approximately the years 1500 to 1650, “regulated courses of study (i.e., curricula) came into being” based on classical, printed texts used with “cohorts of learners” (i.e., classes) (Hamilton, 2009, p. 7). This new, formalized structure was associated “not only with new ideas about curricula, classes, and textbooks” (p. 7) but also with the concept of didactics. At this time in European history, schooling served as a powerful influence in medieval society for controlling and indoctrinating the masses, where it became “a social mechanism for disciplining” students and, in some cases, augmenting “social advancement and/or spiritual salvation” of the citizenry (p. 7). The ideas of curricula (content-oriented programs of study) and didactics (the delivery of a curriculum) took priority in schools and contributed to a shift away from relying exclusively on older forms of knowledge and knowing to “other educational packages and methods developed outside elite educational institutions” (p. 8). In the terminology of the time, the elements of guiding children (pedagogy) became known as the giving of instruction through an established curriculum (didactics) in what came to be Europe’s earliest colleges and universities.

Modern Pedagogy

The concept of modern pedagogy is still interpreted within historical and cultural traditions and understood in diverse ways based upon the context in which it is applied (Smith, et al., 2010). In the European tradition, pedagogy is highly regarded both
philosophically and epistemologically, “the sine qua non of any teacher’s professional life” (Donahue, 2003, p. 127). From a European perspective, pedagogy is seen as human science with a focus not only on the relationship and interaction between teacher and student but on “certain social and societal aims that are guided by moral intentions” (Donahue, 2003, p. 3), which harkens back to its medieval roots. In Anglo-American culture, pedagogy is a broad, umbrella term used to refer to the dimensions of the educational process of students of all ages, thus comprising both children and adults. Anglo-American interpretations of the word have traditionally focused on pedagogy as the “art and science of teaching” or “classroom practice,” and more recently emphasize the importance of establishing a “quality learning environment” (p. 3) throughout the process.

**Identity and integrity in teaching.** In his book *A Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, Palmer (1998) significantly broadened the conception of teaching beyond instructional techniques and classroom practices; for Palmer, modern teaching integrates the identity and integrity of the individual teacher as well. According to Palmer, “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10) because “a strong sense of personal identity infuses their [teachers] work” (p. 10). For Palmer, identity and integrity are more than “noble features” (p. 13) enjoyed by individual teachers; they are the evolving interconnection of the many forces that constitute a person’s life. Palmer described his own identity as

my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering – and much, much more. In the midst of that
complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am.” (p. 13)

Where Palmer described identity as a completeness that encapsulates the wholeness of a person’s being, he described integrity as a selective inner journey toward self-discovery and personal authenticity. In assessing integrity within himself, Palmer believed that integrity requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not – and that I choose life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me: Do I welcome or fear them, embrace them or reject them, move with them or against them? By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am.” (p. 13)

Teachers with the ability to “join self and subject and students” (p. 11) possess a “capacity for connectedness.” A capacity for connectedness enables teachers to “weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so student can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11). The connections made by teachers with this capacity are not done so through their teaching methods; connections are inspired through the hearts of teachers. Palmer referred to heart in the ancient sense as “the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self” (p. 11), making his conception of a courage to teach as the courage to keep one’s heart open to the very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (p. 11)

While the connection of the identity and integrity of the teacher with subject matter in the teaching process was introduced by Palmer in the late 1990s, the relationship between subject matter and method dates back to Dewey in the 1890s.

**Content and method in teaching.** At the turn of the 20th century, Dewey (1897) articulated that the relationship between subject matter and method represents a
fundamental tension in education and the preparation of teachers. Dewey considered the relationship between subject matter and method to be closely linked, if not inseparable, as illustrated through his belief that “scholastic knowledge is sometimes regarded as if it were something quite irrelevant to method” (p. 160). When this separation occurs – the gap between subject matter and pedagogy – teaching is fragmented and knowledge is fundamentally distorted (Ball & Bass, 2000). Well into the second decade of the 21st century, the tension of interweaving content and method into pedagogical approaches in teaching endures in education (Ball & Bass, 2000). For example, in higher education over the past two decades, courses in multiculturalism occupy space in the college curriculum yet “creating worthwhile opportunities for learning that take learners’ experiences, interests, and needs into account” (Ball & Bass, 2000, p. 86) within diverse classrooms rarely happens. There exists an assumption that the integration of subject matter and method occurs at the individual (faculty member) level; however, “this does not happen easily, and often does not happen at all” (p.86).

Since the 1980s, however, the analytic distinction between teachers’ subject matter knowledge and teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy began to fade, in large part due to Shulman’s (1987) seminal work on teachers’ *pedagogical content knowledge*. Following in the footsteps of Dewey from almost a century prior, Shulman struggles with the widely-accepted approach to teaching that is bifurcated along subject matter and method lines; that subject knowledge and pedagogy are being treated as mutually exclusive domains in education. In an effort to address this dichotomy, Shulman proposed the necessary relationship between subject matter knowledge and pedagogy through the conception of pedagogical content knowledge, which he describes as “that
special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding” (p. 8). Shulman articulates that pedagogical content knowledge “represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). In 1987, Shulman named pedagogical content knowledge as one of the seven knowledge bases for teaching, along with content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of the philosophical and historical aims of education. While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore each of the aforementioned knowledge bases, a deeper analysis of knowledge domains that comprise pedagogical content knowledge provides insight into traditional sources from which instructors draw their understanding of teaching.

**Pedagogical content knowledge.** Pedagogical content knowledge is the knowledge formed through the synthesis of subject matter, pedagogical, and contextual knowledge bases (see Figure 4). *Subject matter knowledge*, often referred to as content knowledge, represents a central feature in the knowledge base of teaching as the teacher serves as the primary source of student understanding of subject matter (Shulman, 1987). Subject matter knowledge is based on “the accumulated literature and studies in the content areas, and the historical and philosophical scholarship on the nature of knowledge in those fields of study” (Shulman, p. 9). As such, teachers must have both a “depth of understanding” with regard to their particular subjects and a “broad liberal education” (p. 9) which acts as a conduit between old ways of student knowing and new learning. In
addition to placing demands on teachers’ subject matter expertise, “teachers’ attitudes toward and enthusiasms for what is being taught” communicates to students “ways in which ‘truth’ is determined in a field” (p. 9) and significantly influences student understanding.

Pedagogical knowledge is generally comprised of three major areas: classroom organization and management, instructional models and strategies, and classroom communication and discourse (Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 2002). Research (see, for example, Brewer, Dunn, & Olszewski, 1988; Brophy & Good, 1986; and Everston & Harris, 1992) demonstrates that teachers’ classroom organization and management strategies have a significant effect on student learning. Strategies include setting “clear expectations for behavior, academic work standards, and classroom procedures” (Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 2002, p. 25) while creating a learning environment that supports a diversity of learners. Research also indicates that students learn more when teachers are responsive and timely in their responses, when new information is related to students’ prior experiences and knowledge, and through consistent implementation of class practices throughout the year (Morine-Dershimer & Kent). However, it is noted in the research that these organizational and management characteristics of the classroom are “subject to contextual influences including the level of student ability, degree of student homogeneity, and school level management procedures” (Morine-Dershimer & Kent, 2002, p. 25).
According to Shulman (1987), context knowledge ranges from “the workings of the group or classroom” and the “character of communities and cultures” to the “educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds” (p. 8). Contextual factors include methods of teaching, how students learn, and dimensions of human development, as well as normative, philosophical, and ethical foundations of education. Some researchers (see Gess-Newsome, 2002) suggest that making sense of the teaching process and understanding the influence of contextual factors on instruction are crucial elements in classroom learning. For example, teachers and students bring individual frames of reference to the classroom environment (e.g., knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values) and these perspectives shape the ways in which individuals construct meaning. A lack of understanding of the complexity of contextual dimensions of learning can lead to confusion and misinterpretations by both teacher and student, and have a negative impact on student learning and the learning environment.
Beginning in the 1990s and extending into the following decade, changing expectations with regard to the quality of undergraduate education emerges (see Astin 1993; Boyer, 1987; Grubb, 1999; Light, 1992) and propels the relatively obscure concept of pedagogy into public interest and research.

**Pedagogic Reform in American Higher Education**

Calls for teacher improvement and pedagogic reform are relatively recent phenomena in American higher education – dating back to the early 1980s – and usually associated with student learning and improved quality in instruction. Prior to the 1980s, predominant educational practices were grounded in assumptions about learning that existed for well over a century (Shuell, 1986), with nearly all instruction up to the 1980s having been conducted within a behavioral framework. As applied to classroom instruction, *behavioral learning theory* emphasizes changes in behavior that result from stimulus-response associations made by the learner, usually “facilitated by providing instruction in small linear steps through drill, practice, and feedback” (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998, p. 388). The motivation behind learning is believed to be internal to the individual yet driven through external forces, such as rewards and punishments (Bransford et al., 2000). A limitation of a behaviorist approach to teaching is that it conceptualizes learning as the process of forming connections between observable stimuli and responses, making it difficult to study phenomena such as thinking, reasoning, and understanding, “phenomena that are of paramount importance in education” (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 8).

In contrast, beginning early in the 1980s, *cognitive theories of learning* challenged existing behavioral approaches to teaching that were dominant during the
earlier parts of the century. Cognitive approaches to learning stress that “learning is an active, constructive, and goal-oriented process that is dependent upon the mental activities of the learner” (Shuell, 1986, p. 415), which includes the role of prior knowledge in the acquisition of new knowledge and meaning making. As opposed to focusing on observable behaviors, the focal points in cognitive approaches to teaching are the mental processes and constructs of the learner. Instructional strategies that began to emerge as a result of this orientation were classroom activities that promote active learning, conceptual scaffolding, metacognitive awareness, and placing subject matter content into a practical learning context (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). What also begins to emerge in the research is the notion that teaching requires an understanding of how students learn.

In the 1990s, teaching practices experienced change based on the emergence of a social constructivist view of learning. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding how knowledge is constructed; that knowledge is “not transmitted directly from one knower to another, but is actively built up by the learner” (Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, & Scott, 1994, p. 5). Closely associated with the developmental theories of Bruner (1966), Piaget (1967), Bandura (1977), and Vygotsky (1978), from this perspective learning in a classroom setting requires teaching activities that encourage learners to challenge assumptions, biases, and personal beliefs (Driver et al., 1994). A social constructivist approach to teaching involves classroom activities that promote collaborative learning, active participation with other members of the learning community, and directly engaging in the dynamics of the learning environment (e.g., beliefs, roles, power, culture) (Wilkerson & Irby, 1998).
One of the more influential pedagogic reform recommendations during the last 25 years was produced by Barr and Tagg (1995), who made the case that colleges and universities were shifting from institutions that exist to provide instruction (*instruction paradigm*) to institutions whose primary missions are to produce learning (*learning paradigm*). Institutions operating within instruction paradigm principles perpetuate “conceptions of teaching that are increasingly recognized as ineffective” (p. 13); that is, they reinforce assumptions about teachers and teaching, such as any subject-matter expert can teach effectively, faculty members’ roles are primarily as lecturers, faculty members and students work best independently and in isolation, faculty members classify and sort students, and so on. The new learning paradigm theory represents a change from the traditional approach to teaching and challenges many of the long-held assumptions about faculty members’ role in the learning process. Instead of the all-knowing instructor presenting subject matter in a linear fashion, in the learning paradigm, faculty members frame learning holistically, intentionally select teaching methods and design learning environments, and develop individual students’ competencies and talents. While Barr and Tagg (1995) reveal philosophical and pragmatic limitations of the higher education system as a whole, at its core their new paradigm for undergraduate education highlights the specific need for reformed instruction and improved learner-centered environments at our nation’s colleges and universities.

Barr and Tagg’s (1995) work reflects a general movement in an unofficial public mandate for improved undergraduate education. Factors contributing to the need to improve the quality of teaching and undergraduate education consisted of changing societal needs and expectations of higher education, changing technology and its impact
on teaching and learning, and the emerging science and research on how students learn (Millis, 1994).

**Rise of constructivism in modern higher education.** Constructivist learning theory, and by extension constructivist pedagogy, form the conceptual framework within which this study is conducted. Before entering into a discussion of constructivist pedagogy, I will briefly explore the concept of constructivism in education, which has deep historical roots dating back to antiquity. While not referred to as *constructivism* per se, thousands of years ago philosophers such as Socrates focused on “helping students construct meanings on their own rather than having authority figures transmit information to them” (D’Angelo, Touchman, & Clark, 2009, para. 2). According to Phillips (1995), “there is an enormous number of authors, spanning a broad philosophical or theoretical spectrum, who can be considered as being in some sense constructivist” (p. 6). It is not the intent of this study to provide an exhaustive list of contributors to the concept of constructivism and constructivist ideas; however, it is instructive to provide a brief overview of theorists who have had significant influence on this particular philosophy as it applies to modern teaching and the creation of constructivist classroom learning environments.

In the late 18th century, Kant asserted that human cognition is responsible for shaping experience and assigns human experience its “causal, temporal, and spatial features” (Phillips, 1995, p. 6). As applied in an educational setting, the way in which students perceive their environment shapes the way they understand the world; that is, knowledge begins with experience and while all future knowledge does not necessarily arise out of this experience, it shapes the way students make sense of new information.
In the early 20th century, Dewey built on the idea of the role of prior experience in new knowledge acquisition by adding an element of human agency to the process. Dewey (1960) declared that “knowing is not the act of an outside spectator but of a particular inside natural and social scene” and that the “true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action” (p. 196). In other words, Dewey proclaimed that in addition to students’ prior knowledge, active engagement on the part of the learner plays a significant role in new learning. Or, as stated in Bodner (1986), “The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows” (p. 11).

Later in the 20th century, both Piaget and Vygotsky made significant contributions to the constructivist viewpoint and are generally regarded as foundational figures in modern views of constructivism (Phillips, 1995). For Piaget, learning ultimately rests with the student, not the teacher. A pioneer in child psychology and cognitive development, Piaget believes that children cannot just be given knowledge; rather knowledge must be personally constructed from individual experience and that the capacity of a child to understand is directly related to a child’s cognitive abilities and perceptions of the world at a particular age (Genovese, 2003). In Piagetian terms, the processes of assimilation (taking newly learned information to fit into preconceived categories and individual notions of how the world works) and accommodation (shifting individual views of how the world works while inventing new mental categories in light of new information) are products of constructed learning. Vygotsky influences and contributes to the modern conception of constructivism through defining ways that new knowledge builds upon previous knowledge and through “awareness that interactions between the individual, interpersonal, and cultural historical factors” (D’Angelo et al.,
2009, para. 2) affect the learning of students. In other words, Vygotskian constructivism suggests that “cognition and learning can only be understood by considering the social contexts in which they occur” (Kinnucan-Welsch & Jenlink, 1998, p. 413).

Some educational researchers (see Lunenberg, 1998) maintain that “constructivism may be the most significant recent trend in education relative to the dynamic relationship between how teachers teach and how children learn” (Tenenbaum, Naidu, Jegede, & Austin, 2001, p. 88). Constructivism has become “a leading theoretical position in education” (Ozkal, Tekkaya, Cakiroglu, & Sungur, 2009, p. 74) and “has an important effect on the development of teaching and learning approaches” (Ozkal et al., 2009, p. 75). Although constructivism can be developed in many directions (e.g., psychological, epistemological, sociological, historical), can take different forms in an educational context (e.g., methodological, radical, didactic, and dialectical), and can refer to one of many different but related concepts, constructivist points of view – in relation to teaching and learning – usually focus on pedagogy, epistemological theory, and learning theory.

While epistemological theory plays an important role in explaining how bodies of knowledge come to be, the focus of this study was more on faculty approaches to teaching. As a learning theory, constructivism can be defined as a “cognitive theory that posits that learners actively develop new knowledge based on prior knowledge” which “emphasizes that this construction of knowledge is accomplished within a social and cultural context” (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). In other words, learners construct knowledge based on what they already know and understand as they make connections between new and old information to create new knowledge. Learners' prior knowledge,
perspectives, beliefs, and experiences interact with new experiences and their interpretations of the environment around them. Constructivism as pedagogy is deeply rooted in constructivist and objectivist philosophies and is the focus of debate among educators in terms of how knowledge is acquired. While both philosophies have numerous theories in support of each position, “the preponderance of present-day educational theory and practice appear to support a constructivist viewpoint” (Brown & King, 2000, p. 245). Consequently, thoughtful and reflective consideration “needs to be paid to its [constructivism’s] pedagogic potential in all learning environments and contexts” and the “development of innovative pedagogical practices” (Tenenbaum et al., 2001, pp. 87-88).

A constructivist approach to pedagogy raises questions about the “worth and validity of different kinds of knowledge and knowing” (Cullen et al., 2002, p. 38). Taking a more reflective view of teaching allows us to explore the circumstances surrounding how faculty members arrive at teaching approaches; however, a reflective view on pedagogy in higher education is not widely found in the literature. Studies of pedagogy tend to be “presented in technicist terms – as decontextualised ideas and practices – rather than located in a social and philosophical space” (Cullen et al., 2002, p. 38). Thus, this research study seeks to understand how part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction among diverse populations of students in community college classrooms.

**The Science of Learning in Higher Education**

The previous section provided a brief review of the historical conception of pedagogy through the pedagogy of modern times in the form of pedagogical content
knowledge, a special form of knowledge that bundles subject matter knowledge with knowledge of learners, learning, contexts, and pedagogy. This section provides a brief overview of the research on learning since the 1980s when the concept of *pedagogy* emerged as a national issue (in the form of calls for teacher improvement and increased quality in undergraduate education) for the first time since Dewey’s *Pedagogic Creed* at the turn of the 20th century. It concludes with an examination of the research on the science of learning, the findings of which have implications for teaching in America’s community colleges.

**Emerging research on how students learn.** An evolution in the study of the mind over the past 40 years has significant implications for education as new theories of learning suggest new and different approaches to teaching than are usually found in American colleges and universities (Bransford et al., 2000). Sponsored through the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, and in cooperation with the Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning and the Committee on Learning Research and Educational Practice, Bransford et al.’s *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition* (2000) is a seminal work that provides a compilation and comprehensive review of research related to the science of how people learn. While it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate all aspects of the science of learning, this section briefly examines this research as it relates to (a) how existing knowledge affects how people learn and (b) implications for pedagogical approaches.

**Impact of prior knowledge.** College students are not blank slates. Students come to college classrooms with a wide range of prior knowledge, understandings, beliefs, and
personal perceptions. Regardless of their accuracy or sophistication, these factors have considerable influence on how students organize and interpret their environments which, in turn, affect the process for acquiring and constructing new knowledge (Shuell, 1986). In other words, students acquire new knowledge and construct meaning based upon what they already know and believe, as knowledge does not occur in isolation but is cumulative in nature. The power and influence that existing knowledge has on current learning isexpertly illustrated through an example taken from a children’s book, Fish is Fish (Lionni, 1970). As described in Bransford et al. (2000), the book describes a fish who is keenly interested in learning about what happens on land, but the fish cannot explore land because it can only breathe in water. It befriends a tadpole who grows into a frog and eventually goes out onto the land. The frog returns to the pond a few weeks later and reports on what he has seen. The frog describes all kinds of things like birds, cows, and people. The book shows pictures of the fish’s representations of each of these descriptions: each is a fish-like form that is slightly adapted to accommodate the frog’s descriptions – people are imagined to be fish who walk on their tailfins, birds are fish with wings, cows are fish with udders. (p. 11)

This story is not only relevant for young children but for learners of all ages, and is analogous to how students construct meaning in college classrooms – they bring with them many similarly narrow views based on what they’ve seen, experienced, and know to be true and, as a result, adapt new knowledge to reflect meaning based on prior understanding. College students often cultivate opinions about phenomena that fit their personal experiences but do not necessarily represent an accurate accounting of the facts or a set of circumstances. According to Bransford et al., “learning is enhanced when teachers’ [sic] pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to the learning task, use knowledge as a starting point for new instruction, and monitor students’ changing conceptions as instruction proceeds” (p. 11). Without skilled
assistance from their instructors, students may fail to connect everyday knowledge to subjects, concepts, and ideas taught in college.

Although the science of learning contends that prior knowledge and experiences can enhance acquisition of new learning, it can also detract from it. New information may at times seem “incomprehensible” to students and create feelings of “confusion” (Bransford et al., p. 70). Yet the more challenging circumstances (as related to pedagogy) are when students “construct a coherent (for them) representation of information while deeply misunderstanding the new information” (p. 70). While the first example may be addressed through the identification of the student’s confusion, (e.g., asking a question), the latter instance may go undetected as the student “doesn’t realize that he or she is failing to understand” (p. 70). The fact that students develop new meaning based on prior knowledge and current understanding underscores the importance of incorporating a variety of methods of instruction that does not rely solely on “teaching by telling” (p. 71); instructors must “strive to make students’ thinking visible and find ways to help them re-conceptualize faulty conceptions” (p. 71).

Prior knowledge is not relegated only to the experiences and understandings that students bring to the classroom. Prior knowledge also involves “the kind of knowledge that learners acquire because of their social roles, such as those connected with race, class, gender, and their cultural and ethnic affiliations” (Bransford et al., p. 72). The meanings that are attached to students’ cultural knowledge by instructors has a significant effect on whether or not, and to what degree, this type of knowledge will be valued and applied in the classroom. In other words, factors such as race, class, gender, and culture influences “what we talk about; how we talk about it; what we see, attend to, or ignore;
how we think; and what we think about” (Porter & Samovar, 1991, p. 21). Some instructors may choose to engage this type of prior knowledge through determining what ethnically and culturally diverse students know and applying it within the context of the class; whereby assisting students to view different cultural backgrounds as strengths to be built on rather than as signs of deficits. Conversely, as is the case in many college classrooms, this type of prior knowledge may be disregarded, ignored, demeaned, or neglected (Gay, 2002), and may have a debilitating effect on the learning process.

Some learning environments, along with certain prior experiences, are not compatible with the brain’s natural learning process (Smilkstein, 2003). One such environment is the traditional college classroom that employs standardized teaching methodologies where instructors teach “the one right answer” or “the one right way” (Smilkstein, 2003, p. 29) of doing things. In a traditional classroom, the instructional method typically involves a lecture-based format where students are passively engaged in the activity of the classroom. Admittedly, some students perform quite well in this type of environment. These students tend to be “well prepared with study and test-taking skills,” “have relevant prior knowledge,” “have been socialized to behave appropriately (obediently and quietly),” (p. 29) in this type of environment, and share the same culture or cultural background as their instructors. However, many students who are underprepared and come from different cultural backgrounds and experiences from their instructors are “at a grave disadvantage” (p. 29) in this type of learning environment.

The latter grouping of students tend to populate community college classrooms, where faculty ethnicity ranges between 88% (full time) to 85% (part time) White (Palmer, 1999) and enrollment of diverse populations comprises 32% non-White (American
Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Non-resident Alien, Race Unknown), 59% part-time, and 61% female students (AACC, 2014).

**Implications for pedagogical approaches.** The emerging science of learning underscores the importance of rethinking the methods with which teaching occurs. From a constructivist perspective, learning is a result of the student’s construction of knowledge through idiosyncratic engagement in his or her experiential world, which is in contrast to a view of learning as a “transmission of facts, concepts and skills in a ready-made fashion from teacher to students” (Frid, 2000, p. 17-18). According to Frid (2000), a constructivist perspective of teaching explicitly acknowledges that students will learn different things as a result of the ‘same’ learning activities and experiences. This is because the experiences are not actually the ‘same’ – they are interpreted and acted upon differently by different people as a result of differing prior knowledge and experiences, learning styles, perceptions, goals, and a range of social factors. The pedagogical implications of constructivism are that teachers should act as facilitators who provide appropriate activities and support for students to personally construct meanings, rather than receive them ready-made from the teacher. (p.18)

In other words, instructors must recognize these developmental, social, and contextual differences as they design their classroom environments; which should encourage creativity, problem solving, exploration, sharing of ideas, and understanding in support of constructivist learning (Frid).

While there is no universal best teaching practice, research suggests that there exists a core set of learning principles based upon how students learn, which include: (a) engaging students prior knowledge and experience in meaningful ways, (b) creating opportunities for students to learn in context and with understanding, and (c) empowering students to assume responsibility for their own learning (Bransford et al., 2000). To
create personal relevance, students need to understand the benefits and importance of the curriculum for their own interests. Faculty members can promote this relevance by incorporating real-life situations and experiences into their students' classroom learning. Bransford et al. suggested that attempting to determine which pedagogical approaches or instructional techniques are best, in and of themselves, are not an effective strategy. Instead, with the knowledge of how students learn, instructors can choose more purposefully among methods, or use a combination of methods and techniques, to accomplish specific goals and learning outcomes (see Figure 5). These choices should be mediated by subject matter and course content, grade and course level, learning goals and outcomes, and so forth, in intentional and purposeful ways.

After years of research on the topic of learning, Bransford et al. (2000) concluded the following with regard to pedagogy and teaching:

- Teachers need expertise in both subject matter content and pedagogical content knowledge in teaching;
- Teachers need to develop an understanding of pedagogy as an intellectual discipline that reflects theories of learning, including knowledge of how cultural beliefs and the personal characteristics of learners influence learning; and
- Teachers are learners and the principles of learning and transfer for student learners apply to teachers. (p. 242)

Through the work of Bransford et al. and Shulman (1987), we can reasonably conclude that making intentional and purposeful pedagogical choices within a framework of core learning principles can facilitate effective instruction and assist in designing productive classroom learning environments for diverse populations of learners in community colleges. The work of Bransford et al. (2000) and Shulman informed the central research question of the study, which is discussed in Chapter 3.
Figure 5. Teaching strategies and techniques based on how students learn (adapted from Bransford et al., 2000)

Summary

Although community colleges rely so heavily on part-time instructors – on average, about 70% of the instructional workforce – very little is known about how they approach teaching and how they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the learning environment and ethos of the classroom. Expectations and responsibilities of faculty members at community colleges have evolved beyond the practice of solely delivering content knowledge to providing students with content knowledge expertise within a framework of learning theory, pedagogical content knowledge, student support, and caring (Grubb, 1999).
Chapter 3

Methodology

In general, qualitative research “is based on a relativistic, constructivist ontology that posits that there is no objective reality” (Krauss, 2005, p. 759). Instead, a qualitative research approach assumes that there are “multiple realities constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest” (Krauss, p. 759). Philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality are crucial to understanding the overall perspective from which a study is designed and carried out (Krauss). Similarly, a paradigm, described here as a “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105), provides a research approach and corresponds to the framework within which a study is conducted. In this chapter, I discuss my philosophical assumptions that lead to the research paradigm and conceptual framework that guide the study, and why I chose this approach. I then discuss the research methodology, ethical considerations, and provide the study’s research questions. Next, I set the context for the study, complete with study setting, study site characteristics, and population studied. Chapter 3 concludes with a description of the methods of data collection, data analysis, and instrumentation, and other relevant logistics of the study.

Approach to Study

In qualitative research, researchers recognize their own background, experiences, and world views, and how these things shape their interpretation of both their reality and the data they will analyze (Creswell, 2007). My approach to this study was influenced by my philosophy of knowing and personal epistemology and a constructivist world view,
both of which contributed to the rationale for using a grounded theory methodology for this study.

**Philosophy of knowing and personal epistemology.** Like many at a similar age, my views of knowledge and learning during primary and secondary education were quite conventional in that teachers were the possessors of knowledge and students learned directly from teachers. This dualistic and decidedly one-dimensional notion of knowledge and learning continued into my college years, as I was more concerned with first getting through a course – and later getting a good grade – than I was with learning, or perhaps more specifically, the nature of knowledge. I first became aware of the limitations of dualistic thinking and importance of critical thinking during graduate school in the early 1990s but was not yet exposed to the concept of epistemology. Exposure to this concept of *how do you know what you know* may originally have occurred during my initial years in higher education and attendance at professional conferences, especially the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). It was in those settings that I heard about *The Student Learning Imperative* (1996) – and later *Learning Reconsidered* (2004) – and remember considering the contextual nature of learning; yet, I still do not feel I had a grasp of what this really meant and certainly did not fully appreciate the concept of epistemology. In looking back, the concept gained more and more traction with me over the years and lead to a deliberate examination of my conception of epistemology, especially with regard to students’ ways of knowing and my personal philosophy of knowledge acquisition and meaning making.
I owe much of my current philosophy of knowing and personal epistemology to life experiences, the work of Baxter Magolda (1992), and personal reflection of both. I can point to key life circumstances and experiences that have shaped not only who I am but how I view the world. Growing up in a firmly middle class, staunchly Catholic, and large Italian-American family system in a homogenous section of northern New Jersey, I was taught that life is essentially black and white; that is, you obey your father and mother, God and family always come first, you go to church every Sunday, and you don’t question the natural order of things. It was not until I had moved out on my own and began to experience life in a very different way that I realized northern New Jersey represented a minute sampling of greater society (both American and global) and that life presents many different shades of gray.

One defining life experience occurred when I traveled outside the country for the first time. For three weeks, I backpacked through France, Italy, Germany, and Austria, staying in cheap hotels, B & Bs, and youth hostels. It was an amazing experience as I had only viewed life from an American point of view and was able to meet and meaningfully interact with people from different cultures, probably for the first time. This singular experience made me realize the importance of travel and its significance in understanding, appreciating, and valuing other cultures, and that America wasn’t necessarily always on the “right side” of many global issues. I credit this experience with significantly broadening my view of the world and helping move me toward a greater understanding of the complexities involved in arriving at meaning, whatever that is at the time.
Another defining experience in my life occurred when I entered graduate school. I attended a small, private college in northern New Jersey, about 10 miles or so outside of New York City. The college had a very diverse student body, with about 30% being White, 30% being African-American, 10% being Hispanic/Latino, 10% being Asian-American, and the other 20% representing cultures from around the world. For the first time in my life, I was not in the majority but, depending on the circumstances or situation, very much in the minority. Many times while shopping in town, I was the only white person in a store or area, which was a very uncomfortable feeling, at least at first. Living, eating, working, and traveling for two years with people from so many cultures, backgrounds, and experiences proved to be an incredibly influential life experience with regard to my view of knowing and epistemology, not to mention my personal development. Although I could not articulate it at the time, this experience made me realize that ways of knowing and meaning making are socially constructed, context-bound, and fluid.

**Constructivist view of teaching and learning.** As stated earlier, qualitative research involves assumptions, a world view, and use of a theoretical lens to study problems inquiring into the meaning individuals ascribe to a problem or process (Creswell, 2007). Clearly, the way I view the world and approach my work is decidedly constructivist, which represents the conceptual framework within which this study is conducted. According to Black and Ammon (1992), research and theory in cognitive science, sociology, and anthropology have combined to stimulate widespread recognition in the educational community of a conception of learning as a constructed process. It can be argued that knowledge cannot be transferred intact from the mind of the instructor to
the mind of student. Based on this assumption, a constructivist pedagogical approach therefore requires a shift from someone who "teaches" to someone who tries to facilitate learning; or, said in another way, a shift from “teaching by imposition to teaching by negotiation” (Zhang, Xuan, & Zhang, 2007, p. 1). A constructivist view of teaching also emphasizes the importance of a two-directional flow of information between teachers and their students. Teaching within a constructivist paradigm insists that students explain their answers, focuses the students' attention on the language they are using, does not allow the students to use words or equations without explaining them, and encourages students to reflect on their knowledge (Zhang et al., 2007), all of which have implications for instruction.

Another fundamental aspect to teaching within a constructivist paradigm is the practice of reflection. Although much variation exists in the literature, reflective teaching generally "entails the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 34). As applied to a college classroom setting, where “routine action is guided primarily by tradition, external authority, and circumstances" (Zeichner & Liston, p. 34), reflective practice in teaching facilitates a more informed pedagogical decision-making process (Calderhead & Gates, 1993) and is a key component in faculty development (Richards, 1990). According to Richards, reflective practice can "help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking" (p. 5). In this study, a constructivist view of teaching and learning informs the epistemological approach and guides the methodology.
Assumptions. While I have philosophically positioned myself in the study through recognizing my personal epistemology and constructivist world view, I must also acknowledge my assumptions which are as follows: (a) learning is a constructed process; therefore, teaching must take into account the social, contextual, cultural, and environmental dimensions in the learning process; (b) based on their history, mission, and identity, community colleges are unique and distinctive institutions which must be considered when developing approaches to teaching; (c) instruction in modern community colleges must adapt to meet the changing needs of an increasingly diverse population of students; (d) learner-centered classrooms provide optimal environmental conditions for learning to occur; and (e) instructors have an influence on the classroom learning environment which, in turn, has an influence on student learning. Therefore, my philosophy of knowing, constructivist view of teaching and learning, and aforementioned assumptions form a statement of personal epistemology through which I conducted this study. My epistemological position as it relates to this study is described in the subsequent section.

Statement of epistemological position. The literature on the science of learning provides abundant documentation that didactic instruction that stresses content over teaching method often dismisses the importance of social, cultural, and environmental contexts in learning (see, for example, Shulman, 1987), which represent crucial elements in classroom learning. A lack of understanding of the complexity of contextual dimensions of learning can lead to pedagogical approaches that detract from (instead of add to) student learning. As a result, I believe instructors need to:

- develop an understanding of pedagogy that reflects theories of learning;
• acquire expertise in both subject matter content and pedagogical content knowledge in teaching;
• demonstrate the importance of culture and context in understanding how knowledge is constructed; and
• foster learner-centered classroom environments in intentional ways.

My epistemological position influenced the formation of the study’s research questions and formed the lens through which data collection and data analysis were performed.

Research Questions

As previously stated in Chapter 1, the research questions for this study were as follows:

Central Research Question

• How do part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction in community college classrooms?

Sub-questions

• What internal perspectives and external conditions influenced their decisions? What experiences influenced their choices?
• How do they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom learning environment?
• What theory explains how they make pedagogical choices and decisions?

Research Design

According to Given (2008), “the process of developing a research design combines three broadly connected and interdependent components: theoretical, methodological, and ethical considerations relevant to the specific project” (p. 761).
have already discussed the conceptual framework that guides this study. The remainder of this section covers the research methodology, study design, ethical considerations, and limitations for the study.

**Methodology.** The research method I selected for the study was grounded theory. What follows is a discussion of the rationale for this choice, grounded theory in qualitative research, essential elements in grounded theory, and benefits of grounded theory.

**Rationale for methodology.** The choice of grounded theory as the methodology for this study was determined, in part, by the aim of the study. While many qualitative methodologies seek to describe and explore phenomena, grounded theory moves beyond description and exploration and endeavors to explain the phenomenon being studied (Birks & Mills, 2011). Also, grounded theory is the preferred methodology when the researcher is seeking to uncover a general explanation of a process or action (Birks & Mills, 2011; Creswell, 2007). The aim of this study was not simply to describe the pedagogical methods used by faculty members; the aim was to explain how part-time faculty members arrive at pedagogical approaches that guide their choice of teaching methods and instruction. Further, data collection and analysis in grounded theory result in “the generation of theory that explicates a phenomenon from the perspective and in the context of those who experience it” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 16). This study pursued the discovery of factors (e.g., internal perspectives, external conditions, personal experiences) that influence the pedagogical decision-making processes of part-time faculty members in a community college setting. As a general methodology, grounded theory can adopt any epistemological perspective appropriate to the data and the
ontological stance of the researcher (Holton, 2009). As discussed earlier, my approach to this study was influenced by my articulated personal epistemology; a grounded theory methodology allowed me to account for these influences and assumptions into the data collection and data analysis processes. That is, my personal epistemology provided the frame through which I determined which data were relevant during collection and influenced the interpretation of data. Finally, grounded theory as a methodology is indicated when little is known about the area of study (Birks & Mills, 2011). A review of the literature revealed a void in research related to the pedagogical approaches of community college faculty, especially part-time community college faculty members.

**Grounded theory in qualitative research.** Grounded theory as a research methodology was first used in the United States by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in a study of patients who were dying in hospitals. A grounded theory study design was used in response to the predominantly quantitative research paradigms at the time. Historically, the dissonance that exists between qualitative and quantitative approaches rests with fundamentally different emphases on the uses of theory in research. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), verifying theory (as is customary in quantitative study) is considered systematic and rigorous, while research based on qualitative data “was either not theoretical enough or the theories were too impressionistic” (p. 15). Initially, qualitative research was to supplement quantitative research with “a few substantive categories and hypotheses” (pp. 15-16) in the discovery of facts and theory testing. Advocates of qualitative research contend that this approach is the best way for “theorizing about social structures and social systems” and “was the only way to obtain data on many areas of social life not amenable to the techniques for collecting quantitative data” (p. 17). Glaser
and Strauss contended that theories formulated “within the rhetoric of verification” (p. 17) dismiss the importance of and reliance on the use of qualitative data to generate these theories, and that qualitative research “is often the most adequate and efficient way to obtain the type of information required” (p. 18). What developed for Glaser and Strauss was a methodology that focuses more on the data collected during research to form an explanation of the social topic or phenomenon (as opposed to the more quantitative approach of using the data collected during research exclusively to validate an existing theory). The resulting research method – grounded theory – is “an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data” (Martin & Turner, 1986, p. 141).

**Essential elements of grounded theory.** Grounded theory methods of data collection and data analysis consist of a generally accepted set of essential elements. According to Birks and Mills (2011) these core components include “initial coding and categorization of data; concurrent data generation or collection and analysis; writing memos; theoretical sampling; constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive logic; theoretical sensitivity; intermediate coding; selecting a core category; theoretical saturation; and theoretical integration” (p. 9) (see Figure 6). The initial data analysis process is commonly referred to as *open coding*. Open coding is a process for examining data and breaking it down into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), or said in another way “identifying important words, or groups of words, in the data and then labelling them accordingly” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 9). The open coding process involves conceptualizing the data, labeling phenomena, discovering categories, and
finally naming categories using *in vivo* codes (i.e., important words or phrases, many times deriving from participant direct quotes). Additional data are collected and analyzed concurrently, which allows for subsequent data collection to be based on theoretical purpose or relevance; in other words, the researcher continually controls or adjusts data collection to ensure the data’s relevance to the emerging direction of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and to determine additional information that is needed to saturate particular categories (Birks & Mills, 2011).

*Figure 6.* Grounded theory research process based on Corbin and Strauss (1990).

Note: Theory can assume the form of a narrative statement, visual picture, or series of hypotheses or propositions.

A central part of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of new and existing data. Constant comparative analysis can be characterized through the constant comparison codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories (Birks & Mills, 2011). The constant comparative technique allows researchers to “stay close to their data” and “constitutes the systematization of the
[grounded theory] approach” (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 141). The constant comparative method continues until a grounded theory is fully integrated. Memo writing occurs simultaneously to constant comparative analysis, which are “written records of a researcher’s thinking” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 10) during the grounded theory research study. More specifically, memos can take several forms including notes, thoughts, and diagrams, and usually grow conceptually in “complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 198) as the study progresses. Memo writing is an ongoing activity throughout the study with “memos” transformed into the grounded theory findings (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Intermediate coding, also referred to as axial coding, is “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Axial coding fully develops individual categories through the process of linking categories/subcategories based on a set of relationships. Where open coding is said to “fracture the data” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 12), axial coding repairs or reconnects the data. As stated by Birks and Mills, “developing categories through the process of intermediate coding will increase the level of conceptual analysis apparent in the developing grounded theory” (p. 12). In other words, the axial coding process facilitates the discovery of similarities and differences both between and among categories, and involves a constant interplay between inductive and deductive thinking, in an effort to suggest relationships that are supported through the research data.

Once the researcher fully develops individual categories, it is time to select the core category (or central phenomenon) around which all other categories are integrated.
In addition to identifying the central phenomenon of the study, the selective coding process focuses on completing categories that need further development and actualizing the central phenomenon at a higher level of analysis than occurred during axial coding (Birks & Mills, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); this is achieved through “full theoretical saturation of both the core category and its subsidiary categories, sub-categories and their properties” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 12), which may involve further theoretical sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

The final step in the analytic process is theoretical integration and theory generation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend “explicating the story line” (p. 118) to achieve integration. Strauss and Corbin refer to the “story line” mechanism or technique to realize theoretical integration as advanced coding. In explicating the story line, the researcher formulates a story based upon the conceptualization of the central phenomenon of the study (i.e., the category around which all other categories and subcategories are integrated). Memos play a critical role in both arriving at the story and in the advanced stage of analysis as they enable the researcher to “record ideas about potential central categories and about relationships among categories” (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 145). Rennie et al. further point out that

During this advanced stage of analysis, the research memos are sorted, and new memos are created in response to the insights and speculations produced by initial memo sorts. Additional memoing contributes to the generation of the core category and the specification of the structure of its properties and the relationships among them. (p. 145)

High-quality memos are essential to elevating the study beyond description and to a level of sophistication and comprehensiveness; memos also provide the organizational structure for writing the theory (Birks & Mills, 2011; Rennie et al., 1988). Ultimately,
the theory is validated through the process of grounding it to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Benefits of grounded theory.** Two benefits of using a grounded theory methodology include *ecological validity* and *parsimony* (Walden University, n.d.). In qualitative research, ecological validity refers to the extent to which research findings accurately represent real world settings. In general, grounded theories are considered to be ecologically valid because they reflect the data from which they were generated. In other words, grounded theories tend to be context-specific, detailed, and tightly connected to the data. Parsimony is the concept of reducing complex phenomena to the simplest possible explanation. Grounded theories aim to provide parsimonious explanations that offer helpful and practical applications of complex problems.

**Study design.** Specific characteristics of the study design included the study site and population, the study sample, recruitment of participants, interviews, data collection, data analysis, and member checking, all of which are described below.

**Study site and population.** The study site was a public, urban-serving, comprehensive, multi-campus community college in the Midwest with total enrollment of approximately 17,000 students (see Table 1). At the time the study was conducted, the college’s main campus was situated approximately 5 miles from the urban center in which it primarily serves, which also functions as the location where data collection occurred. In addition to multiple locations, the college offered partial and fully online courses and academic programs of study, and Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEOP) for high school students (also known as Dual Enrollment Option). Students taking advantage of these offerings numbered approximately 5000 and 500, respectively.
The institution offered over 130 program areas leading to an associate degree or certificate, with approximately 2000 degrees and 400 certificates conferred in 2012. The college’s 3- and 4-year (2008 and 2007) cohort graduation rates were 7% and 15%, respectively. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), this rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the revised adjusted cohort. Comparatively, the national average for the 2007 cohort for public 2-year colleges was 20.4% (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

As reflected on the study institution’s web site, enrollment at the college peaked in 2009 with a reported headcount of 23,606 (equates to approx. 12,988 FTE). During the subsequent three academic years, there was a precipitous drop in enrollment as follows: 2010 (19,980); 2011 (17,173); and 2012 (16,996). The 2012 figure represented approximately 9,715 FTE, a difference of over 3,200 FTE’s in a 3-year period.

The population for this study was part-time faculty members across academic disciplines within the college’s six schools. The college’s most recent reporting (AY 2012) indicated a total instructional workforce of 1,499 faculty members (1298 part-time as compared to 201 full-time faculty members). Expressed in another way, the college employed over 6 times as many part-time instructors than full-time instructors, and approximately 3 times as many part-time instructors as full-time, non-instructional staff. Within the instructional workforce, 780 faculty members were women (52%) and 105 were ethnic minorities (7%). The ratio of overall part-time to full-time faculty members, women faculty members, and ethnic minority faculty members within the instructional workforce remained relatively constant in the years since 2009. Comparatively, the
ethnic minority population among students was 27% (included Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander, Native American, and Other/Unknown).

Table 1

*Characteristics of Student Population and Enrollment Figures at Study Site, Fall 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Headcount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>16,996</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8,603</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree/certificate seeking</td>
<td>12,536</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree/certificate conferred</td>
<td>1,597</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New, first-time college</td>
<td>2,280</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>6,061</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid recipients</td>
<td>12,237</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data collected from Office of Institutional Research at the study site.

_Study sample._ The process of data collection for this study began with the identification of a study sample. Initially, sampling was purposeful based on the following criteria: participants needed to be active, part-time faculty members in English Composition (either currently teaching or having previously taught the course at the study site). The rationale behind this initial, purposeful sample was three-fold:

1. To narrow the study population (approximately 1,300 potential participants) to a manageable number.

2. To increase the probability that study participants had taught in a diverse classroom setting (as all students from the college are required to take English Composition regardless of program of study).
3. To refine further the study population into a homogeneous group (i.e., individuals who have commonly experienced the phenomenon under study), a grounded theory sampling strategy recommended by Creswell (2007) and typically used in grounded theory studies. Participants coming from the homogenous grouping formed the study sample.

Qualitative researchers have recommended sample sizes ranging from as few as six participants to as many as 30 for a grounded theory study (Creswell, 2007); however, no rationales exist for those recommendations. A recent study speaking to this uncertainty by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) revealed that no new codes emerged after 12 interviews and that basic codes were present after 6 interviews. Generally, a smaller sample size is appropriate if the study population is relatively homogenous.

**Recruitment of participants.** Recruitment of participants involved multiple steps. First, the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the study site agreed to assist me with the identification of those part-time faculty members meeting the criteria identified above. Upon identification, IRB at the study site released names and college email addresses to me, which allowed me to contact potential participants via college email. After consulting with IRB at the study site, I determined that the email call for participation would come from my college email account, identifying myself as both researcher and employee, for the following reasons:

1. I was well known within the college community, thus increasing the chances that the email would be opened, read, and responded to in a timely manner.

2. This approach created a transparency of process from the study’s outset and assisted in establishing trust and developing rapport with participants.
3. Developing rapport with participants helped to establish reciprocity during future narrative interactions with participants and counteracted the potential imbalance of power during the data collection process (Birks & Mills, 2011).

4. It was recommended by IRB at the study site that the call for participation emanate directly from my email account. I then sent an email call for participation in the study via college email and included a study invitation letter (see Appendix A). Additional calls for participation were sent via email as needed. I followed up with interested participants initially through email or phone call. Those eligible individuals maintaining interest after initial contact were selected for participation until a study sample was obtained, which occurred on a first-come, first-served basis.

Initially, the study population was intended to be a homogeneous sampling of part-time instructors within a single department (English) at the study site. Due to a very low response rate among this population after two calls for participation, it was necessary to expand the scope of potential study participants. I determined that I would first expand to all part-time instructors within Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice, the academic school which houses the English Department. Once again, this initial effort did not yield a high enough response rate to obtain a study sample. As a result, I continued to expand the scope of the study population, one academic school at a time, until a sample was obtained. As such, the study population was comprised of part-time faculty members (instructing at least one course at time of study) from the following academic schools: Health, Education and Human Services; Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice; Interdisciplinary Studies; and Science, Engineering, Technology, and
Mathematics (STEM). Selection of academic schools beyond Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice was performed at random until a study sample was obtained; therefore, it was not necessarily to solicit participation within the college’s two remaining schools.

**Interviews.** At the study’s outset, criteria for the selection of participants was intended to be as follows: (a) number of years teaching English Composition at the study site, (b) number of sections of English Composition taught at the study site, and (c) number of years teaching any course at the study site. Selection of participants was to be based on the grounded theory practice of formulating a homogenous study sample (Creswell, 2007). However, it was necessary to alter criteria for selection of participants based on poor response rates to calls for participation. Eligibility was altered to include all part-time faculty (within the four academic schools receiving calls for participation in the study) scheduled to teach a course or courses at the study site at the time the study was conducted. Those faculty members responding and meeting this single eligibility criterion were selected to participate on a first come, first-served basis until a study sample was obtained. Referring to Creswell (2007) and Guest, et al. (2006) for guidance, I anticipated a study sample of 8-12 participants in which to interview.

All prospective participants responded to a call for participation through email communication, which then elicited either a follow-up email or phone call from me describing more about the study and requirements of participation (outlined in Appendices A and B: Study Invitation Letter and Participant Consent Form, respectively). Participants maintaining interest in participation were scheduled for interviews in a neutral, convenient (to the participant) location, which was confirmed via
Most interviews were conducted in a private study room within the study site library; other interviews were conducted in mutually agreed-upon locations at the study site. Prior to initiating face-to-face interviews, and not included in audio recordings, participants were reminded of the following:

1. That they could withdraw from or opt out of any portion of the study at any time.

2. That participant anonymity would be ensured throughout the study.

3. That participants would be referred to through pseudonyms for use in the study.

4. That all interviews would audio recorded for the sole purposes of transcription and to accurately represent the data.

5. That participants would be assigned pseudonyms and pseudonym identities would be kept in a secure location separate from the interview transcripts throughout the study.

6. Participants would be required to participate in an initial interview and a follow-up interview.

**Data collection.** Upon receiving consent (both verbally and through the signing of the Participant Consent Form), I began the interviews by indicating to the participants that I was turning on the audio recorder. I then proceeded to follow an Interview Protocol with pre-determined questions (see Appendix C). Interview questions were developed based upon (a) the statement of the problem and nature of the study, (b) information obtained as a result of the literature review, and (c) a narrowing of the study research questions. In other words, questions were intended to discover perspectives and factors that guide participants’ pedagogical decision-making, examine how they perceive
that their pedagogical approaches influence the learning environment in their classrooms, and formulate a theory that helps to explain these phenomena. Data collection followed essential grounded theory methods and was influenced by assumptions described earlier in this chapter.

Initial interviews were scheduled based on the availability of both the participant and myself. Each interview was scheduled for an hour in length but the audio recorded portion of the interviews usually lasted about 25 minutes. Interviews followed an interview protocol and included clarifying or follow-up questions at my discretion. In grounded theory research, early analysis of data uncovers topics that need further explanation; as such, data collection and analysis take place in alternating sequences known as the constant comparative method. Based upon analysis of data collected during initial interviews, follow-up interview questions were formulated based upon codes interpreted to need further expansion, clarification, or confirmation (Birks & Mills, 2011) and are represented through Appendix D. Upon formulation of follow-up interview questions, and approval from IRB, I scheduled follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews were mostly scheduled via email, followed the interview protocol outlined in Appendix D, and lasted between 15-25 minutes. In this study, all data gathered through interviews were (a) audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third-party (with the exception of uhm’s, ah’s, and similar placeholders) or (b) were reflected in field notes taken during interviews.

Data analysis. Grounded theory research is built on a practice of comparing and categorizing concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once transcribed, data were analyzed using the constant comparative method through open coding, axial coding, and
selective coding, and followed the essential grounded theory methods described earlier in this chapter, which included an ongoing memoing process.

According to Birks and Mills (2011), the coding process should have a natural progression that “reflects the varying levels of conceptual analysis” (p. 97) that emerge during axial (interconnecting the categories) coding. The selective coding process (building a “story” that connects the categories) focused on completing categories that needed further development and actualized the central phenomenon at a higher level of analysis than occurred during axial coding (Birks & Mills, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); this was achieved through “theoretical saturation of both the core category and its subsidiary categories” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 12), which involved further data analysis. Advanced coding techniques were employed to assist with theoretical integration and ultimately theory generation.

**Member checking.** In order to triangulate the data, field notes were compared to transcriptions of interviews to corroborate the accuracy of field notes. This process of comparison also served to validate important themes/issues as I first read through the transcriptions, highlighting words, quotes, or ideas that I thought were important. I then went back and compared these impressions to field notes to identify themes/issued that overlapped, giving these added attention and consideration in analysis. I also sent all participants, via email, documents of their interview transcriptions to check for accuracy. Other than misspelled words or grammatical errors (as examples), no participant indicated any substantive inaccuracies in the interview transcriptions.

**Ethical Considerations**

According to Creswell (2007), ethical issues can occur throughout the research
process, prior to conducting the study through reporting the data. The primary ethical issue that was anticipated for this study related to the researcher’s role at the study site. As an employee at the study site, an institutional connection existed between the researcher and the participants. While access to study participants and data collection was relatively convenient, the researcher’s status as an employee and role within the institution was a concern; specifically, that this may have negatively influenced the authenticity of participants’ responses. To protect against this, I followed strategies as recommended by Birks and Mills (2011):

1. I established trust with participants through clearly communicating the general purpose of the study (both through written materials and narrative interaction), guaranteeing confidentiality before, during, and after the study, and demonstrating transparency of process.

2. I maintained an audit trail (record of research activities, changes in research direction, and rationale for choices) throughout the study.

3. I employed the technique of member checking (a process that involves participants reviewing data collected during interviews for accuracy) to ensure correct representation of information.

4. I made clear that participants may withdraw from the study at any time and may decline from answering any question or questions while continuing in the study.

5. I identified a neutral site in which to interview participants.

Limitations

As with any qualitative research, this study contained inherent limitations. In
general, the findings in qualitative research can be limited in their transferability to other contexts and situations. Transferability reflects the scope of the study so as to discern its applicability to different contexts (Jensen, 2008). In this way, a study's worthiness is determined by how well others can determine the contexts in which the findings may be applicable. Unlike the notion of generalizability (its quantitative counterpart), which states that a study’s results are applicable “across all environments related to the context being studied” (p. 886), transferability implies that research findings may be applicable both within the study’s context as well as beyond the study’s context. In response to this limitation I provided thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation to “allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations” (Stenton, 2004, p. 70) and assist with potential transferability of findings.

While I have taught, I am not a teacher and therefore did not afford an “insider’s” understanding of college classrooms. While this may be viewed as a limitation, according to Creswell (2007) and Dwyer and Buckle (2009), having an outsider’s epistemology in qualitative research is viewed as an advantage. The goal of a qualitative investigation is to understand the complex world of human experience and behavior from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest. Therefore, “the investigator is expected not to have an a priori, well-delineated conceptualization of the phenomenon; rather, this conceptualization is to emerge from the interaction between participants and investigator” (Krauss, 2005, p. 764).
Summary

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. Using grounded theory as a research methodology allows for the exploration and interpretation of individuals’ experiences, beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and attitudes with regard to a particular subject area or social process. In this study, a grounded theory research approach will help to explain the ways in which part-time community college faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their classroom instruction. A better understanding of this phenomenon will provide a framework for professional development activities and further research for part-time faculty members, and potentially have a positive impact on student success, persistence and completion at community colleges.
Chapter 4:

Results

This study examined a small group of part-time faculty members in a community college setting, where the majority of classroom instruction is performed by this contingent instructional workforce. Within this context, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover the ways in which part-time community college faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their classroom instruction. Using a grounded theory research methodology, this study developed a general theory to help explain how part-time faculty members arrive at pedagogical approaches and make pedagogical decisions at a large, urban-serving community college. This chapter presents the results of the analysis of data collected through initial and follow-up interviews with 11 part-time faculty members representing four schools at the study site. Presentation of results are organized in order of (a) demographic information about the study population, (b) characteristics of the study participants, and (c) results of the analyses used to address the study’s research questions (central research question and sub-questions introduced in Chapter 1), which are as follows:

Central Research Question

- How do part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction in community college classrooms?

Sub-questions

- What internal perspectives and external conditions influenced their decisions?

- What experiences influenced their choices?
• How do they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom learning environment?

• What theory explains how they make pedagogical choices and decisions?

Study Population Demographics

A total of 549 part-time faculty members from four schools within the college were invited to participate in the study (see Table 2). The college’s most recent reporting (Fall 2013) indicates a total instructional workforce of 1,420 faculty members (1220 part-time as compared to 200 full-time faculty members). Expressed in another way, the college employs over 6 times as many part-time instructors than full-time instructors, and approximately 3 times as many part-time instructors as full-time, non-instructional staff. Within the college’s overall instructional workforce, 757 faculty members are women (53%) and 109 are ethnic minorities (8%). The ratio of overall part-time to full-time faculty members, women faculty members, and ethnic minority faculty members within the instructional workforce has remained relatively constant since 2009. Comparatively, the ethnic minority population among students is 27% (includes Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander, Native American, and Other/Unknown). International students (students with a residency code of F1) represent 1% of the student body, or 159 students. Faculty-to-student ratio is 1 to 10.5, with an average class size of 14.4 students. The study population was comprised of part-time faculty members (instructing at least one course at time of study) from the following academic schools: Health, Education and Human Services; Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice; Interdisciplinary Studies; and Science, Engineering, Technology, and Mathematics (STEM). Within this population, percentage of males to females was somewhat skewed by the School of

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STEM, where male part-time faculty members outnumbered female part-time faculty members by a 3-to-1 margin. Excluding the School of STEM, percentage of female (vs. male) part-time faculty members in the other academic schools represented in the study was approximately 59%, much more reflective of the percentage of female faculty members at the College as a whole (54%).

Table 2

*Study Population Demographics, Fall 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Years of service (&lt;= 10 years)</th>
<th>Years of service (&gt; 10 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health, Education and Human Services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science, Engineering, Technology, and Mathematics</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of gender, ethnicity, and years of service</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data provided by Office of Institutional Research at the study site.
Study Sample Characteristics

Calls for participation were conducted through email and consisted of a letter of invitation to part-time faculty within an academic school. Additional requests for participation were then expanded to other academic schools based on response rate. A total of seven separate calls for participation within four academic schools were necessary before attaining a study sample. In all, calls for participation produced 14 responses of interest. Of those responding, one was not eligible (didn’t meet criterion of instructing a course at study site at time of study) and two declined to participate after indicating initial interest (both were no shows to scheduled interviews).

While I received an additional four responses, these were aimed at encouraging the worthiness of the study and/or expressed regrets for not being able to participate. Participants were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis according to the selection criteria delineated in Chapter 3, which resulted in a study sample of 11 participants (see Table 3).

The study sample is representative of the population of part-time instructors at the study site in the following ways: (a) 54% of the participants were women (overall, female instructors represent 53% of the part-time instructional workforce at the study site), (b) 18% of the participants were from ethnic minority backgrounds (as compared to 11% of all instructors eligible for participation), and (c) participants taught courses offered in four academic schools (the college is comprised of 6 academic schools). Within the four academic schools represented in the study, approximately 65% had 10 years or less of service at the institution, while participants in the study with 8 years or less of service at the institution was approximately 64%. 

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### Table 3

*List of Study Participants, Fall 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant/gender (pseudonym)</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male1 (Nate)</td>
<td>Health, Education and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male2 (Brad)(^a)</td>
<td>Health, Education and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male3 (Leo)(^a)</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male4 (Alex)(^{ab})</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice; Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male5 (Josh)(^a)</td>
<td>Science, Engineering, Technology, and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female1 (Elaine)(^a)</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female2 (Joanne)</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female3 (Dorothy)</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female4 (Anna)(^a)</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female5 (Eva)(^a)</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female6 (April)</td>
<td>Humanities, Social Sciences, and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Data collected from Office of Institutional Research at study site.

\(^a\)Denotes simultaneously taught courses at another college (or colleges) beyond the study site.

\(^b\)Male4 taught courses in School of Health, Education and Human Services and School of Interdisciplinary Studies.

Additionally, the ages of study participants ranged from 28 years old to 62 years old, with an average age of 42.8 years old. A number of participants were either teaching multiple courses at the study site (5) or teaching courses at another (or multiple)
institutions (7) in addition to the study site. All participants have a minimum of an earned master’s degree, with 2 currently enrolled in Ph.D. programs and two with terminal degrees (Ph.D. and J.D.). One participant was concurrently teaching courses in two different academic schools at the study site.

Presentation of Results

As discussed in Chapter 3, grounded theory methods of data collection and data analysis consist of a generally accepted set of essential elements. These core components include: initial coding and categorization of data through concurrent data collection and analysis (referred to as open coding); putting data back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between categories (referred to as intermediate coding); completing categories that need further development and actualizing a central phenomenon (referred to as advanced or selective coding); and finally theory generation (Birks & Mills, 2011). Memo writing, “records of a researcher’s thinking” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 10), occurs simultaneously to coding and constant comparative analysis, and ensues throughout the study until theory is generated. As such, the remainder of Chapter 4 will present results in the following order (based on information gathered from initial and follow-up interviews with participants): (a) data generated through open coding; (b) data generated through intermediate coding; (c) advanced coding and theoretical integration; and (d) research questions (including presentation of theory). Memos recorded throughout the study were used to identify relationships and link categories, and were interspersed throughout sections as appropriate. Data specifically attributed to a participant (or participants) were done so through the use of pseudonyms.
Open coding. In grounded theory research, open coding is a process for examining data and breaking it down into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Expressed in another way, open coding identifies important words or concepts and labels those phenomena (Birks & Mills, 2011). Deciding which words or concepts are most important was based on (a) researcher epistemology (b) conceptual framework for the study, (c) study research questions, (d) consistency of results, and (e) potential implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research. Within this construct, participant responses from interview questions provide the vehicle to present results in open and intermediate coding sections of this chapter.

Q1. What draws you to teaching? What are your thoughts about teaching at a community college?

The most common response to the first part of this question was that participants were drawn to teaching, viewing teaching as “a calling.” Participants also referred to teaching as “a natural fit,” “a bridge”, “a blessing”, and “the best profession.” Two participants (Dorothy and Elaine) expressed a deep connection to the profession through personal connections or family background. Although he worked in corporate business for the first 20 years of his professional life, one participant (Leo) expressed that he always wanted to be a teacher and receives great satisfaction working with students, especially at-risk populations. Others expressed similar levels of satisfaction in teaching through making connections with students, interactions with students, the ability to have an impact, the ability to watch people grow, self-improvement, and personal enrichment. One participant (Brad) expressed that by virtue of his connection to teaching and involvement in the teaching profession, he would become a better student and thus have
an improved ability to master subject matter. Less common responses were the need for work, supplemental income, convenience, and personal and family reasons.

In answering the second part of the first question, many participants cited the student population at community colleges, describing students as diverse, non-traditional, older, working full or part-time, at-risk, and having families. Elaine described non-traditional community college students as “not your traditional kind of students that you get at a four-year college.” Multiple participants referenced their experiences teaching students who self-disclosed that they have served jail time or come from felony backgrounds leading Dorothy to indicate it’s “a different fabric of student” who are “potentially more challenging than the four-year [student].” For some participants, community college students have a greater need than their more traditional four-year counterparts, among them the need for flexibility in the learning process, support and guidance in non-academic matters, and an environment that fosters student confidence and confidence building. Elaine described her experience in this regard as “What I learn from them is to [sic] ways to continue to meet their needs as students….Try as much as possible to make connections.”

The other primary category that emerged with regard to teaching at a community college was a feeling of disconnectedness for participants in their role as part-time instructors, not necessarily with students but with the academic department, academic chair, colleagues, and the institution in general. One participant (Alex) shared that while teaching at a community college provides “a lot more freedom to do things the way I want without a whole lot of people looking over me;” he had not been “evaluated in [his] classroom in probably three or four years.” For Alex, he felt “a lot less connected to the
department” and “my department chair” as a result. Another participant (Eva) had a similar experience with regard to classroom evaluations, whether from her supervisor, colleagues (in the form of peer review), or students. She mentioned that when she first started, the study site had “a peer review system and it forced faculty to go in and observe other colleagues.” Eva also indicated that “as far as student evaluations” she had not “seen an evaluation in a year.” She stated that “they don’t do that anymore but I learned quite a few things doing that” which was helpful for her since “there isn’t any training course to be an instructor.” Elaine explained that a contributing factor to her feeling of disconnection was little (if any) interaction with other faculty at the study site. For Elaine, “the lack of connection might be with other adjunct instructors” and “sometimes that lack of collegiality probably doesn’t enhance my teaching in the way that it might in a full-time environment.” She referred to this experience as “sort of a tangential connection, a connection of a lack I suppose.”

What was notably absent in response to the second part of the question was anything related to the institution type; that is, there was no mention institutional mission, purposes, culture, history, and the potential impact these elements of the institution’s character had on their teaching.

Q2. How do you make decisions about HOW or WHAT you teach? (In other words, what underlies the thought process behind your teaching decisions?)

Results to what participants teach revealed consistent responses with regard to the standard course curriculum. All participants referenced some form of the course content or broader curriculum in their responses, citing the department syllabus shell (most courses at the institution have a standardized syllabus), assigned text books or readings,
or other communicated standards. One participant (Joanne) indicated that she did not have much control over what she taught, citing that “the full-time faculty choose the curriculum, they design the tests, they choose our assessment tools.” Another participant (Nate) clearly indicated that standards of the course dictate what he teaches. “First I look at the standards of the course. I look at the course description and course objective – What do they [students] need to know? What are they going to be able to do after the course? What does the description cover?” Then, based on these standards and specific subject matter elements (the example Nate provided was incorporating ethical decision making and copyright law into an educational technology course), he will design the course. Similarly, Leo used lesson plans established by the former department chair. “I really go by the curriculum here and the lessons that I use are the traditional [ones]; I just follow the curriculum.” He then “modified them to meet [his] own teaching style.”

Brad, teaching in the Fire Science program, referenced that much of the curriculum in this particular program is based on state certified courses and dictated by national standards, leaving the instructor with little room to deviate from established subject matter. He did indicate, however, that the subject matter dictates, or at least lends itself, to how instructors teach. Certain courses in state certified programs provide very strict parameters for how particular subject matter needs to be taught. For example, in an academy setting (e.g., Police Academy or Fire Academy), the instructional approach takes on a quasi-drill, para-military quality; in an EMT program, courses require a standardized, practical teaching methodology. Other courses within these types of programs (e.g., general education) allow more instructional freedom and flexibility.
The *how* portion of question 2 appeared to be more taxing for participants. With most participants, I felt the need to re-word the question in different ways to clarify the question’s intended meaning. Even with this assistance, there were brief periods of silence and hesitation, and ensuing responses were somewhat strained. One participant (Josh) indicated that he tries to “stay away from the traditional [lecture] classroom” and attempts to “run [his] classroom more like an SI [supplemental instruction] session than an actual classroom.” Another participant (April) revealed that “she really never had to think about it before” but offered that “it [how she teaches] kind of breaks it down, it kind of keeps everybody focused” and “moving forward.” A clarifying question revealed that she establishes milestones for students in the design of her courses. Another participant (Anna) indicated that she teaches to everyone.

Depending on the course I am teaching, I will give them a multiple intelligence test so they know how they learn as well as their areas of weakness and strength, and then, based on that I tend to either bring in outsource information that focuses on their interests, or I will gravitate towards things they have no exposure to, to give them more background.

A follow-up question clarified that Anna’s reference to a multiple intelligence test is not an actual administrated test but her approach contained features of a theory of different learning styles and the student population in the course. Nate provided a very specific instructional approach using the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) of instructional design. According to Nate, ADDIE applies mixed methods (such as lecture, demonstration, PowerPoint, video, self-study unit, and small group work) to promote both direct and indirect learning among students of varying learning styles and abilities. While participants described the importance of fostering an interactive, participatory learning environment using a variety of
methodological approaches (beyond lecture), most showed a general lack of awareness about how they teach and intentional ways to produce desired environmental and learning outcomes.

Additional responses to the *how* portion of question 2 encompassed a wide range of thoughts and ideas, which included: consultation from peers (reaching out to colleagues external to the institution), trial and error (what has worked or not worked in the past), personal experiences as a student (drawn from both good and bad experiences), the learning profile of the class (both as individuals and collectively), practical application (viewed as especially important with a community college student population), standards of the course (for example, dictates of subject matter or syllabus shell), skill development (in such areas as writing, critical thinking) and feedback (from both students and peers). Other less tangible dimensions of how they teach included comfort level, confidence building, validation, flexibility, engagement, interaction, expectations, and open mindedness.

**Q3. How do your personal values, beliefs, and attitudes influence the way you teach?**

Participants’ values, beliefs, and attitudes had a clear influence on the way they teach. The most common response from participants involved various aspects of their personal experiences and family backgrounds, which shaped them as individuals and had an impact on their current values, beliefs, philosophies, ethics, and attitudes – both in terms of the ways they view the world and in terms of their approaches to teaching. For Dorothy, the exposure to different types of students had forced her to challenge her assumptions and reframed how she views certain groups of people. According to Dorothy,
I never had any exposure to kids I see, that were in jail last week, or you know got picked up for whatever, or their brother just got shot over on the east side. I have had no experience with that, so the beliefs and values have to be altered” to discover “where other people are coming from.

She went on to say that “growing up in a college environment family, we didn’t have friends like that; that’s completely how they affect how I teach.” Brad indicated that through instruction, individuals will reflect their values, ethics, and attitudes, saying that “It’s hard not to, that’s who you are.” While most participants’ answers concurred with Brad’s assessment, others stressed the importance of keeping their personal views to themselves during instruction to allow multiple perspectives or viewpoints of an issue to emerge neutrally during classroom discussion.

Many participants had a decidedly democratic attitude toward teaching at a community college. Elaine explained that “I am an absolute advocate for education for everyone, at the level and to the extent that they want it, which is part of the reason I am also teaching at a community college.” In valuing knowledge and learning, she felt that with community college students, “the best learning happens in [classroom] conversation.” Eva stated that fair is not giving everyone the same thing but providing the same opportunities for success. She believed that in order to achieve fairness with many community college students, “You’ve got to be flexible with the students, and value that.” April, a former non-traditional community college student, understands that many community college students lead very complex and complicated lives. She stated that “I get it that life happens,” and as a result, incorporates flexibility into her instructional practices.

Other participants expressed the importance of analytical and critical thinking in teaching, fluidity and flexibility in meeting the changing demands of students, honesty
Q4. What personal experiences have had the greatest influence on you as an instructor?

Responses to this question essentially fell into one (or both) of the following categories: previous instructors/instruction/mentors and family background/upbringing. The most common influence among participants was from previous instructors, their experiences as a student, and mentors (many of whom were also previous instructors). Previous instructors were most often represented in a positive way through having a passion for teaching, showing interest in students (both collectively and as individuals), connecting with students outside of class, bringing a humanizing element to the teaching and learning process, creating a comfortable learning environment for students, not judging students, exercising objectivity in grading, and having a sense of humor. Mentors were referred to both as previous instructors and those in a participant’s current profession or sphere of influence that has helped shape his or her current approach to teaching. Elaine described a former department chair as her mentor. The department chair provided Elaine with an opportunity to teach a public speaking course at a prison and, after some apprehension, she accepted. This experience exposed Elaine to a world she knew nothing about and forced her to challenge her assumptions about this new group of students, whom she later described as “the best students I have had.” Nate described a previous supervisor, and former elementary and secondary school teacher, as a mentor that has had the greatest influence on him as an instructor. Among the things he learned from her was the importance of approaching students as individuals (versus as a collective group) and then accommodating individual student’s different learning needs. Josh referenced a former math instructor who was able to create a comfortable learning
environment in upper-level math courses by making connections with individual students and the class, the latter through interactions beyond standardized course content. Josh indicated that this represented a “pedagogical shift” for him; specifically, that an instructor could have a humanizing impact on a classroom through humor and personalized interaction, which can have a transformational effect on the classroom learning environment.

Many participants commented on ways their family background and upbringing have influenced them as instructors. April described that although she is the first member of her family to go to college (she then went on to earn multiple degrees), the importance of “reading a lot, knowing what’s going on in the world and being able to talk about those things, and always listening to what other people had to say” were emphasized and encouraged. For April, these values have translated into a classroom methodology that promotes the exploration of various viewpoints to a given topic, connecting course subject matter to current events, and encouraging students to share their opinions in class. Dorothy evoked her father (as a college professor) and “some of those professors that I grew up with, and watching their standards, and being around grad students” as her biggest influence as an instructor. Eva referenced “being a role model to [her] daughter” as having a significant impact on her remaining in the teaching profession to indicate that “there are things past high school that make a difference.”

Providing a different perspective, Joanne alluded to how a diagnosis and illness in college had influenced her approach of holding students accountable but being flexible in the process. She articulated that by scheduling her treatment in the early morning, “I would only be 10, 15 minutes late to an eight o’clock class” and was able to remain in the
course. Her perspective was that “everyone’s life is messy and dirty – it’s just how you cope and respond,” a philosophy that was illustrated through her approach to working with a student this past semester needing to pick up extra work shifts to support his family. “Instead of coming [to] class, I leave his work for him, he drops off the completed work, and then we communicate through Blackboard [study site’s course management system].” Only one participant referenced an illness as the greatest influence as an instructor.

Other participants grew up with family members in the teaching profession or described personal and educational experiences during their upbringing but it was unclear from their responses how these factors influenced their instructional practices.

Q5. Have you changed your approach to teaching over time? How? What were the precipitating factors?

Each of the 11 participants responded affirmatively to this question; that they have changed their approaches to teaching over time with answers ranging from becoming less structured and more flexible in their teaching approaches to adjusting delivery methods and actively engaging in continuous improvement. Participants who have evolved to a less structured/more flexible approach describe their changes in terms of flexibility with regard to deadlines for turning in work and meeting deadlines, outreach to students who have not attended class on a regular basis, adaptability to the changing needs of students, increased classroom dialogue and conversations, more student-lead classroom activities, modeling behavior and standards, and changing the way situations are approached based on feedback. Leo described the various teaching philosophies that have emerged over the past five or six decades and how he has adapted his approach to
accommodate some of the new knowledge domains. While he expressed that structure was still very important, he adapted his approach to incorporate students’ thoughts, self-expressions, and perceptions of the world; in his words, “the scientific, which is how people learn.”

Eva provided a specific example of a student taking courses in different parts of term but at the same scheduled class time. The student was already enrolled in a required STNA (State Tested Nursing Assistant) course that would conflict with the first few weeks of the class being instructed by Eva. Eva indicated that she could not “give [the student] the participation points for being present but [the student would] still have the opportunity to submit the work.” The student completed the STNA course while submitting work for Eva’s course; when the STNA course concluded, she began attending regularly. Eva’s flexibility allowed the student to complete a required course while simultaneously maintaining enrollment in her course; and she was able to uphold the academic standards outlined in her syllabus.

Participants also described changing their delivery methods over time, moving away from more traditional lecture-style classes and incorporating more interactive, participatory classroom learning activities. Joanne explained that opportunities to adjust delivery methods present themselves in different ways. Over time, she realized that if a student still doesn’t get a concept, it isn’t that I need to keep re-teaching that same concept; it is that as a teacher, it’s my job to change the way I am presenting it. It’s not the student’s job to just learn it; it’s my job to present it in a way that they can learn it.

Nate cited an Excel course he taught recently as an example of adjusting his teaching methodology to meet the needs of students in his course. He explained that he attempted to demonstrate the math functions behind the Excel program but about 40% of the
students in the class did not understand. “I changed my strategy by, at first I was going to demonstrate, then I changed it to explain everything, make sure that they can understand Excel from the added, from another point of view pretty much.” He then decided to augment his demonstration with an explanatory technique incorporating a video lecture.

They need to know how to manipulate the function not only from the example that I gave them, it should be from something they are using as well. From that, and I know even if you don’t understand, I cannot keep re-explaining – they would say I don’t understand – I would say explain five times, six times so I decided to go down to video lecture.

This proved to be a successful strategy as he estimated about 90% of the students understood the functions with the implementation of a supplemental delivery method. He expressed an understanding that not all students learn the way he learns and he must make adjustments and allowances for this variable in student learning.

Other participants’ referenced continuous improvement in terms of adapting to changing students through keeping pace with dynamic subject matter, being more open minded (in general), keeping current with popular culture, and embracing peer-to-peer interaction in the classroom. Joanne expressed the need for more of a regimented and strict approach to classroom management and instruction. This proved to be an outlier as she was citing an example from a high school class of autistic students.

Q6. How do you perceive that your pedagogical decisions impact the classroom learning environment?

As described in Chapter 1, pedagogy is defined as “a set of strategies implemented by teachers [part-time faculty members] that is intended to facilitate student learning in an academic setting [community college classrooms]” (Walvoord & Pool, 1998, p. 35). Within this context, pedagogical decision making has been defined
generally as the reasoning and influences behind instructor decisions relative to pedagogical processes employed in their classes. Brad provided the most comprehensive, coherent answer to the question on pedagogy. Brad stated that “at a minimum, there has to be some type of methodology” and that “it’s critical they [instructors] are aware of those factors, methodologies, and influences” that informs their approaches to teaching and instructional practices. Shulman (1987) articulated that pedagogical content knowledge “represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). Brad communicated that while students dictate what they want to learn and what they want to get out of a course, it is critical that instructors are both subject matter experts and good teachers. In his experience, “there’s a lot of very rich subject-matter instructors that are experts” but, many times, “put them in front of a bunch of people and they are either staring at the floor or they are talking way above everybody’s head.” Expressed very succinctly, Brad stated that “if you don’t know how to teach, the students will not learn.”

Some participants offered a variety of perceptions on pedagogy, which included that pedagogical decisions completely influence the classroom, have a huge influence on the classroom environment, and depend on the topic of the class or content of the course. The participants who provided these responses could not articulate how or why pedagogical decisions are influential in the context of learning or within a classroom environment. Some participants described the teaching methods they employ, which included methods that will reach and accommodate the most learning styles (e.g., PowerPoint presentation, video, activities, lectures), multi-sensory methods (e.g.,
YouTube), peer-to-peer instruction, group projects, students sharing personal histories, and the importance of practical application in instruction. Some participants described the desired learning environment, which included an environment that is relevant, interesting, comfortable, fun, flexible, and participatory.

Two concepts that were notably absent in the responses from participants were (a) knowledge of how students learn (with the exception of Brad) and (b) pedagogical content knowledge. The literature on the science of learning and emerging research on how students learn provides a core set of principles that can assist instructors in making purposeful pedagogical choices to accomplish specific goals and learning outcomes, especially among diverse student populations. Pedagogical content knowledge is the knowledge formed through the synthesis of subject matter, pedagogical, and contextual knowledge bases, and encompasses most, if not all, aspects of classroom learning.

Q7. Think of a class or classes you have taught in the past. How did you choose your teaching methods/strategies?

This question proved to be repetitive from earlier questions and did not produce any new or different results.

Results from open coding. The process of examining the data generated from initial interviews and identifying important words or concepts produced a number of codes, which are represented in Table 4. The majority of codes that emerged through the open coding process focused on the experiences, perceptions, and influences of participants in their roles as instructors, which included: being drawn to teach; their approaches to teaching (including teaching methods, instructional choices, and perceptions of pedagogy); their personal experiences and family backgrounds; and a
prevalent feeling of disconnection among part-time instructors. Other codes that emerged include: standards of the course (dictating what instructors’ teach), classroom environment (comprising both physical space and climate for learning), and student population (primarily perceived as diverse, non-traditional, and at-risk). Concepts that were notably absent during data analysis (and significantly represented in the literature as crucial factors in teaching at community colleges) were: (a) the emerging science of how students learn (which provide a core set of principles by which instructors make intentional pedagogical choices to accomplish learning outcomes); (b) the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (the synthesis of subject matter, pedagogical, and contextual knowledge bases), a necessary amalgamation of content, pedagogy, and contextual factors in adapting instruction to the needs and abilities of a diverse group of learners; and (c) institutional culture (in terms of history, culture, missions, purposes, and organization) and the effect on teaching. Finally, the many connections between and among people, things, and events in the teaching and learning process emerged as an overarching concept during open coding.

In all, these 15 codes were either combined with similar codes to form a category or a singular code emerged as its own category through the process of intermediate coding. Intermediate coding will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Table 4

*Results of Open Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being Drawn to Teach</td>
<td>Participants viewed teaching as a “calling” and/or had a deep personal connection to teaching as a profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Population</td>
<td>Participants perceived the student population at the study site as diverse, non-traditional, and at-risk, with greater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants indicated that subject matter (or what participants teach) is dictated, in large measure, by a dept. syllabus shell, assigned text or readings, and other standards.

Teaching methods employed by participants were influenced by consultation from peers, trial and error, personal experiences as a student, the learning profile of the class, practical application of subject matter, standards of the course, skills development of students, and feedback from students and peers.

In addition to the influences stated above (in Teaching Methods), participants’ responses expressed that their teaching approaches (or how they teach) in terms of comfort level, confidence building, validation, flexibility, engagement, interaction, expectations, and openness.

Participants disclosed that various aspects of their upbringing and family backgrounds have shaped them as individuals and had an impact on both the ways they view the world and their approaches to teaching.

Participants stated that their previous experiences as instructors, as students, and with mentors (and their family backgrounds and/or upbringing) had the greatest influences on them as instructors.

Participants indicated that they have changed their approaches to teaching over time to adjusting their delivery methods, incorporating more flexibility into how they respond to situations, and integrating more interactive, participatory learning activities.

Participants’ perceptions of the influence of pedagogy was primarily cited as having a significant influence on the classroom environment and depended on the topic of the class/content of the course.

Based on participant responses, classroom environment comprises both the physical place (locations and attributes of a physical space) and the learning environment (general atmosphere and classroom climate).
The concept of connections emerged during initial interviews and was evident in participants' responses. The feeling of disconnection among part-time instructors was highlighted, with participants expressing disconnectedness from their chair, academic department, staff, colleagues, and the institution in general. Science of Learning was notably absent in participants' answers. Pedagogical Content Knowledge was also lacking in participants' responses. Institutional Culture involved considering the history, mission, and purpose of the institution.

Participants who provided these responses did not articulate how or why pedagogical decisions are influential in the context of learning or within a classroom environment. Concept of connections emerged either directly through participants’ responses or indirectly through data analysis and interpretation.

Intermediate coding. Intermediate coding, also referred to as axial coding, is “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Where open coding is said to “fracture the data” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 12), intermediate coding repairs or reconnects the data. Codes (described here as important words or concepts) that emerged through the open coding process were modified and/or coalesced into categories (formed through the integration of codes and concepts) during the intermediate coding process. Categories that emerged through data analysis were as follows: (a) view of teaching profession (with a predominant view of teaching as a “calling”), (b) diverse student population (specifically, the impact of a diverse student population on instruction); (c) the concept of connections (between and among people, things, and

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**Concept of Connections**

The many connections between and among people, things, and events in the teaching and learning process was present in participant answers to multiple questions during initial interviews.

**Feeling of Disconnection (among part-time instructors)**

Participants expressed feelings of disconnectedness from their chair, academic dept., staff, colleagues, and the institution in general.

**Science of Learning**

Concept of the science of how students learn was notably absent in answers from participants.

**Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

Concept of pedagogical content knowledge was notably absent in answers from participants.

**Institutional Culture**

Taking into account the history, mission, and purpose of the institution.

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*a* Participants that provided these responses did not articulate how or why pedagogical decisions are influential in the context of learning or within a classroom environment.  
*b* Concept of connections emerged either directly through participants’ responses or indirectly through data analysis and interpretation.
events in the teaching and learning process, which includes an effect of disconnection among many participants), (d) *standardized curriculum* (in terms of dictating what instructors teach), (e) approaches to teaching (refers to instructors’ overall methodologies), (f) *personal histories* (the influence of family backgrounds and personal experiences in shaping participants as people and instructors), (g) *perceptions of pedagogy* (especially as it relates to the potential impact on the classroom environment and the degree to which it incorporates learning theory and pedagogical content knowledge), (h) *classroom environment* (comprising both physical space and learning atmosphere), and (i) *institutional character* (teaching in the context of community colleges).

In order to more fully develop these categories, I formulated follow-up interview questions for participants. Follow-up questions were based on what was obvious and what was notably absent during open coding, with data analysis influenced to a great degree by reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity. Through data analysis, I determined that the concept of instructor connections (and, conversely, a lack of connections for instructors) needed further expansion, clarification, and confirmation; this analysis produced Questions 1 and 2 in the follow-up interview. Participants produced much consistent data related to the diversity of the community college student population during initial interviews; the researcher determined that a richer understanding of participants’ concepts of diversity was needed, which resulted in Question 3 in the follow-up interview. Open coding also revealed ways in which participants’ personal histories had shaped them as people and instructors, which is consistent with literature on student learning and how prior knowledge, culture, and context influence the learning
process for students. As such, I felt these concepts (which correspond with learning theory and pedagogical content knowledge) needed further expansion, clarification, and confirmation and produced Question 4 in the follow-up interview. By extension, I wanted to know how the classroom environment is perceived, accounted for, and incorporated into pedagogical approaches and instructional practices of part-time instructors, which generated the final follow-up interview question. The categories about a standardized course curriculum and view of the teaching profession generated a large amount of consistent data from the first interview and did not need to be developed further. The category about institutional culture emerged from data analysis after follow-up interviews had been completed.

Q1. *The concept of “connections” has emerged as a theme in answers to multiple questions provided by participants during interviews. In the context of teaching and learning, what does “connections” mean to you?*

The question about the concept of “connections” during the follow-up interviews produced answers from participants that were much more focused on student-based connections. An analysis of the data produced during the open coding process demonstrates that participants tended to place the emphasis on themselves as instructors when referring to some element or degree of connection (see Figure 7).

During initial interviews, participants identified connections between themselves and the following people or things in the teaching and learning process: (a) other instructors at the college, (b) peers (external to the college), (c) institution, (d) their own lived experiences, (e) learning (in general), (f) the learning environment, (g) teaching as a profession, (h) their world view, (i) the curriculum, and (j) students (individually and as a
collective group). The instructor is at the center of all these connections. The connections may be linear (e.g., an instructor feeling connected to another instructor at the college) or multidimensional (e.g., the relationship between an instructor’s lived experiences and world view with his or her approach to teaching students from diverse populations).

![Figure 7. Visual representation of instructor connections.](image)

During open coding, instructors primarily expressed the concept of connections in the teaching process in application to themselves. In other words, instructors placed themselves in the center of a sphere of connections (see Figure 7). However, responses to question 1 during follow-up interviews proved to be much more student-centric than during initial interviews. Responses produced different meanings with regard to the concept of connections, which was represented as instructor perceptions of the variety of connections that exist between students and people and things (see Figure 8). Anna provided a very thorough response, equating the concept of connections with several meanings, including “the student connecting with themselves, the student connecting to
the materials, the student connecting to the instructor, the environment, to their peers.”
Anna added the importance of students “feeling connected to the campus, to support
staff, [and] being able to go to their advisor.” Elaine indicated the need for “fostering
their [students] connection both with one another and [her]” as the instructor. April felt
that in order to connect with students, an instructor must “develop some type of
relationship there on some level.” Comparably, Josh stated the importance of being “able
to connect with students on a learning level,” which he felt “doesn’t always happen” in
classrooms. Nate perceived the connection between a student and instructor as
“emotional,” stating that “there is a connections [sic] for the instructor and student – we
are talking about maybe [an] emotional connection – a connection that will allow the
student to pretty much connect with the instructor.” Alex focused more on the
connection between students, course content, and meaningful application, ensuring that
his students “can make connections, both between the material and what [they] are
learning, and then real-life application so that they can take it and somehow connect it
with their own lives.” While Eva provided similar responses to other participants, she
included the importance of connecting students to the larger community through
“resources for students” and getting students “in contact with the right resource person,
because [if] you don’t have that connection, then [the instructor] is not doing [his or her]
job.” Similarly, Dorothy cited a connection to the community as being significant, stating
that “I think that it is really important to be a participant in some manner in being part of
the fabric of the community.” Focusing more on developing the community within the
classroom, Joanne “found the best way to do that is to first build a connection with [her]
students.” She indicated that some students “come in [to class] a little intimidated” and
referenced the importance of students feeling a comfort level with the instructor, which
them promotes a “connection to the learning.” Building on the notion of a comfortable
learning environment, Anna believed that some students in community colleges “need
someone to help them believe in themselves because their self-esteem is so low the
majority of the time.”

For the most part, participants did not offer definitions of connections per se but
provided examples of what they perceived to be important connections for students to
make or have in the teaching and learning process (see Figure 8). Elements of student
connections that emerged through participants’ answers were: developing relationships
(with instructors, staff, students, and others at the college), establishing emotional bonds
(with instructors through inspiration, encouragement, support, and mutual respect),
feeling part of a community (whether it be a cohort, class, or the institution at large),
engaging with course content (both among the subject matter and across disciplines, and
then with real life, practical applications), and being or becoming comfortable in the
learning environment.

Figure 8. Visual representation of student connections.
Q2. Have you experienced a “lack of connection” in your current teaching role? If yes, what impact do you think a lack of connection has on you as an instructor? How does this manifest itself in the classroom learning environment? Can you provide an example?

Although it meant different things to different people, all participants responded that they have experienced some lack of connection in their role as a part-time instructor. A perceived lack of connection was represented as a disconnection between instructors and their academic departments (which involves communication, standards, and accountability – which includes full-time faculty) and between instructors and students in their courses (which includes online courses), a lack of connection with leadership of the college (which leads to a feeling of being underappreciated and low morale among part-time instructors), a lack of collegiality with colleagues (especially as it relates to discussing specific issues or particular aspects of a course), a lack of awareness of campus resources (which leads to an inability to support students in their classes), and a lack of knowledge about technology and other media in classrooms.

Joanne described that if instructors do not make connections with students early on during a class, students simply no longer show up. The impact this has on her as an instructor and the learning environment is that it limits her choice of instructional activities. For example, in a recent composition course, Joanne was unable to break into small group activities or peer review papers due to students’ inconsistent or lack of attendance. She referenced that this is especially relevant at community colleges, where class sizes are traditionally small (around 15-to-1 ratio), and students are vulnerable and may not have the same resiliency as students at more traditional four-year colleges. Eva reported that she had never met her supervisor in her two years of teaching at the college.
She would like to incorporate more technology into her teaching methodology but does not know who to contact to learn more. Leo described part-time faculty members as being “treated as second-class citizens.”

Many participants did not feel that their lack of connection had a direct impact on them as an instructor or on the classroom learning environment. Most participants that fell into this category provided an example of how some degree or form of a lack of connection would most likely impact other instructors, not themselves. However, participant responses may have been influenced by their motivation to participate in the study and/or need to provide an administrator of the college with socially desirable answers. While it cannot be determined with certainty why participants self-selected to be involved in the study, it is reasonable to believe that some may have been motivated by the opportunity to make a connection with an upper-level administrator at the college for personal benefit, although certainly not all.

**Q3. Many participants referenced the diversity of the community college student population. What does diversity mean to you? How does knowledge of a diverse student population influence your instructional practices? Can you describe a specific example?**

The idea of diversity was clearly articulated by the participants as being multi-dimensional, or as described by Anna, diversity is not just a “black/white thing or male/female gender [thing].” Elaine provided a succinct description of diversity, saying that diversity refers to “all those markers by which we indicate people.” As stated by the participants, these markers include race, culture, ethnicity, creed, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, family background, neighborhood connections/community (from which people come), geographic location
(in this case, referring to specific location of a multi-campus community college), occupational training, aptitude (for example, ability to use a computer), knowledge of subject matter, interest level, access to transportation, and openness to new ideas and concepts. Participants indicated that diversity takes on dimensions of difference, culture, and context.

In contrast, describing the ways in which knowledge of a diverse student population influences instructional practices was a much more difficult task for participants. Most participants pronounced that knowledge of a diverse student population does make a difference, in one case (Alex) “a ton of difference,” but could not articulate the ways in which this knowledge impacted their teaching methodology. In most cases, it seemed that this knowledge had no tangible impact on the ways in which they approached instruction. However, one participant (Nate) offered a detailed response. Nate described an understanding that he will have students from different backgrounds, different cultures, and different age groups, which for him translates into individual students with different needs. In his words, “How they impact me is I am trying to accommodate everyone.” He illustrated his approach through the needs of two groups of students in an educational technology course: direct from high school students and non-traditional adult learners. These very dissimilar groups of students came to the learning environment with different needs and skills sets. Direct from high school students were very skilled in the use of technology but lacked life experiences, perspective, and context while non-traditional adult learners possessed a great deal of life experience but were largely unskilled in the use of educational technology. Nate decided to capitalize on the strengths of each group and encourage some of the direct from high school students to
assist in teaching and navigating the classroom technology while empowering a current high school teacher to instruct the section of the course pertaining to applicable teacher certification, compliance issues, and regulations. He said that “these students really help each other and I can adjust my instructional practice by not being the only person who delivered the content.” He continued that the student assistants always have some kind of idea to share with other students, so with diversity, big diversity like this, with backgrounds from the culture, from the age group, I can say that it impacts me by changing me from being an instructor to being a facilitator.

In summary, he changed his approach from being the sole instructor to more of a facilitator, which allowed other students to showcase their strengths and him to provide more individualized instruction to other students in need.

Q4. Students come to college classrooms with a wide range of prior knowledge, backgrounds, beliefs, and lived experiences. How do the things students bring with them to the classroom influence you as an instructor? How do they influence your approach to teaching? Can you provide an example?

Responses from participants involved the challenges of working with students from diverse populations (e.g., students come with a lot of problems that instructors have to deal with) and the needs these students bring to the learning environment (lack of computer skills/ability requires instructor to teach outside of subject matter, certain students need individualized attention). These responses took on somewhat of a burdensome tone, resulting in instructors needing to be more of a resource beyond the classroom (e.g., when students are in crisis or experiencing issues related to hunger, homelessness, work, or family) or take on more of a supportive role for students in addition to teaching (e.g., confidence building, students needing someone to help them
believe in themselves). Alex indicated that many times in English courses, “I find myself a computer teacher as well,” referencing that he will need to assess “whether an individual knows how to use a computer or not.” He also concluded that the student body will vary based on the location where the course is offered. In this particular instance at a more urban location of the college, Alex indicated that he “changed everything over there [the location] from the supplemental readings that I select, changing the focus of the assignments occasionally toward different students.” He adds that “there is a certain level of flexibility that is needed that’s very different than when I’m teaching at [a neighboring] university.” For Anna, culture plays a large role in the level of trust a student may be able to proffer in a classroom setting. Based on her observation, “it is hard for them [students from African-American and Latino backgrounds] to be more trusting outside their culture.” Based on Anna’s experiences, for some cultures or ethnicities, it is difficult to trust others outside of their immediate community or circle of people (e.g., family system), which adds another dimension to teaching for the instructor and learning for the student.

Other participants viewed diversity as a strength, something to be embraced and not just tolerated. Participants that shared this position tended to view learning in reciprocal terms; that is, students learn from the instructor, the instructor learns from students, and students learn from fellow students. For Elaine, the reciprocal nature of learning “helps me to see the places where my knowledge is thin or deficient or maybe even wrong.” In some cases, these experiences provide her with new and different ways to explain the same concepts in subsequent sections of the course, illustrating the connection between language and context to understanding. For April, the differences in
age among students can be useful for an instructor in bridging generational gaps and validating course subject matter. The example she provided is how traditional-aged students help teach non-traditional students about pop culture and technology, while non-traditional students can provide greater context about a particular subject or event. In April’s words, traditional-aged students are “hearing it first hand from somebody who lived through it,” thus enhancing the learning experience. While this approach requires flexibility, encouraging students to share how their experiences differ from others fosters a greater understanding of the world around them.

While instructors articulated rather clearly during the initial interviews how their lived experiences (e.g., personal values, beliefs, attitudes) have shaped the ways they teach, most have failed to make the connection to how students’ lived experiences impact their ability to learn.

**Q5. How does the classroom environment impact learning? Can you provide an example?**

Each participant acknowledged that classroom environment has an impact on learning. Participant responses to this question tended to fall into one of three areas: general atmosphere (which included a description of the optimal classroom climate and elements of effective classroom management), the emotional environment (characterized by the students’ ability to make connections in the classroom), and physical environment. The general atmosphere of the classroom was described as sterile until the instructor sets the tone and initiates whatever atmosphere is going to be created, which can either support learning or detract from learning. Characteristics of an optimal classroom climate and classroom management included a climate of openness, inquisitiveness, and
risk taking, a climate where multiple teaching and assessment methods are employed, a climate where adaptability and flexibility are evident in managing situations and meeting the needs of students, a climate where students are encouraged to look at issues from multiple perspectives, a climate where personal views of the instructor are withheld from class discussion, and a climate where learning is multidirectional, interactive, and practical.

Elements of an emotional environment were described as one where the instructor establishes rapport with students, exhibits passion and enthusiasm, shows compassion and caring, builds students’ confidence, and develops opportunities for students to learn from text, learn from other students, and learn about the world around them. These environmental elements will help students feel validated, respected, encouraged, supported, and engaged in the learning process. To a greater degree, these things will impact whether or not students feel a connection within the classroom learning environment and, in some cases, continue in the class. Alex emphasized how crucial it is to make that connection early on in the semester observing that if he does not “it’s not only that they do not engage, but they just stop coming to class.” He goes on to say that “I just won’t see them again. They don’t drop the class. They don’t do anything. They just take the ‘F’ and don’t show up,” which, in many cases, starts a downward spiral from which many community college students do not recover (academic sanction, loss of financial aid, bill posted to student account, and overdue balance sent to collections). As stated by Brad, “To me it’s a no brainer; if you don’t create a decent learning environment, you are going to suffer.”
Some participants commented on the physical environment (e.g., the way a classroom is arranged, the condition of equipment and furniture) but conceded that these factors were not nearly as important as the other environmental factors discussed above.

**Results from intermediate coding.** The process of establishing relationships between the categories and reconnecting the data that were generated during open coding is represented in Table 5. The majority of data that were generated through the intermediate coding process primarily fell into one central category (*connections*) and two constituent categories (*lived experiences of instructors* and *environmental factors*). The central category of connections is described as: (a) the many connections that exist between instructors and people, things, and events in the teaching process and (b) the many connections that exist between students and people, things, and events in the learning process. This dynamic interplay includes *disconnections* that exist for instructors in the teaching and learning process. One constituent category, lived experiences of instructors, refers to derivative (or pre-reflective) dimensions of individual instructors’ reality (van Manen, 2004) and comprises the elements of the following categories: personal histories of instructors (includes family backgrounds and personal experiences); views of teaching profession; perceptions of pedagogy; and approaches to teaching. Lived experiences of instructors can also be viewed as the internal perspectives instructors bring with them to the teaching process. The other constituent category, environmental factors, refers to the existing conditions encountered by instructors upon entering the instructional process, which include diverse student populations, standardized curricula, and physical classroom environment (includes physical location

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and attributes of physical class space). Environmental factors can also be viewed as external conditions beyond the control of instructors as they enter the teaching process.

Table 5

*Results of Intermediate Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections (includes disconnections or lack of connections)</td>
<td>Refers to: (a) the many connections that exist between instructors and people, things and events in the teaching process; (b) the many connections that exist between students and people, things and events in the learning process; and (c) collectively how these things influence an instructor’s approach to teaching. Includes <em>disconnections or lack of connections</em> that exist for instructors in the teaching and learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived Experiences of Instructors (internal perspectives)</td>
<td>Refers to derivative (or pre-reflective) dimensions of individual instructors’ reality (van Manen, 2004) and comprise the following categories: (a) personal histories of instructors (includes personal experiences); (b) views of teaching profession; (c) perceptions of pedagogy; and (d) approaches to teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Factors (external conditions)</td>
<td>Refers to the existing conditions encountered by instructors upon entering the instructional process, which include: (a) institutional character; (b) diverse student populations; (c) standardized curricula; and (d) physical classroom environment (includes physical location and attributes of physical class space).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all, these eight categories were integrated into one central and two constituent categories based on their relationship to the overarching concept of connections, and the internal perspectives of instructors or external conditions of the environment within the teaching and learning process.

**Advanced coding and theoretical integration.** The advanced coding (also referred to as selective coding) process focused on identifying a central phenomenon and moving analysis of coding toward theoretical integration, or the development of a theory.
For a chart depicting the visual mapping of transitions from codes to categories, categories to theoretical integration, and theoretical integration to central phenomenon, see Appendix F.

According to Birks and Mills (2011), “the point at which a core category is selected occurs when the researcher can trace connections between a frequently occurring variable and all of the other categories, subcategories and their properties and dimensions” (p. 100). The core category that emerged during data analysis is the concept of connections, which included the many connections that exist between instructors and people, things and events in the teaching process and the many connections that exist between students and people, things and events in the learning process. An instructor’s personal connections between and among the constituent categories of lived experiences of instructors and environmental factors have a collective influence on the manifestation of his or her teaching. For example, Elaine comes from a family background of educators, or in her words, “a family of nerds” who value “knowledge, learning, and sharing.” For Elaine, these family values have influenced her current and decidedly democratic view of education – “I am an absolute advocate for education for everyone” – which translates into her personal value of teaching at a community college, stating “What I love about teaching at a community college is the population,” citing students’ “drive” and “the desire to succeed that they bring with them” because “they know what’s at stake.” She believed that in a diverse community college classroom setting “people can really begin to understand the connection between knowledge [and] power and also diversity is strength.” But she conceded that this does not happen automatically but
needs to be fostered by design. In referring to the multiple aspects of diversity represented through the student population at community colleges, Elaine expressed

I embrace it. I try to encourage other people to embrace it in their own way and at their own pace. I try to present it to my students as this is a richness that they can’t get if you don’t become aware of it or put yourself into that kind of position. So diversity is an enriching, can be an enriching experience.

The tangible ways in which Elaine fosters “a climate of openness and inquisitiveness” is through “conversations,” “facilitating small group work,” “encouraging questions all the time,” and “support for taking risks.” She feels this approach will “enhance others’ self confidence in their understanding of how they could share their knowledge, and that their perspectives are also valuable.”

This is an instructive example as it illustrates how an instructor’s lived experiences (most notably, personal history) dynamically interact and connect with environmental conditions (a diverse population of students) in influencing an approach to teaching. In this case, Elaine is deeply connected to the teaching profession and community college students, which is manifested in the instructional choices she makes and learning environment that is created in her classroom.

Advanced coding also emphasizes actualizing the central phenomenon – defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as the concept or category “around which all other categories are integrated” (p. 116) – at a higher level of analysis than occurred during intermediate coding. Initially, it seemed relatively clear from the data that the various instructor connections made within the teaching process formed the basis of the storyline. However, it needed also to capture students in the learning process, the disconnections that existed for instructors in the teaching process, and the inability of instructors to make meaningful connections that impact learning. Attempting to identify a key story in the
data, a grounded theory technique proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), suggested coherence and continuity among the relationships between the major concepts and led me to *pedagogical connectivity* as the central phenomenon of the study. Although a nuanced distinction, the choice of the word connectivity (versus connections) is significant in that it implies the property of being connected or the degree to which something has connections. This distinction allows me to incorporate the degree to which instructors make connections among people, things, or events, and capture the importance of disconnections or connections that either do not exist for instructors or are not as robust as needed. Pedagogical connectivity will be discussed in greater detail when the theory is presented through answering the final research question.

**Answers to Research Questions**

*Central Research Question: How do part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction in community college classrooms?*

As revealed through the findings of the study, there are many factors that impact instructors’ pedagogical approaches. Chief among them are the instructors themselves, and the ways in which each is individually influenced by and makes connections between and among two primary conceptual areas – their lived experiences (or internal perspectives) and environmental factors (or external conditions).

**Lived experiences.** Lived experiences are described as derivative (or pre-reflective) dimensions of human reality (van Manen, 2004). Lived experiences of participants that influenced their pedagogical approaches were personal histories (including personal experiences), views of the teaching profession, and perceptions of pedagogy.
**Personal histories.** Personal histories include: family background, experiences during upbringing, experiences after leaving home, culture, race, ethnicity, and communities in which participants live and interact. In particular, participants’ values, beliefs, and attitudes had a clear influence on the way they teach. The most common response from participants with regard to their personal histories involved various aspects of their personal and family backgrounds, which shaped them as individuals and had an impact on their current values, beliefs, philosophies, ethics, and attitudes – in terms both of the ways they view the world and their approaches to teaching. Many participants had a decidedly democratic attitude toward teaching at a community college. Elaine explained that “I am an absolute advocate for education for everyone, at the level and to the extent that they want it, which is part of the reason I am also teaching at a community college.” In valuing knowledge and learning, she feels that with community college students, “the best learning happens in [classroom] conversation.” Another participant stated that fair is not giving everyone the same thing but providing the same opportunities for success. She believes that in order to achieve fairness with many community college students, “You’ve got to be flexible with the students, and value that.” April, a former non-traditional community college student, understands that many community college students lead very complex and complicated lives, and as a result, incorporates flexibility into her instructional practices. Other participants expressed the importance of analytical and critical thinking in teaching, fluidity and flexibility in meeting the changing demands of students, honesty with students, fairness, and opportunity.

Personal experiences influencing participants included consultation from peers (reaching out to colleagues external to the institution), trial and error (what has worked or
not worked in the past), personal experiences as a student (drawn from both good and bad experiences), the learning profile of the class (both as individuals and collectively), practical application (viewed as especially important with a community college student population), standards of the course (for example, dictates of subject matter or syllabus shell), skill development (in such areas as writing, critical thinking), and feedback (from both students and peers). The most common personal experiences referenced among participants involved their experiences with former instructors. Previous instructors were most often represented in a positive way through having a passion for teaching, showing interest in students (both collectively and as individuals), connecting with students outside of class, bringing a humanizing element to the teaching and learning process, creating a comfortable learning environment for students, not judging students, exercising objectivity in grading, and having a sense of humor. Instructors that engendered negative memories for participants were primarily described as unengaging, uncaring, and disconnected from students.

**View of the teaching profession.** In the context of teaching and learning, Palmer (1998) suggested that for those who feel they were called to teach, reconnecting through the self-knowledge of what attracted them to this vocation is a good place to re-enter (or enter, depending on the person) the journey toward self-discovery in teaching. Most participants viewed teaching in vocational terms, referring to teaching as “a natural fit, a calling, something I was called to do, a blessing, the best profession, and the best job I ever had in my life.” Participants described being “drawn to teaching,” and “always [wanting] to be a teacher.” Elaine described her teaching philosophy as enabling her “students to become the best students and then the best citizens they can be.” Joanne
“knew that teaching, specifically teaching special education was what [she] was called to do.” Eva expressed “the ability to make an impact” and the enjoyment of “watching people grow” as her draw to teaching. Participants that viewed teaching in this manner tended to receive tremendous gratification and satisfaction in their work, enjoying the connections they make with students.

Other participants viewed teaching in different terms. Dorothy came from a teaching family (her father was a professor of criminology at a university in Illinois) and “grew up around professors and grad students” her whole life. While influential, getting into teaching was more a function of circumstance than a calling as she “just saw an ad in the paper” for adjunct instructors and applied for a position. Anna landed in teaching “by default,” having lost her job in business after 20 years. Brad was drawn to teaching because he felt that he “would become a better student, and just better overall in [his] profession” as an instructor, believing that instructors are more apt to master subject matter content through teaching. Finally, April got into teaching because it was convenient for her particular lifestyle.

**Pedagogical perceptions.** Responses from instructors related to pedagogy indicated that they believed pedagogy had an impact on the learning environment and classroom atmosphere. Also, responses revealed that pedagogical approaches were influenced by direct feedback from students.

In response to the question concerning pedagogical decisions, Anna stated quite emphatically, “It has everything to do with the impact on the classroom – everything.” In response to the same question, Leo answered “Well, that is the classroom; it is a function of all those things [referring to decisions about delivering content and managing the
Brad believed that while being a subject matter expert is imperative, the manner in which content is presented within the learning environment is crucial as well. “I think for the instructor, teacher, professor, it’s critical they are aware of those factors, methodologies, influences” that impact the learning environment in the classroom. For Brad “at a minimum, there has to be some type of methodology” that guides classroom instruction. Alex felt that “material [subject matter] impacts the classroom more than my pedagogical decisions.” Alex stated that “certain subjects lend themselves to more excitement than other subjects,” citing a human sexuality course over an algebra course as an example; he did, however, acknowledge that pedagogical decisions “make a difference in the environment of the classroom.”

Other participants expressed their perceptions of pedagogy through the classroom atmosphere they wanted to promote. Nate indicated that “I try to make my class, first of all, like laid back, fun, and something they [students] want to come to, not something they have to come [to].” April also described a laid back classroom atmosphere, stating “I think my class tends to be laid back” which “makes it more fun for them and for me.” Josh provided similar perceptions, indicating that “I have been told several times that I run the funnest [sic] classroom that students have ever been in.” Josh emphasized the importance of “comfort level” in creating a classroom atmosphere that is “fun” and has high “enthusiasm levels” for students. For Leo, “over the years, I’ve really been aware of making my students comfortable and welcomed in the classroom, and appreciated. So this means my classes have been more relaxed, less formal, less traditional.”

In some cases, feedback from students was a powerful influence on instructors’ pedagogical decisions. Joanne stated that feedback she received from students (both
informal through conversation and more formalized through student evaluations) has helped her to evolve to a “multi-sensory approach” to teaching. Eva explained that “I ask for feedback a lot” from students. “If there is something that you are not getting, let me know and I will try to accommodate.” For Leo, “students tell me they like to work together in teams” which, to him, is “sort of a modern, a contemporary approach to learning – more teamwork.”

Pedagogical disconnections were evident among participants in the areas of pedagogical decisions, knowledge of how students learn, and pedagogical content knowledge. Some participants offered a variety of perceptions on pedagogy, which included that pedagogical decisions completely influence the classroom, have a huge influence on the classroom environment, and depend on the topic of the class or content of the course. However, the participants that provided these responses could not articulate how or why pedagogical decisions are influential in the context of learning. Similarly, while participants described the importance of fostering an interactive, participatory learning environment using a variety of methodological approaches (beyond lecture), they showed a general lack of awareness about how they teach, the potential impact of these teaching approaches, and intentional ways to produce desired environmental and learning outcomes.

Approaches to teaching. The codes of approaches to teaching, teaching methods, and instructional choices were combined into the overarching category of approaches to teaching. The category of approaches to teaching refers to the overall methodologies, which include instructional choices made and teaching methods used by instructors in teaching, which are guided by the identity and integrity of instructors.
Most participants’ approaches to teaching were linked solely to the course content and/or teaching methods they employed in their classrooms. Nate shared that his teaching approach depended on the topic of the particular class.

The teaching pedagogy, like I said before, it really depends on the topic and content on how and what I’m going to do. For Corporate Law [for example], there’s no better way than lecture them, I need to give them information, and they need to write it down.

Elaine teaches “by analogy and metaphor” to “try to make assignments relevant and interesting.” Eva expressed that in trying “to reach the most people” she employs multiple teaching methods and has become “much more flexible” in trying to “accommodate” students’ various learning styles. Alex shared that based on the classroom audience “I’ve got to change up my approaches.” Dorothy expressed the importance of taking both a practical and participatory approach to teaching. Dorothy summed up her approach as follows:

So the idea of letting them teach each other as well, that would be the main thing; but it’s part of it, and the practical application of getting them to do things that are real, that they can use in the future.

Some participants emphasized the importance of integrating approaches that provide practical application in teaching. For example, Dorothy explained that she is “very concerned about practical application” ensuring that students “interact and [have] experiences outside of the classroom,” referencing an internship requirement in one of her courses. Elaine interpreted practical application in a different way. For Elaine, “requiring interactions with a variety of people” allows for a “well roundedness that can develop as a consequence of learning;” this “well roundedness” is applicable “especially for people who are going to be going into professions that require interactions with a variety of kinds of people.”
Other participants expressed many different influences on the way they approach their teaching. Anna referenced Howard Gardner’s *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, a theory of multiple intelligences based on universally accepted principles. For Anna, Gardner’s work translated into three major methods to her teaching in a reading course—
(a) students read course material on their own, (b) students read course material aloud in front of the class, and (c) student engaged in writing to demonstrate they have comprehended what they read. Joanne approached her community college classes within a framework of support and encouragement. She expressed that a lot of her students are “people who have had a long time between school and college education.” She explained, “So with them, a lot of it [teaching] is confidence building and skill building right off the bat.” Josh, in responding to a question about how he teaches, indicated that “comfort level for a student is probably the most important thing in my eyes.” Another participant, Leo, reverted back to what he knows and has learned from trial and error over many years of teaching.

In summary, the results revealed approaches to teaching that were individualized among participants and contained a range of teaching methods and instructional practices, some similar, many different.

**Environmental factors.** Environmental factors refer to the existing conditions encountered by instructors upon entering the instructional process. Prevailing environmental factors that influenced their pedagogical approaches were diverse student populations, standardized curricula, and classroom environment (which includes attributes of physical class space and class location).
**Institutional character.** The distinctive character of community colleges was experienced by participants in different ways. For some participants, these experiences were magnified in comparison to their experiences teaching in university settings. Erica, who also taught simultaneously at two other local universities, indicated that teaching at a community college required her to assume more of a “guide role” due to “much more of a [student] need to navigate the landscape.” Alex stated that in teaching at a community college “there is a certain level of flexibility that is needed that’s very different than when I’m teaching at the university.” April, who attended a community college as a non-traditional student, also felt that flexibility was an important component in her teaching, saying that she approached her classes “with a really open mind of flexibility.” Elaine, Leo, and Brad all referenced their students as the primary factor in differentiating community colleges from other institution types. Elaine referenced that community college students “know what’s at stake” and “don’t have much time for foolishness because their lives are too busy.” Leo said that he gets “a lot of satisfaction working with at-risk, inner-city kids,” referencing that students from other populations “were still going to have great, successful lives” with or without his assistance. Brad indicated that he really enjoys the “diversity” of the “community college setting.”

It appeared, in general, that participants’ sensed that teaching at a community college was going to be different (as compared to other teaching experiences) but, beyond their student populations, did not articulate other ways it was different. According to Joanne, “I didn’t know what [it] was going to be like as opposed to teaching in a regular college.” Joanne stated that she thought that teaching at a community college would be
“potentially more challenging that the four-year institution.” Nate provided a contextual response teaching at a community college:

Teaching in a two-year college gave me some idea and make me, have to make sure that I have to prepare for the class for a variety of background[s]. For a four-year university, I can say that most of my students, about 99%, they were out of high school; they just came straight from high school, they pretty much were prepared. But here [at a community college], I have students who are 40 years old, I have some students that are probably like 60, trying to go back to the workforce, or change careers, or some of them are also retired but want to find other things to do. And also, with the student who went to an alternate of high school, such as a GED or were not really prepared for college.

Nate’s response adds dimension to teaching in the context of a community college, which includes history (open access), mission (academic preparation, 4-year transfer, vocational education, workforce training), and purpose (workforce partnerships within the community) in addition to the diversity of the student population. The distinctive character of community colleges has implications for teaching, which is discussed further in Chapter 5.

**Diverse student populations.** The various facets of diversity within the student population provide an added dimension to instruction at community colleges. Diversity was portrayed as multidimensional and described as “all those markers by which we indicate people.” As stated by the participants, these markers include race, culture, ethnicity, creed, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, family background, neighborhood connections/community (from which people come), geographic location (in this case, referring to specific location of a multi-campus community college), occupational training, aptitude (for example, ability to use a computer), knowledge of subject matter, interest level, access to transportation, and openness to new ideas and concepts. According to Elaine, “one of the bigger markers of
diversity at a community college is age difference among students.” She referenced students “as young as 18” and as old as “70.” Eva provided a similar example, stating “I’m subject to have a seventeen year old teen mom that’s taking a course with me sitting next to a 66 year old.” As stated earlier in this chapter, participants felt that community college students are “not your traditional kind of students that you get at a four-year college,” referencing that they are “a different fabric of student” who are “potentially more challenging than the four-year [student].”

Diversity takes on dimensions of difference, culture, and context, which in the framework of learning can be perceived as a liability and/or strength in classroom instruction. Anna illustrated the dimension of difference through the following example: “Just because you have two white males does not necessarily mean that they both have the same socioeconomic standing, that they both view religion the same way.” Leo stated that while knowledge of a diverse student population didn’t necessarily change his lesson plans for the course, it forced him “to be really respectful of everything [he] present[ed].” He referenced that when he first started teaching, he was more inclined to give his own opinions during class but does not do that anymore due to his “cultural bias.” He illustrated the potential impact of culture and context through the following example:

I can’t assume knowledge of middle class. There’s a shared knowledge that middle-class people, an assumed knowledge of books, oh cultural, cultural events I guess. And that would have to do with food, TV, restaurants, travel – all that. You can’t reference things and assume that everybody knows; you have to be really careful.

In a similar way, Joanne viewed diversity in terms of “differences,” using the marker of poverty as an example. Citing Bridges Out of Poverty, first a book then a series of programs created to teach professionals and those living in poverty how to move beyond
its effects, Joanne articulated that many times in community colleges we are “taking people who have grown up in poverty and then expecting them to meet middle-class white standards.” Joanne also illustrated context in learning through the following example:

I also have had some English as a second language students….not understanding some of the references that were in the text, then working to change that – explaining the reference then asking, ‘Can you give me a reference in your on context that would meet this metaphor or simile’ – and working through those types of things.

Instructors indicated that community college students have a greater need than their more traditional four-year counterparts, among them the need for flexibility in the learning process, support and guidance in non-academic matters, and an environment that fosters student confidence and confidence building. In a community college setting, some instructors felt a need to (a) assist in fostering an environment of reciprocal learning where students learn from the instructor, the instructor learns from students, and students learn from fellow students, (b) provide new and different ways for the instructor to explain the same concepts in subsequent sections of the course, illustrating the connection between language and context to understanding, (c) bridge generation gaps and validate course subject matter among students with differences in age and experience, and (d) generally enhance the learning experience through encouraging all students to share how their experiences differ from others, which fosters a greater understanding of the world around them.

*Standardized curricula.* In the context of this study, curricula are specific courses of study in one subject area at the college study site to include a standardized syllabus, specific subject matter, topic of the class, assigned textbook, readings, and other
supplemental materials, departmental requirements, standards of the course (e.g., course description, objectives, goals), and other standards (e.g., state and national certification standards and guidelines). In determining the answers to a question on how they determine what they teach, most participants responded in the context of the department syllabus shell (most courses at the institution have a standardized syllabus), assigned text book or readings, or other communicated standards. Other participants indicated the importance of engaging students with course content (both within the course subject matter and across disciplines, and then with real life, practical applications).

Elaine indicated that in order to engage students with subject matter across disciplines, she tries as much as possible to make connections, referencing the foundational value of a liberal arts education. By promoting learning activities that develop critical thinking skills and open mindedness, she facilitates students’ understanding of “how they make connections between course content, ours and other courses” in a way that the separate classes “all come together in [students’] degree program.” Many participants addressed the need to incorporate practical application as an instructional strategy within their community college courses. Dorothy in particular stressed the importance of practical application in instruction regardless of subject matter. She feels that students, especially within a community college setting, need to experience “something practical, something that can work for them in the future where they get to see the results.” One way she accomplishes practical application is through incorporating guest speakers, experts “from the field,” into her lesson plans to provide students with different, practical approaches to course content.
**Physical classroom environment.** Physical classroom environment refers to the physical attributes of a classroom space and the classroom location. While most participants’ interpreted “classroom environment” in more abstract terms (see research sub-question #2), some described the physical elements of the classroom in which the course is offered.

Leo described teaching courses “in trailers on campus” where “the train would come by and the whole building would shake, there were no restrooms, and there were no hallways; so when it was raining out the students would have to wait outside, huddled under the little overhang.” However, he indicated that it didn’t really have an impact on learning, stating that “physical environment, it’s nice to have nice rooms but I don’t think it matters that much.” Brad commented that “the more comfortable [the classroom], the better” but did not indicate the physical environment as being a significant factor in learning.

Other participants acknowledged more of a connection between the physical environment and an emotional environment within the classroom. Elaine stated “I think physical environment also plays a part,” explaining that “sometimes we sit in classrooms that are rows of tables and I like to rearrange the furniture as often as possible.” She continued, “If we can’t do that, then one of my standard policies is every class, new seat/new neighbor,” meaning students are required to “sit in different places, talk to new people.” Elaine declared that “I have consistently had students say, ‘Wow, I feel like I learned more just because I sat next to so and so and learned all kinds of things I never would have learned” as a result. Two participants referenced teaching non-computer
courses in computer labs. One of the instructors (Eva) described the challenges associated with this arrangement:

I don’t even allow them to turn the computers on…because in that environment, you have to get their attention from the beginning. If you don’t, you will never get it back. Then those people that you don’t have it from become a distraction to those that do want to learn, and then you have a classroom full of both frustrated and disengaged students.

The other participant (Anna) explained that she needed to be much more physically mobile when she taught an English composition course in a computer lab, walking around the room to ensure students remained attentive to the activities of the class. Anna also shared that the physical classroom environment is “sterile; you walk in, it’s got desks, chairs, sometimes computers, windows sometimes” and “the lighting can put you to sleep if it’s just very quiet.” The examples provided by these three participants illustrate that, in Elaine’s words, “there is an interaction between the physical environment and the emotional environment” of the classroom. Finally, Alex referenced the geographic locale (in terms of campus location) of the classroom as having an influence on him as an instructor. Based on “a very different student population” at an inner-city location, Alex made a number of curricular changes and incorporated a greater degree of flexibility into his instruction. He was the only participant to reference geographic location as an environmental factor.

Sub-question: What internal perspectives and external conditions influenced their decisions? What experiences influenced their choices?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are a variety of internal perspectives, external conditions, and experiences that influence instructors’ pedagogical decisions and choices. Internal perspectives were expressed through the lived experiences of
instructors (depicted through their personal histories, personal experiences, and views of the teaching profession) while external conditions were described as environmental factors (represented through diverse student populations, standardized curricula, and attributes of the physical classroom environment) that are present when instructors enter the teaching process. At the risk of being redundant, I refer the reader to the responses to the central research question of the study (Chapter 4, Section: Answers to Research Questions) for a complete listing and corresponding descriptions of internal perspectives, external conditions, and personal experiences of instructors that influenced their pedagogical decisions and choices.

Sub-question: How do they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom environment?

As described in Chapter 1, pedagogy is defined as “a set of strategies implemented by teachers [part-time faculty members] that is intended to facilitate student learning in an academic setting [community college classrooms]” (Walvoord & Pool, 1998, p. 35). Within this context, pedagogical decision making has been defined generally as the reasoning and influences behind instructor decisions relative to pedagogical processes employed in their classes. While participants offered a variety of perceptions on pedagogy – which included that pedagogical decisions influence the classroom and have a significant impact on the learning environment – they could not articulate how or why their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom environment. Participants did, however, describe the teaching methods they employ within the classroom, which included methods that will reach and accommodate the most learning styles (e.g., PowerPoint presentation, video, activities, lectures), multi-
sensory methods (e.g., YouTube), peer-to-peer instruction, group projects, students sharing personal histories, and the importance of practical application in instruction. Some participants described desirable elements in a learning environment, that included an environment that is relevant, interesting, comfortable, fun, flexible, and participatory.

Participants also described an optimal learning environment as one characterized as learner-centered and emotionally supportive. Elements of an optimal classroom learning environment included (a) the classroom’s general atmosphere (which includes classroom management), (b) a climate of emotional support, and (c) the physical environment. Generally, although not specifically, elements of an optimal classroom learning environment were portrayed by participants as a function of the instructors’ teaching style and instructional practices (i.e., pedagogical choices).

The general atmosphere of the classroom was described as sterile until the instructor sets the tone and initiates whatever atmosphere is going to be created, which can either support learning or detract from learning. Characteristics of an optimal classroom atmosphere included a climate of openness, inquisitiveness, and risk taking, a climate where multiple teaching and assessment methods are employed, a climate where adaptability and flexibility are evident in managing situations and meeting the needs of students, a climate where students are encouraged to look at issues from multiple perspectives, a climate where personal views of the instructor are withheld from class discussion, and a climate where learning is multidirectional, interactive, and practical.

An emotionally supportive environment was described as an environment where the instructor establishes rapport with students, exhibits passion and enthusiasm, shows compassion and caring, builds students’ confidence, and develops opportunities for
students to learn from text, learn from other students, and learn about the world around them. These environmental elements will help students feel validated, respected, encouraged, supported, and engaged in the learning process. To a greater degree, these things will impact whether or not students feel a connection within the classroom learning environment and, in some cases, continue in the class.

Some participants commented on the physical classroom environment (e.g., the way a classroom is arranged, the condition of equipment and furniture) but conceded that these factors were not nearly as important as the other environmental factors discussed above.

Sub-question: What theory explains how they make pedagogical decisions?

The resultant theory that explains how a small group of part-time faculty members arrived at the pedagogical approaches that guided their instruction in community college classrooms is represented in Appendix F and described in detail below.

Presentation of theory. The theory of pedagogical connectivity posits that part-time instructors make connections between and among people, things, and events in the context of their teaching within community college classrooms. As suggested through the findings of this study, the internal perspectives of instructors (i.e., their lived experiences) act as influencers in shaping who instructors are and their views of teaching. As instructors enter into the teaching process, they encounter existing external conditions (i.e., environmental factors) over which they have little, if any, control. As the teaching process ensues, interactions occur between instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors, interactions that are dynamic (characterized as having constant activity between forces) in nature and stimulate teacher thinking. As part-time instructors
process these interactions, they form perceptions and meanings that frame their teaching. The ways in which these interactions are interpreted and subsequently mediated in teaching has an influence on the instructors’ pedagogical approaches and the classroom learning environment, as does the degree of connectivity demonstrated throughout this process (see Appendix G for visual representation of degree of connectivity).

For example, Elaine indicated that one of the things she loves about teaching at a community college is “the [student] population” who “ask questions in different ways that require me to think in different ways.” This helped her “to continue to meet their needs as students,” which plays a role in her overall “teaching philosophy – to enable my students to become the best students and then the best citizens they can be.” This example is revealing in the following ways: (a) it illustrates interactions that occurred between Elaine’s lived experiences and environmental conditions; (b) it provides insight into Elaine’s perceptions of these interactions; and (c) it allows us to make inferences about Elaine’s pedagogical approaches.

There are multiple aspects of Elaine’s lived experiences (her personal history, views and approach to teaching, perceptions of pedagogy) that interact with existing environmental conditions (institutional character and student population) in this example; but for purposes of illustration, let’s say that Elaine’s lived experiences in this example are interpreted as her beliefs and values (personal history) while the presenting environmental factor is diverse student populations. Elaine believes in and values students from diverse populations. Elaine explained her belief that “diversity is strength” that is to be embraced and tries to encourage her students “to embrace it [diversity] in their own way and at their pace.” This example provides insight into how Elaine
perceives diversity – as a positive aspect of the learning experience – and represents a personal value that she believes is worthy of inclusion in her teaching approach. While a causal relationship cannot be established between perceptions and practices (nor is it the purpose of this study), it can reasonably be inferred that (a) some type of interaction occurred between Elaine’s lived experiences and environmental factors that (b) had a stimulating effect on how she perceived it in the context of her teaching.

The processes through which these interactions occur contain qualities that are specific to each individual instructor – frame of reference, conceptual lens, interpretation, and mediation. The individual instructor enters the teaching process from an individualized frame of reference. A frame of reference is defined as the lived experiences that shape the general world view of the instructor. The dynamic interaction between instructors’ lived experiences and existing environmental factors represents a convergence of influencers that are assimilated (i.e., the integration of new knowledge or information with what is already known by the instructor) through each individual instructor’s conceptual lens. In the context of this theoretical model, conceptual lens is defined as the formation of new concepts and meaning through the convergence of instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors. The ways in which instructors interpret and mediate this convergence has an influence on the pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

Continuing with this example, the interaction between Elaine’s beliefs/values and students from diverse backgrounds represents a convergence of influencers that are assimilated through her conceptual lens. The meaning that Elaine forms as a result of this convergence is that students from all backgrounds and experiences are valued and have a
role to play in classroom learning, stating that “their [students’] perspectives are so valuable” and they “add richness to the classroom experience.” She also stated that diversity “requires interactions with a variety of kinds of people” such that, during class, she has “gotten more relaxed about allowing conversation to just go because really interesting things happen in those discussions,” which is also a way to “enhance others’ self-confidence in their understanding of how they could share their knowledge.” Again, while I cannot establish a causal relationship, Elaine has intentionally designed methods or altered classroom practices in alignment with her values, beliefs, and the student population, which has influenced her pedagogical approaches to teaching.

Lastly, operating from the assumption that learner-centered classrooms are desirable learning environments within community colleges, the theory of pedagogical connectivity suggests that a higher degree of pedagogical connectivity will most likely result in intentional teaching approaches and classroom practices that support learner-centered environments. Conversely, a lower degree of pedagogical connectivity will likely result in a greater likelihood that pedagogical conditions fundamental to developing learner-centered environments will be absent (a discussion of learner-centered environments can be found in Chapter 2, Section: Historical Overview of Pedagogy).

Summary

In conclusion, categories that emerged through data analysis in open coding were as follows: (a) view of teaching profession; (b) diverse student population; (c) the concept of connections; (d) standardized curriculum; (e) approaches to teaching; (f) personal histories; (g) perceptions of pedagogy; and (h) classroom environment. In order to more fully develop these categories, I formulated follow-up interview questions for
participants that comprised participants’ perceptions and/or conceptions of the following aspects of the teaching and learning process: connections, diversity, lived experiences of students, and classroom environment. The process of intermediate coding generated two constituent categories (lived experiences of instructors and environmental factors) and one core category (connections) around which all other categories and their properties and dimensions were integrated. Advanced coding generated the study’s central phenomenon of pedagogical connectivity, or the degree to which instructors demonstrate meaningful connections between and among people, things, and events in the teaching process. An instructor’s degree of pedagogical connectivity influences his or her pedagogical approaches and ultimately has an impact on the classroom learning environment and ethos of the classroom. Deriving theory, research, policy, and practice implications and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

Findings, Interpretations and Recommendations

Dating back to the Truman Administration in the mid to late 1940s, community colleges were founded on the principles of access, equity, and opportunity in American higher education, subsequently drawing students from an incredibly diverse range of populations that produce student bodies who are historically underprepared for college level work. Over the years, community colleges continued to expand in scope, transforming from institutions primarily focused on academic preparation to comprehensive colleges serving their communities, employers, and students (Kasper, 2002). The converging forces of current and projected demographic shifts in student populations and missions much more comprehensive in nature are challenging the resiliency of community colleges (Saenz, 2004). An area of concern that has emerged during the past few decades is whether current pedagogical approaches are adapting to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community college student population (King, 2000; Vigil Laden, 2004); populations where classroom instruction is increasingly being performed by part-time faculty members. Although community colleges rely heavily on this contingent workforce to teach increasingly diverse populations of students, very little is known about how they teach, their perceived roles in the learning process, and, ultimately, the factors that influence how they arrive at pedagogical approaches in community college classrooms. While modern literature on pedagogy places a strong emphasis on teaching practices that foster interactive, learner-centered approaches, a lack of empirical literature exists about teaching in community college settings (Grubb, 1999; Moriarity, 2007). Understanding more about community college pedagogy and the
increasing role of part-time instructors in teaching our nation’s most diverse student body is an academic imperative in American higher education.

This study used a grounded theory research approach to examine a small group of part-time faculty members at a large, public, urban-serving community college. Within a diverse community college setting, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover the ways in which part-time community college faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their classroom instruction through answering the following research questions:

Central Research Question

- How do part-time faculty members arrive at the pedagogical approaches that guide their instruction in community college classrooms?

Sub-questions

- What internal perspectives and external conditions influenced their decisions?
  - What experiences influenced their choices?
- How do they perceive that their pedagogical decisions impact the community college classroom learning environment?
- What theory explains how they make pedagogical choices and decisions?

Data collection and analysis followed a set of essential grounded theory research methods that included semi-structured interviews, constant comparison analysis of data, and memoing. A total of 22 interviews (11 initial and 11 follow-up) were conducted among 11 study participants and served as the primary form of data collection. Interviews were transcribed in preparation for data analysis. Data analysis was guided by the approach to the study, which included (a) the study’s design and methodology, (b) the study’s
conceptual framework, and (c) researcher epistemology and assumptions. Additionally, data analysis was influenced by researcher reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity, study research questions, consistency of results, and potential implications for theory, policy, practice, and future research.

In general, the results of the study revealed that a variety of internal perspectives and external conditions acted as influencers in shaping the pedagogical approaches of part-time community college faculty members. Internal perspectives included instructors’ personal histories, views of the teaching profession, pedagogical perceptions, and approaches to teaching (collectively referred to as *lived experiences of instructors*). External conditions (collectively referred to as *environmental factors*) were comprised of institutional character, diverse student populations, standardized curricula, and the physical environment (refer to Chapter 4, Section: Intermediate Coding for a more detailed description of how I arrived at these categories). Through the data analysis process (i.e., constantly comparing data, categorizing concepts, conceptual analysis, and inductive reasoning), coupled with researcher reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity, I determined that the lived experiences of instructors and existing environmental factors were not just static elements in the teaching process but were integrated through a central concept – connections in the teaching process. With the assistance of memoing, I concluded that these elements were in fact dynamic, characterized by a structure of continuous activity involving competing, conflicting, and/or complimentary forces. Yet while certain elements were clearly present and connected in various ways with particular instructors, the same elements were notably absent or undetectable with others. Why was this so? And what impact does this have on the pedagogical approaches of part-time
instructors? These questions in the larger context of this study lead me to the development of my grounded theory: the theory of pedagogical connectivity.

**Theory of Pedagogical Connectivity**

The *theory of pedagogical connectivity* (see Appendix F) posits that part-time instructors make connections between and among people, things, and events in the context of their teaching within community college classrooms. As suggested through the findings of this study, the internal perspectives of instructors (i.e., their lived experiences) act as influencers in shaping who instructors are and their views of teaching. As instructors enter into the teaching process, they encounter existing external conditions (i.e., environmental factors) over which they have little, if any, control. As the teaching process ensues, interactions occur between instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors, interactions that are dynamic (characterized as having constant activity between forces) in nature and stimulate teacher thinking. As part-time instructors process these interactions, they form perceptions and meanings that frame their teaching. The ways in which these interactions are interpreted and subsequently mediated in teaching has an influence on the instructors’ perceptions of pedagogy.

The processes through which these interactions occur contain qualities that are specific to each individual instructor: frame of reference, conceptual lens, interpretation, and mediation. The individual instructor enters the teaching process from an individualized *frame of reference*. A frame of reference is defined as the lived experiences that shape the general world view of the instructor. The dynamic interaction between instructors’ lived experiences and existing environmental factors represents a convergence of influencers that are assimilated (i.e., the integration of new knowledge or
information with what is already known by the instructor) through each individual instructor’s *conceptual lens*. In the context of this theoretical model, conceptual lens is defined as the formation of new concepts and meaning through the convergence of instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors. The ways in which instructors interpret and mediate this convergence has an influence on the pedagogical approaches in their classrooms. Said in another way, as instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors become integrated through the teaching process, they construct knowledge and make meaning that informs their overall approaches to teaching (see Figure 9).

Operating from the assumption that learner-centered classrooms are desirable learning environments within community colleges, this theory postulates that a higher degree of pedagogical connectivity will most likely result in intentional teaching approaches and classroom practices which support learner-centered environments. Conversely, a lower degree of pedagogical connectivity will likely result in a greater likelihood that pedagogical conditions fundamental to developing learner-centered environments will be absent (a discussion of learner-centered environments can be found in Chapter 2, Section *Historical Overview of Pedagogy*).

The remainder of this chapter discusses findings from the study in the context of the resulting *theory of pedagogical connectivity* while offering researcher interpretations of the findings. Interpretations, study data, and existing literature form the basis for the study’s major conclusions, which lead to implications for theory and recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, the chapter concludes with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.
Findings and Interpretations

Internal perspectives. The internal perspectives of instructors were reflected through their lived experiences, which were comprised of their personal histories, views of the teaching profession, pedagogical perceptions, and approaches to teaching.

Personal histories of instructors. As discussed in Chapter 4, the most common representation of participants’ personal histories involved various aspects of their personal and family backgrounds, including their current values, beliefs, philosophies, ethics, and attitudes. Collectively, these things contribute to the formation of instructors’ world views and play a role in shaping instructors as individuals. In his 1999 study, Grubb stated that community college instruction cannot be improved “without knowing more about what instructors do and what shapes their teaching” (p. 11). It is a widely-accepted principle in learning theory (see, for example, Bransford et al., 2000) that knowledge is a constructed process by the learner and new knowledge and understanding is based on what the learner already knows and believes; a principle that is usually applied to students (when applied at all). Instructors are learners as well. Instructors
construct meaning from their personal beliefs, values, philosophies, experiences – *lived experiences* – as they make connections between new and old information to create new knowledge. In other words, learners – in this case, part-time community college faculty members – construct knowledge based on what they already know and understand (Bransford et al., 2000). As supported by Palmer (1998), instructors must possess a highly-developed self-concept with the ability to draw upon who they are as individuals and beings as they engage in the teaching process, which becomes particularly relevant in the context of teaching in community colleges as “there is more to the identity and work of community college faculty than teaching” (Levin, 2008, p. 456).

**Views of the teaching profession.** According to Palmer (1998), the capacity for connectedness is a way of linking an awareness of the inner self with a connectedness to students and the classroom, and is fundamental to good teaching. Without a true sense of self, it’s not possible to reveal who we are as teachers, and thus have an authentic connection with our students.

Most participants in the study expressed that they were drawn to teach, viewing teaching as a type of calling. Participants that viewed teaching in this manner tended to receive tremendous gratification and satisfaction in their work, enjoying the connections they make with their students. For example, Leo felt that he “always had a way of making complex things understandable,” calling it a “gift.” Although he didn’t get into teaching until later in life, he feels very connected to the profession in general and to at-risk students in particular. He said that he is drawn to a “different” (meaning at-risk) population because traditional students “would be OK anyway.” For Alex, “the connections with students” is what draws him to teaching, saying that “those are the
moments that really remind me that I enjoy being a teacher.” According to Palmer, a failure to make these internal connections could result in a scholar-centered (vs. student or learner-centered) classroom where the instructor is at center stage and possesses traits (e.g., insecure, critical/judgmental, fragile identity, defensive if challenged) that detract from a productive learning environment. In a truly student-centered classroom, the instructor exhibits generosity, self-reflection, and authenticity.

Palmer (1998) suggested that for those who feel they were called to teach, reconnecting through the self-knowledge of what attracted them to the teaching profession is a good place to re-enter (or enter, depending on the person) the journey toward self-discovery in teaching. While only one interview question directly asked about the teaching profession, participant responses suggested to me that while all participants seemed to have an affinity for teaching, it was unclear whether or not many possessed self-knowledge in teaching or if they were actively engaged in self-discovery in teaching. It was not an uncommon experience for me to receive responses such as “That’s a good question,” “Let me think about that for a minute,” or “I have never thought about that before.” On other occasions, I found myself repeating questions and/or re-wording the questions in ways that I felt would resonate with the participant. Even so, I experienced a fair amount of hesitation and uncertainty in responses. This suggests to me that instructors – at least these part-time instructors – did not regularly engage in reflective practices in teaching. However, it was clear based on their responses that the college did little, if anything, to create an atmosphere that fosters reflective practice or clearly define expectations of instructional faculty (full or part-time). All participants reported, in one way or another, a feeling of disconnection or disregard from
the institution as a whole or a lack of connection with some aspect (or aspects) of their teaching experience.

**Pedagogical perceptions.** In *Honored but Invisible: An Inside Look at Teaching in Community Colleges*, Grubb (1999) illustrated that many faculty members who were interviewed as part of the study found it difficult to discuss the principles of pedagogy, even when applied in the context of their own teaching. The findings of this study reinforce this notion, as most participants – when asked to respond to questions related to their perceptions of pedagogy and their pedagogical decisions – did not provide responses that indicated a conceptual understanding of pedagogy; that is, they did not clearly articulate how or why pedagogical decisions are influential in the context of learning, their teaching, or within a classroom environment. One possible explanation for participants’ difficulty in answering questions about pedagogy is the term itself; *pedagogy* is a rather lofty, seldom used, and often misunderstood term even among seasoned educators, an observation that is absent in Grubb. In retrospect, although I did provide clarification of the term during interviews, I would have used a term in the interview questions more common to the teaching experience of participants, such as *teaching* or *instruction*. This was clearly present for one participant who, during an interview, declared “I don’t like the term pedagogy; I hate it as a matter of fact. It’s cumbersome and nobody ever knows what the hell it means.” However, this realization notwithstanding, while most participants were able to provide multiple examples of teaching methods and practices, they generally demonstrated a general lack of awareness and/or misinterpretation of the concept of pedagogy. This is not to say participants’ teaching methods and instructional practices were devoid of principles of learning theory
or sound pedagogical practices; many examples were provided to the contrary. What it may suggest is a lack of intentionality with regard to course planning and design, taking into consideration environmental factors in teaching that may represent challenges to achieving pre-determined learning goals and outcomes.

**Approaches to teaching.** As discussed in Chapter 4, *approaches to teaching* refer to the overall methodologies employed by instructors in teaching, which are guided by the identity and integrity of instructors in the teaching process. Most participants in the study reduced their approaches to teaching to the teaching methods and instructional practices they employ in their classrooms. According to Palmer (1998), “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). For Palmer, identity and integrity are not just our “noble features” (p. 13); they are “subtle dimensions of the complex, demanding, and lifelong process of self-discovery” (p. 13) – which involves acknowledging the whole of who we are as individuals and instructors. Before this can occur, instructors must have a strong self-concept and sense of personal identity (e.g., individual epistemologies, ways of knowing, ways of viewing the world); self-knowledge is imperative for individuals to possess “a capacity for connectedness” (p. 11), an essential trait for good teachers. Instructors who possess a capacity for connectedness “are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so students can weave a world for themselves” (p. 11).

Again, in retrospect, while interview questions did contain some elements of identity and integrity in teaching, interview questions could have been designed more intentionally to uncover these nuanced and reflective dimensions of teaching; in a way
that helped to guide participants but not direct them toward any particular answer. For example, “In what ways do you feel who you are as a person impacts your teaching?” or “How does who you are as a person interrelate with your role as an instructor?” It is reasonable to conclude that the design of the interview questions impacted participants’ ability to respond in more nuanced ways to their approaches to teaching. However, taken in the aggregate, participants did not demonstrate a strong sense of personal identity during the interviews, an attribute that is essential for individuals to possess “a capacity for connectedness” in teaching. While the findings for this particular category are inconclusive, Palmer’s (1998) notion of a capacity for connectedness in teaching supports the study’s resultant theory of pedagogical connectivity.

**External Conditions.** The external conditions encountered by instructors during the teaching process were reflected through existing environmental factors, which were comprised of institutional character, diverse student populations, standardized curricula, and physical environment.

**Institutional character.** Within higher education, “institutional context – history, culture, missions, purposes, and organization – separate the community college from other educational institutions” (Levin, 2008, p. 461), making community colleges and the teaching that occurs within community colleges “clearly distinct from other sectors of education” (p. 461). Through combining so many characteristics, functions, and roles, modern community colleges have developed into truly unique institutions with similarly unique characters and cultures. While all participants in the study acknowledged the distinctiveness of community colleges in different ways and through different experiences, most displayed an inability to articulate how this distinctiveness impacted
their pedagogical approaches or translated into instructional practices. Again, participants did rather insightfully express the differences of community college students (in comparison to students at four-year institutions), the incredible diversity of the student population, the need to assume multiple roles in support of their students, and the general lack of collegiality and appreciation experienced in their teaching roles.

However, participants generally failed to clearly express meaningful connections between the context of working within an open-access, community college setting and ways in which this environmental factor influenced their approaches to teaching. When considered in combination with the additional challenges articulated by part-time faculty members and the many obstacles faced by traditionally marginalized and underprepared students, the task of community college instruction can seem overwhelming. It is reasonable to predict that if part-time instructors are not better familiarized with the mission, purpose, and identity of community colleges and equipped with strategies to manage these distinct institutional characteristics, conflicts will most likely result – both individually for the instructor and collectively for students in their classes.

**Diverse student populations.** As has been illustrated throughout this study, community college campuses represent diverse student populations in all its forms more than any other institution type in American higher education. According to Vigil Laden (2004), students from progressively more diverse backgrounds are creating “a cultural transformation” (p. 1) at community colleges that warrant a re-examination of traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Although these changes are occurring on community college campuses, “the implications for faculty and especially for community college teaching are seldom articulated and certainly not investigated in research” (Levin,
While study participants acknowledged the incredible diversity of the student body in community colleges and were able to provide a rather broad and insightful description of what diversity means to them, they generally had a difficult time explaining – in well-defined ways – how this student population affected their teaching. This finding supports the contention in community college literature that there is a growing concern about whether or not pedagogical approaches are changing to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community college student population (King, 2000; Vigil Laden, 2004). Although there was recognition of students’ needs in learning, there appeared to be a general lack of connection between students’ needs in learning and instructors’ roles in teaching, and then translating this knowledge into intentional instructional practice. It was not a matter of unwillingness or inability to do so, or a lack of compassion or caring for their students; on the contrary, participants presented in the study as extremely compassionate individuals deeply invested in their students’ success. Based on feelings of disconnection from their supervisors and academic departments, little guidance and direction in their teaching, and a general lack of regard from the institution – according to one participant, part-time faculty members were “treated as second-class citizens” – it seems that the possible unmet needs of students is connected to the unmet needs of part-time faculty members.

**Standardized curricula.** All participants clearly articulated that the subject matter, course content, and other established standards had the most direct influence on what is taught in a particular course; and, in some cases, these factors dictated how they teach depending on the specific program, course, or even particular class session. For example, state certified courses, such as in a Fire Science program, contain very strict
parameters for both the course curriculum and the method/setting with which course content is delivered. However, these teaching situations were more the exception than the norm among the experiences of study participants. Most participants expressed that while they usually were required to follow a prescribed syllabus shell, they retained flexibility with regard to the choice of supplemental texts, course materials, the delivery of content, and the overall format of the class.

The literature on the science of learning provides abundant documentation that instruction that stresses content over teaching method often dismisses the importance of social and cultural contexts in learning (see, for example, Shulman, 1987). While study participants were able to express their perceptions that standardized curricula and other standards had an influence in their teaching – clearly conveying the impact that subject matter and content have on what they teach – they generally had a difficult time articulating a thought process behind how they teach. For example, when posed this question (see Appendix C, Question 2), one participant responded “trial and error” but did not offer any specifics beyond what he wants for his students (“I want this to be a life changing experience for them”) and what he brings to the classroom as an “adjunct” instructor (“a lot of practical experience in the world”). Although he may have had a very well-defined, thought-out process behind how he teaches, it was not clearly expressed during the interviews. It may be that instructors are guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine (Gay, 2002), to the point that it is has become habit and is therefore difficult to articulate the thought process behind how they arriving at these teaching approaches.
**Physical environment.** In the context of this study, physical environment denotes the physical attributes of a classroom space and the classroom location. Some participants described the physical elements of the classroom in which the course was offered, such as furniture and lighting, but these played a relatively inconsequential role in the way they taught their courses. Other participants referenced the mismatch between physical classroom attributes (a computer lab) and course content (English composition) as creating a distraction for students but not necessarily having a major impact on instruction. The geographic location of the course (e.g., an urban center satellite campus) played a minor role in the pedagogical decisions of one participant but this can be attributed to the needs of the populations of students enrolled at that particular location.

Most participants’ interpreted physical environment in more abstract terms, such as classroom “atmosphere” and “climate.” Nate stated very directly that “the atmosphere of the class impacts learning.” Elaine referred to “a climate of openness and inquisitiveness.” Eva indicated that “classroom environment is pretty much at the top of the list as far as affecting learning,” referencing “classroom management” and the “preparation and style of the instructor” as influences on the atmosphere or climate of the classroom. Admittedly, the more abstract interpretation of classroom environment as “atmosphere/climate” (versus physical attributes of a physical space) was my intent behind the interview questions related to classroom environment. The fact that participants interpreted classroom environment as atmosphere or climate indicated to me that there was a conceptual understanding of the importance of environment factors in learning. A good example of this conceptual awareness was expressed by Elaine, who said that “there is an interaction between the physical environment and the emotional
environment.” The emotional environment was described in terms of fostering a sense of community within the classroom while engendering a general feeling of support among students, which was a view that was reflected among many participants in their perception of student needs (see Chapter 4, Section Intermediate Coding, Figure 8).

**Conclusions**

Overall, participants in the study presented as caring, compassionate, and experienced individuals committed to teaching and the teaching profession. What they may have lacked in pedagogical knowledge and insight seemed to be counteracted through their deep dedication to their students and their students’ success. Unfortunately, based on participants’ responses, the institution did not appear to be anywhere near as supportive of them – some of whom have served the institution on a consistent basis for years – as they were of their students. With this in mind, the findings of the study generated two primary conclusions, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

**Conclusion #1:** The lived experiences of instructors and existing environmental factors were not just static elements in the teaching process but were integrated through a central concept – connections in the teaching process.

As interpreted through my theory, interactions occur between instructors’ lived experiences and environmental factors as they enter into the teaching process. As the teaching process ensues, these elements are not necessarily linear and fixed but dynamic in nature, constantly moving and changing based on the individual instructor and teaching situation. The central concept through which all of these elements were integrated was connections in the teaching process. Each individual participant demonstrated various connections both between and among these elements, all of which
were idiosyncratic based upon the nature of the interaction and individual instructor. For example, Brad was the only participant whose teaching methods were directly connected to state certified courses in Fire Science, which proscribed strict standards with regard to the delivery and assessment of certain course content. While other participants’ teaching approaches were also connected to established standards (usually in the form of standardized curricula), they were not as prescriptive as required in a state certified course; still, they were all distinctive in their own ways as teaching a course in music history will be different from a course in lower-level math which will be different than an English composition course, and so on. This is only one linear example of the interactions and connections that are constantly occurring between the lived experiences of instructors and presenting environmental factors throughout the teaching process.

Other times, connections were much more multidimensional in nature based on the simultaneous interactions occurring among multiple elements. To illustrate, I refer the reader back to the example used in Chapter 4 to describe the theory of pedagogical connectivity. In this example, multiple aspects of Elaine’s lived experiences (her personal history, views and approach to teaching, perceptions of pedagogy) interacted with existing environmental conditions (institutional character and student population) during the teaching process in one of her English courses. These interactions were dynamic not only between singular elements but among multiple elements. Elaine indicated that she loves the community college student population because, among other things, they “ask questions in different ways that require [her] to think in different ways” which helps her “to continue to meet their needs as students.” Here, the characteristics of the student population within a community college setting interact with Elaine’s personal
history (in the form of her values and beliefs), her perceptions of pedagogy (through how she was influenced by direct feedback from students), and approaches to teaching (as she determines how to best meet her students’ needs). Based on her response, I inferred that Elaine has connected these elements in a way that has created meaning for her. While we cannot say that these interactions produced a particular behavior, they have stimulated teacher thinking and constructed new knowledge for Elaine.

Conclusion #2: Instructors are learners who make connections between new and old information to construct new knowledge and create meaning as they encounter people, things, and events in the teaching process.

As indicated in conclusion #1, the lived experiences of instructors and environmental conditions in teaching were integrated through connections in the teaching process. As these elements were integrated through connections, they created new knowledge for instructors. According to Bransford et al. (2000), “Teachers are learners and the principles of learning and transfer for student learners apply to teachers.” Similar to how students learn, instructors make connections between new and old information to construct new knowledge. As demonstrated through this study, instructors’ lived experiences form personal epistemologies that create meaning as they interact with environmental conditions in the teaching process. Returning to the Elaine example, she stated that “classroom interaction certainly [is] a two-way street with me to them [student], and them to me” and “provides other ways for me to explain things to subsequent sections of the same class.” In this example, Elaine enters into the teaching process with pre-determined ways to deliver content in her classes. Based on her belief in the reciprocal nature of learning, information from students connects with her personal
epistemology to construct new knowledge; in this case, different ways to deliver the same content. Elaine has not only constructed new knowledge, she has assigned meaning to this new knowledge in the context of her teaching as she determines how and when to incorporate this new knowledge into classroom instruction. To illustrate, Elaine stated that in the future, she will say “A student of mine a couple of years ago said it this way…either it connects or it doesn’t but it’s another way [to deliver content meaningful to learners].” Again, while we cannot form a causal relationship to specific behavior, as Elaine connected new and old information in the teaching process, she constructed new knowledge and assigned meaning to the new knowledge within the context of their teaching.

Implications and Recommendations

Community colleges are dynamic environments with ever-changing roles and increasingly diverse student populations. In order to remain resilient and stay true to their historical mission, community colleges must adjust to meet the needs of its staff, students, and constituents. In particular, community colleges must recognize the value part-time instructors bring to the institution while intentionally developing policies and practices to support this distinctive workforce and create institutional conditions that provide these instructors with the best opportunity to effectively meet the needs of the students they teach.

Policy and practice recommendations. Teaching in the context of community colleges is an extremely complex undertaking even for the most seasoned of instructors (Levin, 2008). According to Grubb (1999), “A defining aspect of instructors’ lives in community colleges is their isolation.” Based on the findings of this study, community
colleges must develop ways to connect part-time instructors to their teaching, both through connections to the institution, academic departments, programs, and colleagues and through connections within the teaching process. What follows are recommendations toward these ends.

**Programs to connect part-time faculty to the institution.** It is recommended that community colleges develop a multi-tiered orientation program as an initial method to connect newly or recently-hired part-time instructors to the institution. The orientation program should have two levels to ensure that instructors are connected to both (a) the historical mission of community colleges and the culture of the institution and (b) their particular academic schools, departments, or programs. Institutional orientation should provide insights into the institution, including mission, vision, values, structure, and culture, and provide an historical overview of community colleges and the character of these institutions. The academic orientation should provide a general overview of the academic school and department within which part-time instructors will be teaching, and include information specific to a particular academic program or curriculum. Each orientation should provide attendees with an opportunity to meet/hear from key individuals within the institution, school, or department, and provide them with a comprehensive listing of campus support services and resources, both for instructors and students. It is recommended that successful completion of orientation be a requirement of employment.

**Opportunities to connect part-time faculty to their colleagues.** It is recommended that opportunities are created to connect part-time faculty with colleagues both within and external to their departments/programs. One of the primary ways that
participants expressed their feelings of disconnection from the institution was through a lack of collegiality. There did not appear to be many opportunities for part-time instructors to connect with other faculty within or external to their respective departments or programs. Possible opportunities in this regard include institution-wide events designed specifically for faculty to meet and interact and smaller events designed to connect part-time faculty to colleagues within particular departments or programs. There may be opportunities to establish mentoring-type programs that connect full-time faculty with part-time instructors or create team-taught course offerings. Academic schools and departments can also be more intentional about inviting part-time faculty to assume roles within their governance structures; however, unions, politics, and availability of part-time instructors may create challenges in pursuing these opportunities.

It was also expressed that a lack of physical space was made available for part-time faculty members to meet with students, meet with other faculty, or even place their belongings during the day. It is recommended that a shared space be identified and specifically designed for part-time faculty within each school and, where possible, within academic departments or programs. A relatively minor yet important way to help make part-time faculty members feel more connected to their colleagues is to ensure that departmental addresses, emails, and phone numbers are current and widely distributed among all faculty. Also, ensuring that contact information of part-time faculty members is maintained and regularly updated by the institution will ensure that campus communication is reaching them and will help keep them connected to the institution.

**Trainings to assist part-time faculty members to make connections within the teaching process.** It is recommended that community colleges create opportunities for
part-time instructors to develop capacities to make connections within the teaching process. According to Bransford et al. (2000), “Knowledge of a large set of disconnected facts is not sufficient. To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must have opportunities to learn with understanding” (p. 16). Based on the findings of this study, the same can be applied within the context of teaching for part-time instructors. In general, part-time instructors demonstrated knowledge in a variety of areas within their teaching, yet many disconnections existed for them within this process. Although we’ve discussed connections to and within the institution, we must also provide trainings to assist part-time instructors with making connections within their teaching. Trainings and professional development offerings should include topics such as teaching in the context of community colleges, pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge in teaching, constructivist approaches to teaching, identity and integrity in teaching, connectivity in teaching, dimensions of diversity in teaching, and cultivating learner-centered classroom environments. It is recommended that colleges periodically survey their part-time instructors to determine additional topics of interest and areas of need. Training sessions and professional development workshops should be outcome orientated, with a focus on skills development and practical application.

**Systems to maintain connections within teaching for part-time instructors.** It is recommended that a second method be instituted to connect part-time faculty within their teaching. A system of review, evaluation, and feedback will assist in maintaining ongoing connections within the teaching process for part-time instructors. Palmer (1998) states that “Space without boundaries is not space, it is a chaotic void” (p. 74). At times, the experiences of the participants in the study appeared to be chaotic, devoid of
boundaries, structure, communication, and accountability. Alex mentioned that during his first three or four years at the college, “I have [not] been evaluated in my classroom” so it’s difficult for him to gauge whether or not he is “teaching to a more rigorous standard, to a less rigorous standard, if [he’s] being too hard, too easy.” Community colleges need to develop a review/evaluation/feedback system to ensure that part-time instructors are linked to their departments/programs as they carry out their teaching. The system should include: (a) clearly communicated expectations and responsibilities from which instructors will be evaluated; (b) a peer review component involving in-class observation(s); and (c) opportunities for part-time instructors to serve as peer reviewers of fellow instructors. Colleges should also adopt a systematic approach to soliciting student evaluations and feedback and sharing this information with part-time instructors in meaningful ways. Reviews and evaluations should be occur regularly and conform to a pre-determined schedule. Lastly, the system of review/evaluation should be adopted at an institutional level – not just within certain schools, departments or programs – so as to make it sustainable and not vulnerable to being discontinued (or disregarded), as was the case at the participants’ study site. As such, it is recommended that it be adopted as an institutional policy.

Significance

The importance of student connections cannot be overestimated when considered in the context of college student success (persistence, retention, and completion), a contention that is supported through ample research and educational literature (see, for example, Astin, 1993). As revealed through this study, instructors indicated that the most important connections for community college students in the learning process involved
developing relationships, engaging with course content, being comfortable in the learning environment, establishing emotional bonds, and feeling part of a community. Many of these touch points, or connection points, occur within the classroom learning environment where instructors are the primary facilitators of the student experience. Although community colleges continue to preach the importance of facilitating meaningful student connections in the learning process, existing literature and the findings from this study suggest that they are failing to facilitate connections within the teaching process for part-time instructors. In other words, what we are relying on part-time instructors to do for our students is not being done for them. By failing to support our part-time faculty members we are also failing our students, especially at our nation’s community colleges where the nature of the student population already places them at-risk for academic success. The implications of continuing down this path are increasingly costly as many state and federal funding models are moving away from funding based on enrollment and headcount toward performance-based funding based on student persistence, retention, and completion. We must do a better job of supporting part-time faculty members so they are better fortified to advance student success.

While research exists on pedagogy, pedagogical decision making, community college instruction, and part-time faculty members, this research study breaks ground as it uniquely focuses on (a) part-time faculty members at community colleges and (b) the internal perspectives and external conditions that influence their approaches to teaching. Knowing more about part-time faculty members and factors that influence their collective pedagogical decision making will provide insight into the isolated world of the community college classroom and the learning environments vital to the academic
success of students. Through their sheer numbers (and projections that these numbers will continue to increase), part-time faculty members are central – not peripheral – to the instructional process and success of students at community colleges. This study provided a starting point for additional future research on part-time faculty members, pedagogy, and classroom learning environments at community colleges.

Limitations and Future Research

The theory that was generated as a result of this study, the theory of pedagogical connectivity, was based on the experiences of a small group of part-time faculty members at one community college. The principles of the theory are supported by Grubb (1999) in his work on pedagogical approaches of community college faculty, Palmer (1998) in his work exploring the inner landscape of teachers’ lives, Bransford et al. (2000) in their work on how people learn, and Levin (2008) in his work on community college teaching. However, only two of these works (Grubb and Levin) focused on community colleges and none involved the experiences of part-time faculty members in teaching. While this study breaks new ground in that respect, it also potentially limits the applicability of its findings to the teaching of part-time instructors at large, urban-serving, community colleges. Also, the transferability of the findings to other contexts is limited to the level and degree that others find them applicable to their particular situations. As such, it is recommended that future research be considered to expand this knowledge base.

Possible future research studies (both qualitative and quantitative) on this topic include: (a) a study comprising part-time faculty members at multiple community colleges; (b) a study comprising part-time faculty members at multiple community colleges within different Carnegie classifications or categories; and (c) a study including both full-time
and part-time community college faculty members, both at a single and multiple study sites. These approaches will allow for the validation of data among various populations, institution types, and methodologies.

This study and corresponding theory focused in general terms on the perceptions of part-time faculty members, and the potential influences that the interplay of their lived experiences and environmental factors had on their pedagogical approaches within a community college setting. The study did not consider specific elements of their experiences, such as race, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, or educational attainment. It may be worthwhile to initiate a study isolating on one or more of these variables to determine the degree of influence of each or in comparison to others. Further, this study suggested (a) that a “degree of connectivity” exists as instructors make connections between and among people, things, and events throughout the teaching process, and (b) there may be a resulting influence on the classroom learning environment. However, there is no mechanism to measure “the degree of connectivity” or determine potential “strength of impact” that particular internal perspectives and environmental conditions have on individual instructors and/or their pedagogical approaches. This study also did not provide evidence of the impact instructors’ pedagogical approaches have on shaping the classroom learning environment. Possible future research could include the development, testing, and validation of an instrument to measure “the degree of connectivity” and “strength of impact” within the teaching process, and a method to determine the influence that pedagogical approaches have on the classroom learning environment.

Finally, a fundamental aspect to teaching within a constructivist paradigm
is the practice of reflection. I acknowledge that the research methodology did not sufficiently integrate design features to adequately capture aspects of participant reflection and reflective practice in their pedagogical decision-making processes, which represents both shortcoming in the current study and an opportunity for future research. Also, a future study using a different qualitative methodology or quantitative approach may provide additional validation to the study and/or theoretical model or identify gaps or weaknesses in each that should be considered in potential practical application.

In Closing

Generally, modern community colleges remain defined by their commitment to being open access institutions, a philosophy that has endured since the Truman Commission report in 1947. Since that time, community colleges have expanded in scope, mission, and purpose, adding unique characteristics to campuses that already consist of the most diverse student body in the history of American higher education. However, “the implications for faculty and especially for community college teaching [is] seldom articulated and certainly not investigated in research” (Good, 2008, p. 456). This study attempted to explain the ways in which part-time faculty members construct pedagogical approaches within their community college classrooms, resulting in a grounded theory.

The theory of pedagogical connectivity posits that the degree to which part-time instructors make connections between and among people, things, and events in the context of their teaching will influence their pedagogical approaches. The study concluded that (a) the lived experiences of part-time instructors and existing environmental factors are integrated through connections in the teaching process and (b)
part-time instructors are learners who make connections in the teaching process to construct new knowledge and create meaning. The study also addressed policy and practice implications through a series of recommendations to connect part-time instructors to their teaching, through connections to the institution and colleagues and connections within the teaching process.
References


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Appendix A

Study Invitation Letter

[Date]

Dear Colleague:

I am currently conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in Higher Education at the University of Toledo. I am interested in knowing about your pedagogical approaches to teaching and the process by which you make decisions related to pedagogical choices in your community college classroom(s). Student learning and corresponding approaches to teaching are of increasing concern in American higher education, yet there is a lack of research on community college faculty, classroom practices, and factors that influence pedagogical decisions. Most literature to date is based on the student or administrative perspective, or reflects research studies that primarily focus on full-time faculty at four-year colleges and universities. This study is designed to give voice to part-time community college faculty members in the teaching and learning process and contribute to a limited base of research on community colleges and part-time faculty members. It will also provide an important baseline of data that can assist in determining future support programs and professional development opportunities for part-time faculty members at community colleges.

Your involvement in this study will take approximately 2 hours and comprise the following:

- Phone appointment to confirm interest (will take approximately 15 minutes)
- Interview (will take between 60-90 minutes)
- Checking interview content for accuracy (will take approximately 30 minutes)

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and confidential. No personally identifiable information will be released at any point before, during, or after the study. The study has been approved through the University of Toledo and Owens Community College Internal Review Boards.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the enclosed consent form and return to me by (date). If you have additional questions, I may be reached at 567-661-7129 or christopher_giordano@owens.edu.

I thank you in advance for your consideration and please feel free to contact me with questions.

Best regards,

Christopher Giordano, Dean of Student Life, Owens Community College
PhD Candidate, University of Toledo
Appendix B

ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Constructing Pedagogical Approaches Among Part-Time Community College Faculty Members: A Grounded Theory Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti, Dean, Judith Herb College of Education; Associate Professor, Higher Education Program, 419-530-5570

Co-investigator, Christopher Giordano, Doctoral Student, University of Toledo Higher Education Program and Dean of Student Life, Owens Community College, 567-661-7129

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, Constructing Pedagogical Approaches Among Part-Time Community College Faculty Members: A Grounded Theory Research Study which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti. The primary purpose of this study is to develop a grounded theory that explains how part-time faculty members make pedagogical decisions and choices. This study is designed to give voice to the experiences of part-time community college faculty members and learn more about how this segment of the instructional workforce can be better supported in the teaching and learning process.

Description of Procedures: This research study will take place on the Toledo Campus of Owens Community College in Ohio and require approximately 2 hours of your time. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview (approximately 60-90 minutes) and a follow-up interview (approximately 30 minutes). Prior to the follow-up interview, participants will receive a brief narrative of the first interview. The follow-up interview will consist of a review of the narrative for accuracy and one follow-up question. All interviews will be audio recorded.

Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audio record during this research procedure?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

[Signature]
Initial

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study. Participating in this study (e.g., answering interview questions) might cause you to feel discomfort. If so, you may stop at any time.

Potential Benefits: The only direct benefit to you if you participate in this research may be that you will learn about how research studies are run and you may learn more about pedagogy and how a small group of part-time faculty members arrive at pedagogical approaches in a community college setting. Others may benefit by learning about the results of this research.
Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with Owens Community College or the University of Toledo. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation, you should contact a member of the research team (Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti, 419-530-5570 or Christopher Giordano, 567-661-7129).

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

**SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today's date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Subject (please print)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Person Obtaining Consent</td>
<td>Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Adult Research Informed Consent document has been reviewed and approved by Social, Behavioral and Educational IRB for the period of time specified in the box below.

Approved Number of Subjects: _____________________
Appendix C

Interview Protocol A

Time of Interview:

Date:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Position Held by Interviewee:

Purpose of Research Study: Describe to participant. (NOTE: Remind participants that they can choose not to answer any question asked of them, or choose to terminate the interview at any time.)

Questions:

1. What draws you to teaching? What are your thoughts about teaching at a community college?

2. How do you make decisions about HOW or WHAT you teach? (In other words, what underlies the thought process behind your teaching decisions?)

3. How do your personal values, beliefs, and attitudes influence the way you teach?

4. What personal experiences have had the greatest influence on you as an instructor?

5. Have you changed your approach to teaching over time? How? What were the precipitating factors?

6. How do you perceive that your pedagogical decisions impact the classroom learning environment?

7. Think of a class or classes you have taught in the past. How did you choose your teaching methods/strategies?
Appendix D

Interview Protocol - B

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Purpose of Follow-up Interview: Describe to participant (*NOTE: Remind participants that they can choose not to answer any question asked of them, or choose to terminate the interview at any time.*)

Follow-up Questions:

1. The concept of “connections” has emerged as a theme in answers to multiple questions provided by participants during interviews. In the context of teaching and learning, what does “connections” mean to you?

2. Have you experienced a “lack of connection” in your current teaching role? If yes, what impact do you think a lack of connection has on you as an instructor? How does this manifest itself in the classroom learning environment? Can you provide an example?

3. Many participants referenced the diversity of the community college student population. What does diversity mean to you? How does knowledge of a diverse student population influence your instructional practices? Can you describe a specific example?

4. Students come to college classrooms with a wide range of prior knowledge, backgrounds, beliefs, and lived experiences. How do the things students bring with them to the classroom influence you as an instructor? How do they influence your approach to teaching? Can you provide an example?

5. How does the classroom environment impact learning? Can you provide an example?
# Appendix E

## Visual Mapping of Relationships between Coding Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Coding Codes</th>
<th>Intermediate Coding Categories</th>
<th>Advanced Coding Theoretical Integration</th>
<th>Core Category Central Phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Concept of Connections</td>
<td>▪ Concept of Connections</td>
<td>▪ Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Feeling of Disconnection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Family Background</td>
<td>▪ Personal Histories</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lived Experiences of Instructors (Internal Perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Personal Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Being Drawn to Teach</td>
<td>▪ Views of Teaching Profession</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Perceptions of Pedagogy</td>
<td>▪ Perceptions of Pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Science of Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Pedagogical Content Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Approaches to Teaching</td>
<td>▪ Approaches to Teaching</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Teaching Methods</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Instructional Choices</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Institutional Character</td>
<td>▪ Institutional Character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Student Population</td>
<td>▪ Diverse Student Populations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental Factors (External Conditions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Standards of the Course</td>
<td>▪ Standardized Curricula</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Classroom Environment</td>
<td>▪ Physical Classroom Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Degree of Connectivity

Lived Experiences

Within the Teaching Process

Institution

Academic Department and Program

Colleagues

Environmental Factors

Degree of Connectivity
Appendix H

Excerpted Researcher Memo

MEMO 10.8.13: Reflexivity and Grounded Theory

Maintaining an audit trail of the procedural aspects of data collection and analysis will help to ensure methodological congruence during the study. Writing memos and actively analyzing memos in light of epistemological and methodological position will develop insight into my work as a research and guide the future directions of the study = reflexivity. According to Strauss (1987), researchers’ biographies exert influence and need to be accounted for during the research process (have done this on pp. 57-61 but need to more clearly articulate HOW my epistemology influences data analysis). Charmaz (2006) acknowledges an obligation for constructivist grounded theorists to incorporate reflexivity as a strategy into research design.

I have articulated my world view and constructivist view of teaching and learning. I now need to incorporate reflexivity into data analysis through (1) identifying/acknowledging assumptions/biases that I bring with me into the study and (2) provide a systematic, written record of reflexivity on the study. I will incorporate this into my memo writing by including both my actions/feelings and the influences of my thinking, and the collective impact they have on my data analysis and outcome. In other words, I need to develop insight into how my underlying assumptions about the world have influenced both my analysis of data and presentation of findings. The writing of memos will capture a textual documentary of my lived experience as a grounded theorist. Consciously creating a record of how I feel during the data collection and data analysis process will allow me to keep an audit trail of research direction/decisions and reflexively analyze decisions made in relation to operational or analytical processes.

**Thoughts on Interviewing:**
The emergent nature of the process will require flexibility in interviewing. What to ask a participant and how it is asked will vary both between and within interviews. Less structure is better from the perspective of following where the conversation takes you. The interviewer acts as a coordinator of the conversation with the aim of generating fodder for the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Learn from mistakes through techniques such as reflecting on the experience, reflexivity, and memoing. Where possible, return to earlier participants for a second or subsequent interview to follow up on leads that arise as the research progresses. Verbatim quotations can be used to defend coding and illustrate final theory.

**Thoughts on Theoretical Sensitivity**
Difficult concept to get your head around; certainly seems similar to theoretical sampling. More specifically, appears to be insight that leads to the researcher’s ability to identify relevant concepts and clues in the data. Defined as researcher’s insight into what is meaningful and significant in the data. Analytical tools can assist in becoming theoretically sensitive: drawing upon personal experience, looking at emotions expressed
and the situations that aroused them, and waving the red flag. Corbin and Strauss (1990) identify the need for grounded theorists to examine their underlying assumptions about the world throughout the research process to develop theoretical sensitivity to the data.

*Drawing upon personal experiences* is a strategy that explicitly recognizes the researcher’s history and utilizes it as a conceptual comparison with the data, which is similar to *emotions* above. Although this refers to participants’ emotions, Corbin and Strauss allude to the researcher’s emotions being evoked by certain sensitizing concepts in the data. Using emotions as a clue can lead to analytic breakthroughs. *Waving the red flag* is recognizing when biases, assumptions, or beliefs are unduly influencing the analysis = relevant to constructivist grounded theorists.

Keywords and phrases that provide cues to stop or ask other questions of participants’ in interviews = Absolute Statements
  - e.g., always, never, it couldn’t possibly be that way, everyone knows that, there’s no need for discussion, etc.

**Additional thoughts on Reflexivity in Data Analysis (12.4.13)**

During the coding process (both open and axial) I am identifying things that are both **obvious** and **notably absent**. For example, repetition of a particular word, phrase, or concept (eg, “connection”), regardless of meaning, represents data that needs expansion, clarification, or confirmation – and is based more on an objectives (vs. subjective) point of view. Issues, topics or concepts that are identified as being **notably absent** are influenced by my epistemology (as reflected in my Statement of Epistemological Position. Therefore, data reviewed and analyzed falling into this category is more subjective in nature, and influenced to a greater degree by reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity (the latter being defined as *researcher’s insight into what is meaningful and significant in the data*). Draws on personal experience.