

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: THE SHARED EXPERIENCES OF
HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY

by

Lisa R. Desruisseaux

Bachelor of Science
Notre Dame College, 1988

Master of Arts
University of New Hampshire, 2006

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Educational Leadership

School of Education

Southern New Hampshire University

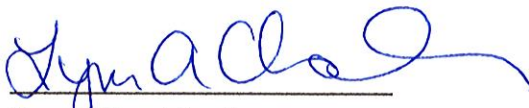
2016



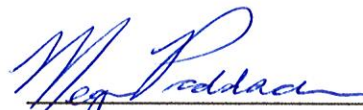
Chair



Committee Member



Committee Member



External Reader



Associate Dean and Director
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership

Abstract

This phenomenological study aims to give a voice to higher education faculty as they continue answering to demands of accreditation accountability while continuing to take on the challenge of serving their increasingly diverse student populations. This study investigated faculty experiences in communities of practice (CoPs) as one way to provide faculty with an opportunity to engage each other in conversations and share different perspectives and understandings in relation to their own professional backgrounds and pedagogical practice (Wenger, 1997).

The study asks the question: How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice? A phenomenological research approach was used to capture the essence of the “what” and “how” of the shared experiences in CoP participation (Creswell, 2013). Nine faculty members from an institute of higher education were interviewed and transcripts were analyzed to identify significant statements relevant to their CoP participation. The significant statements were then reduced to twenty-nine meaning clusters and then grouped into four themes.

An analysis of findings indicated that faculty participants shared a deep sense of belonging that linked to the relationships formed within their CoP. Faculty participants revealed that their perceived sense of belonging and relationships reinforced their efforts to learn more about themselves as learners and professional educators. Additional data showed that diverse perspectives based on professional backgrounds and experiences provided rich contexts for conversations and helped faculty participants to build university-wide connections.

Keywords: higher education faculty, communities of practice, professional identity, instruction and assessment

Acknowledgements

For a little over three years, I have had two items hanging on my desk lamp, a fortune from a fortune cookie and a pendant in the shape of a spider's web. The fortune reads: *A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step, Lao Tzu.* My journey began in July 2013 and that is when I met the members of my cohort, my web. To my cohort, thank you for always being one text, one call, or one Google Hangout away.

I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to my committee. To Lorraine Patusky, Ph.D., thank you for sharing your story with me. Your passion for teaching, learning and student success has inspired and will continue to guide me. Thank you for reminding me to trust myself. I will never forget that. To Beth Sheehan, Ph.D. and Lynn Murray-Chandler, Ed.D., thank you for the exceptional support and insight. Most importantly, thank you for truly being invested in my success.

I would like to thank my advisory team, Christine Parr, Jennifer Durant-Gagnon, Jennifer Oquist and Eide Nesmith. I appreciate your insight, professionalism and never-ending commitment to my learning. Thank you for allowing me to “talk your ears off” about my studies and research, and I have not forgotten about lunch!

I wish to thank all of the professors in the doctoral program. Your dedication to education as a life-long journey is inspiring. I am also grateful to Peg Ford, Ph.D. for her commitment to each one of us as we go through our own journey.

Without my family and friends, this dissertation would still be a dream. Thank you all for being there through the many phases of my doctoral experience. I would not be where I am today without your words of encouragement, patience, love and Salt Box Caramels, handmade by Charlie in North Truro, MA.

To Bailey, Thomas and Giuseppe: thank you for being my “study-buddies” and for keeping me warm while I wrote early in the morning and late into the night.

To my wife, Lisa Giuffre: you have been my rock and my Highland Light. Thank you for always being there to keep me on my path. Without you, I am certain that I would be lost.

Finally, to my daughter, Cacey Desruisseaux: this journey is for you. You can accomplish anything you set your mind to and remember that we are all stories, in the end. Just make it a good one.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Chapter I.....	1
Introduction to the Research	1
Phenomenon of Interest.....	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Conceptual Framework	8
Social Theory of Learning and Communities of Practice in Higher Education.....	10
Transformative Learning Theory	11
Transformational Learning Theory – Mezirow (2000)	13
Adult Learning – Four Principles of Andragogy	13
Phenomenon of Interest Terms	15
Phenomenology Research Terms	16
Research Questions:	17
Purpose of the Study	17
Research Methodology.....	20
Delimitations and Limitations	21
Chapter Summary	22
Chapter II	24
Literature Review.....	24
Introduction	24
Shifts in Higher Education Assessment	24
Reporting on the Evidence of Student Success	28
Faculty Engagement in Higher Education	32

The Identity of Faculty in Higher Education	32
Learning Communities: Platforms for Faculty Development and Student Learning.....	34
Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	36
Faculty Learning Communities	38
Communities of Practice	40
Chapter Summary	42
Chapter III.....	44
Methodology	44
Overview	44
Researcher's Identity.....	46
Bracketing	50
Overview of Information Needed	50
Contextual	52
Perceptual	53
Demographic	53
Research Design.....	54
Data Collection Methods.....	59
Phenomenological Reduction.....	63
Ethical Considerations.....	65
Reliability and Trustworthiness	66
Delimitations and limitations	67
Chapter Summary	68
Chapter IV.....	70
Findings.....	70
Theme One: Identity.....	73
Theme Two: Sense of Belonging.....	81
Theme Three: Collaboration	89
Theme Four: Transformation	93

Chapter Summary	98
Chapter V	100
Findings and Recommendations	100
Major Findings.....	102
Professional Identity.....	102
Self as a Learner: Positive Affirmation.....	103
Self as a Learner: Improving Practice	104
Self as a Learner: Professional Identity.....	104
A Sense of Belonging.....	105
Transformation of Practice: The Missing Piece.....	110
Recommendations	112
Future Research.....	116
Conclusion	118
References.....	121
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval	128
Appendix B: Consent Form for Research.....	129
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate	135
Appendix D: Electronic Survey	137
Appendix E: Communities of Practice: The Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty	139
Appendix F: Coding Manual	143

Table of Tables

Table 1 Participant Demographics.....	65
Table 2 Interview Anchor Questions.....	67
Table 3 Sample Timeframe Anchor Questions.....	68
Table 4 Research Questions, Clusters, and Themes.....	79

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Components of a Social Theory of Learning.....	18
Figure 2 Transformational Learning Theory.....	21
Figure 3 Learning Communities.....	43
Figure 4 Research Design Overview.....	62
Figure 5 Theme One: Identity.....	80
Figure 6 Theme Two: Sense of Belonging.....	86
Figure 7 Theme Three: Collaboration.....	91
Figure 8 Theme Four: Transformation.....	95

Chapter I

Introduction to the Research

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” Henry Ford

This phenomenological study will seek to describe the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about perceived change(s) in professional practice among higher education faculty who participate in Communities of Practice (CoP) at a small, non-profit university located in the Northeast. This introductory chapter will explain the phenomenon of interest, the statement of the problem, and the theories that make up the conceptual framework for the research and purpose of this study. Key terms used throughout will be defined. Chapter I will conclude with this study's delimitations and limitations and a summary.

Phenomenon of Interest

Consider the evolution of higher education in the United States. Since the late 1800's, American colleges and universities have evolved from the recitative, questioning and answering form of teaching and assessment to the implementation of outcomes assessment systems designed to measure academic growth at the individual student level (Foden, 1989; Wilbrink, 1997). This evolution has withstood the financial crisis and the public and political scrutiny of higher education in the 1970s and state-level funding of the 1980s. Currently, evaluation of student learning in higher education is a part of the 2011-2014 and 2014-2018 United States Department of Education Strategic Plans.

In these strategic plans, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan emphasized a steady decline in American students attaining college degrees. In fact, within the last 25 years, America

has slid from first place to sixteenth place in comparison to other nations. As a result, President Obama challenged America to once again lead the world in the proportion of college graduates by the year 2020. Secretary Duncan (2011), purported that meeting this challenge will mean that all children and adults in America must receive the type of rigorous, academic experiences necessary for success in college and careers. In order to reach the President's goal and meet this "...cradle to career commitment...", comprehensive, systemic reforms must be implemented (U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan, 2011, p.1). A critical aspect of systematic reform in higher education continues to be the implementation of outcomes-based assessment.

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) is charged with advising and setting recommendations regarding the eligibility and certification of postsecondary institutions participating in federal student aid programs. Its primary function is to advise the Secretary of Education on matters involving the efficacy and quality of education and the programs it accredits (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). When drafting the Strategic Plan, the Department of Education reviewed the recommendations of the NACIQI to improve the effectiveness of the accreditation review process and ensure that institutions participating in Title IV programs are providing high-quality programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The U.S. Department of Education's Strategic Plan (2011) acknowledged that it is through the accreditation process that a postsecondary institution's ability to meet the academic needs of their students will be determined. Additionally, the department is responsible for supporting each postsecondary institution in the creation of institution-wide systems that measure the accuracy of its programs through the collection and analysis of student learning data. However, as written, the Strategic Plan falls short. Essentially, the plan limits postsecondary institutions to solely creating systems that collect student learning data as an

attempt to gauge student attainment and completion of programmatic outcomes. The plan does not acknowledge the role of faculty in this increasingly complex educational paradigm.

Therefore, the questions that remain unanswered are: “How does this work transfer into the classroom in support of students?” and “What is the impact on professional development for higher education faculty?”

Increasing the number of states with a public plan for improving postsecondary assessment, quality, and completion of programs is a key goal of The United States Department of Education’s Strategic Plan. To have a direct effect on academic rigor and encourage cultures of assessment literacy, there must be what Hattie (2012) described as the most effective professional development for faculty: the data team model. The model’s inquiry-based focus organizes faculty discussion for informed decision making about: 1) improving student achievement; and 2) promoting equity and excellence (Hattie, 2012).

For higher education faculty, this does not mean that they must become pedagogical experts over night, but it does infer that they must engage in practice that develops individual capacity, as well as uphold a collective responsibility for student learning. It is the opinion of this researcher that it is naïve to assume that a faculty member can know everything about teaching and learning and maintain subject matter expertise. The CoP model aligns with Hattie’s (2012) recommendation while building a collective, institution-wide responsibility in an effort to ensure that all students meet course and programmatic outcomes. This goal can be perceived as lofty, Hattie (2009) argues, but it edges closer to reality when faculty work together to overcome difficulties, make suggestions, and collectively evaluate the effect of instruction and assessment at the course and program level.

Hattie's (2009) research and synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to effective practices that improve student learning showed that what works best for students is similar to what works for teachers. This model of teaching and learning revealed that the most effective professional development for faculty is allowing for extended opportunities to challenge, "...prevailing discourse and conceptions about learning" (p.121). Consequently, this researcher agrees that higher education faculty must engage in conversations that perhaps challenge assumptions and the status quo and build collective understanding about teaching, learning, and the evaluation of student learning. Hutchings (2010) pointed out that faculty involvement in conversations that address questions about whether their students are learning what they are teaching matters most. Moreover, Hutchings (2010) recommended that faculty specifically engage in conversations about: 1) the purpose of assessment; 2) goals for student learning; 3) whether students are meeting those goals; and 4) feedback to support students' learning. These shared experiences focused on student learning set the stage for what Dufour et al (2004) referred to as "perpetual learning" (p. 5).

In alignment with the CoP model, and strongly influenced by the work of Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, Dufour et al. (2004) suggested that through participation in a learning community, new experiences lead to new awareness about professional practice. Their call for "learning for all" emphasized the need for faculty members to break down the proverbial silos and question the status quo so that fundamental shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions can transform (p. 21). They stressed that in order for this paradigm shift to occur, the aforementioned conditions for perpetual learning must include departmental and cross-disciplinary teams whose members work together to achieve common goals and learn from each other.

In agreement with the literature (Hattie, 2009; Hutchings, 2010; Kezar and Maxey, 2014), the instructor is pivotal to improving and deepening student's academic success. Therefore, using Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning as a guide, the purpose of this study was to gain more insight into how higher education faculty participating in a CoP describe perceived change(s) in professional practice. The results of this study add to the growing knowledge about engaging higher education faculty in focused conversations about their own professional learning as it relates to teaching, learning, and student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Since the early 1980s, a call to action has resulted in institutions of higher education working toward implementing innovations that change how instruction and assessment are delivered to students (Van Meter & Murphy, 1997). There are two primary reasons driving this change: 1) the increasing cost of secondary education; and 2) the demand for students to acquire skills for successful entry into the workplace. Increasing accountability concerning the quality of teaching and learning in higher education has put additional pressure on higher education administration and faculty to generate more consistent, positive results for student achievement (Morphew & Eckel, 2009). Consequently, the need for higher education faculty members to collaborate and focus on individual student achievement is surging.

Critical review of higher education in the United States is not a new concept. In 1985, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) released their report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community*, to echo growing concern over the lack of public confidence in the quality of higher education and the undermining of the bachelor's degree. AAC&U's report acknowledged growing concerns from businesses and the national community about the lack of knowledge, skills, and general "decay in the college course

of study and evidence of decline and devaluation is everywhere” (Werking, Wilson & Hassenger, 1986, p. 168). It was this report that accused colleges and universities of abandoning quality and structure and caving in to the “marketplace philosophy” of giving students what they want at the expense of institutional integrity (p. 168). The AAC&U Select Committee contended that institutions of higher education must engage students in experiencing “how to learn” and faculty in “effective and responsible teaching” (p. 171). In alignment with this study, this report maintained that subject matter expertise is not enough to deliver high quality instruction and assessment in higher education.

The mid-1980s was met with the most forward advancement in support of student achievement and faculty engagement in student learning: outcomes assessment. In particular, in 1984, The Study Group of Excellence in American Higher Education released their proposed recommendation that faculty should actively participate in the selection, development, and adoption of assessments that evaluate student learning. They urged colleges and universities to ensure that their assessment system include faculty participation in the creation of student outcomes, the measurement of those outcomes, and the assessments themselves. They stated that, “...the more precisely [faculty] can specify the outcomes, the more likely they are to match teaching approaches to those ends” (p. 69). The Study Group felt so strongly about this recommendation, they emphasized that accrediting agencies must hold colleges and universities accountable for creating clear student outcomes, designing appropriate assessment programs, and identifying how the institution would measure student learning.

Literature, in response to the widespread urgency to implement outcomes assessment, described that faculty engagement in the evaluation of student learning must be considered a key component to student achievement in higher education (Hutchings, 2010). Mere engagement is

insufficient, however. The shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning is dependent upon depth of knowledge that faculty members have about the measurement of whether or not students have met these outcomes (Hutchings, 2010). Based on the collective research, it is incumbent upon full-time and adjunct faculty to engage each other in professional discourse about teaching and learning in order to create academic programs steeped in rigor and relevance. With that, the next question becomes, what is holding back this type of shift in higher education?

According to Hersh and Keeling (2013), the reason colleges and universities are under scrutiny for lowering expectations and standards is not the lack of qualifications of full-time and adjunct faculty, it is a lack of compensation and additional incentives from institutional administration. They surmised that tenured track faculty often have a heavy focus on research, large class loads, few incentives, and insufficient time to engage in the measurement of what students are learning (Hersch and Keeling, 2013). The time is running out for institutions of higher education to make a shift in focus. Knowing is not enough.

According to the American Association for Higher Education (1993), colleges and universities are responding to the urgency, however solutions lack emphasis on the role of faculty. The report stressed that colleges and universities must create systems that reflect the values of educators and connect to the classroom (Astin et al., 1987). Unfortunately, Hutchings (2010) argues that much of what has been done to promote student achievement has failed to engage large numbers of faculty in transformational ways. Even though the quality and integrity of higher education has been in the spotlight since the mid-1980s, and many colleges and universities report they are “doing assessment,” results are showing that this surge has simply led to being data rich with little to no changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Hutchings, 2010). The art and science of teaching and learning has not been a part of professional

development for faculty and more notably, faculty have not been engaged in widespread conversations about student learning for fear of not wanting to seem uninformed and unprofessional (Hutchings, 2010). This paradigm lends itself to an exploration of theories that may help to clarify whether or not these educated and talented faculty members may learn from each other in a community setting.

Conceptual Framework

Lave and Wenger (1991) defined learning as an integral, generative social process which occurs in the lived-in world. Together, the initial phase of their work resulted in the development of situated learning theory which offered several assumptions regarding the learner, new knowledge acquisition, and the role of people engaged in the interaction of the physical or virtual learning environment. The theory is based on the interaction of these concepts as they relate to the assimilation of learning in a participation framework. Through this perspective, learning does not occur in isolation of the social setting but, on the contrary, requires social engagement. For instance, intellectualism, as described by Socrates, defines learning and rationalizing as a mastery over the individual mind through internalizing thought. Building upon that assumption, social learning theory tells us that as individuals we may all learn the same concepts and may come to the same understanding and conclusions, but this is coincidental. In other words, learning is the result of different perspective and understandings that individuals conceptualize through engagement with others (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The interplay of engagement or participation with others in a social context and learning thus became the frame for Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning. For the purpose of this study, the social theory of learning was used as a framework that helps to organize what Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to as intellectual bins.

Wenger (1998) shaped the social theory of learning by first acknowledging the following assumptions:

- We are **social beings**. This is a central aspect of being.
- **Knowledge** is a matter of **competence** with respect to valued enterprises.
- **Knowing** is a matter of **participating** in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.
- **Meaning** is the ability to **experience** the world and our **engagement** with it as meaningful; this is ultimately what learning is intended to produce.

Wenger (1998) then purported that the previous assumptions frame social participation as the primary focus of learning. Wenger (1998) supported this conclusion by breaking down the process of social participation into four components:

- **Meaning** - a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful;
- **Practice** - a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action;
- **Community** - a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence;
- **Identity** - a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

These four components were used as part of the theoretical framework (see Figure 1) for this qualitative study when looking at the perceived change(s) of higher education faculty as a result of CoP participation.



Figure 1. Components of a social theory of learning: an initial inventory. Adapted from “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept,” by E. Wenger, 1988.

Social Theory of Learning and Communities of Practice in Higher Education

The roots of learning through CoPs in education can be traced back to the work of Dewey (1916). Dewey stressed that education is a social process by which groups maintain their identity and participate in continuous learning for the greater good of the individual and society. When communities learn together, professional learning becomes a “...continuous reconstruction or reorganization of experience...” and “...define[s] their unity, since method in study and learning upon this basis is just the consciously directed movement of the reorganization of the subject matter of experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 5).

Since 1991, with the introduction of *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* by Lave and Wenger, the concept of CoPs has taken on varying forms within differing professions and disciplines (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). Each variant form of CoPs have their own unique set of characteristics that fit the needs of the communities. Brown and Duguid (1991) concentrated on the unstructured and unintended CoPs that evolve out of connections and need which then later became complimented by Wenger and Snyder (2000) who described a more intentional and continuous cultivation of CoPs across organizations. These authors purported that the fundamental rationale for CoPs is the building of a social structure that has the critical elements of the individual's learning, the social structure, and the "...mutual constitution of the two" (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014).

Transformative Learning Theory

Jack Mezirow first introduced transformational learning theory as part of adult learning in the 1970s. Since that time, he has elaborated on his early description of transformational learning, which began as a 10-step process grouped into four main components: experience, critical reflection, discourse, and action (Merriam and Bierema, 2014). For the purposes of this study, Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory (see Figure 1) focusing on critical content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection was utilized.

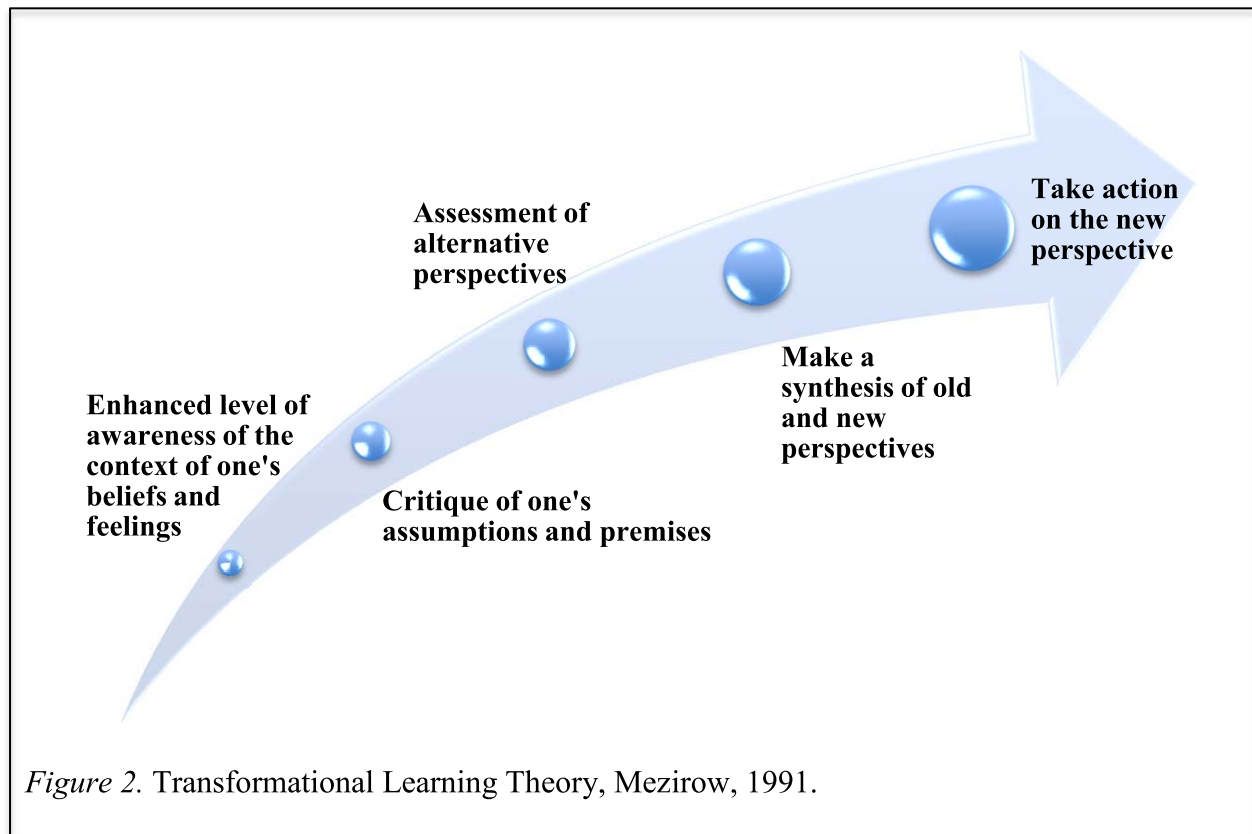
- Content Reflection - reflections of **what** people perceive, think feel or act on
- Process Reflection - reflections of **how** people perform the functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting
- Premise Reflection - reflections of **why** people perceive, think, feel, or act as they do
- Perspective Transformation - the result of the act of premise reflection

Building upon the reflective aspects above, Mezirow also recognized that emotions, intuitions, context, and relationship also play a critical role in the transformational learning of the adult (Baumgartner, 2012).

Merriam and Bierema (2014) suggested that it is through the individual that transformational learning engages with self-direction and experiential learning; two components of Knowles' (1984) adult learning theory. The authors surmised that it is through transformational learning that the adult learner begins to question and evaluate assumptions about the self as a learner and the world experienced by the individual.

After Kasworm and Bowles (2012) studied some 250 publications on transformational learning theory, they acknowledged that it is within higher education that much of transformative learning occurs due to the intellectual discourse and the "...invitation to think, to be, and to act in new and enhanced ways" (p. 87). They continued by asserting that it is within this type of social learning experience that adults challenge each other to move outside of their comfort zone. The resulting transformation is based on the adult learners' self-reported transformation in assumptions and beliefs about themselves and their environment.

Finally, according to Merriam and Bierema (2014), Jack Mezirow was able to verify the existence of transformational learning through the use of interviews. He began building his theory by interviewing women who were returning to school. He listened to their stories and carefully connected what each woman reported to find themes related to how they saw themselves and their place in their environments.



The following theory served as a foundation for the data collected and analyzed as a result of this study. It is not, however, considered to be part of the conceptual framework. Its inclusion in this chapter is to provide context for the phenomenon of interest and the theoretical framework for the study.

Adult Learning – Four Principles of Andragogy

For the purpose of differentiating the art and science of teaching children, pedagogy, and the teaching and learning characterized in adult education, Malcom Knowles (1973) defined the term, andragogy. Andragogy, defined as the art and science of adult learning, is based on five assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1984).

- Self-concept - as a person matures, the self-concept evolves from a dependent personality to a more self-directed person.

- Adult Learner Experience - as a person matures, the person's life-experiences become their resource for learning.
- Readiness to Learn - as a person matures, the person develops a readiness to learn the tasks of his or her social role.
- Problem-centered Approach to Learning - as a person matures, his or her orientation of knowledge shifts from future to immediacy, and a problem-centered approach rather than subject-centered.
- Motivation to Learn - as a person matures, their motivational drive becomes more internal than external.

Knowles (1984) suggested that the following four principles are applied to Andragogy:

- Involved Adult Learners - Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Adult Learners' Experience - Experience, including mistakes, provides the basis for the learning activities.
- Relevance and Impact to Learners' Lives - Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
- Problem-Centered - Adult Learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010).

The Adult Learning Theory – Andragogy – Infographic, 2014.

According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), self-direction and motivation organically evolve as people mature. Additionally, societal roles influence the need for adult learning, which connects with Knowles' (1984) theory that adults are mostly interested in learning about relevant information pertaining to their life or profession. These combined concepts set the stage for the

assumption that adult learning must be solution oriented and problem-centered. Naturally, when we scope out and look at the adult learner, we see a “someone” who requires interaction with others to solve problems related to something they are directly involved in.

Phenomenon of Interest Terms

Andragogy. The art and science of adult learning; helping adults learn (Knowles, 1973).

Assessment Literacy. The knowledge about how to assess what students know and can do, interpret the results of these assessments, and apply these results to improve student learning and program effectiveness (Webb, 2002).

Communities of Practice. Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor (Lave and Wenger, 2014, para. 5).

Faculty Learning Communities. Trans-disciplinary faculty, students, and professional staff of a group size 6-15 who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning... (Developing Faculty Learning Communities Website, Miami University, n.d.).

Professional Learning Communities. Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students in continuous, job-embedded learning for educators (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

Pedagogy. The art, science, or profession of teaching (Merriam-Webster).

Practice. A process by which we can experience the world and engagement with it as meaningful (Wenger, 1991).

Professional Practice. The continuous cycle of the broad study of learning one is charged to cause. Faculty members engaged in inquiry-based discourse to tackle questions about what works and what doesn't in helping students learn (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006).

Professional Identity. An unstable, complex entity formed through the on-going process of interpretation and reinterpretation of personal experiences (Clyde, Hyde & Drennan, 2013).

Phenomenology Research Terms

Epoché /Bracketing. The processes used to set aside, to the extent possible, the researcher's biases and preconceived experiences to best understand the unique experiences of the participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizontalization. The second phase of the data analysis procedure in which the researcher lists every topic-related statement of significance and awards it equal value (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Reduction. The process of describing what each participant experienced by bracketing belief in what is real and educing concreteness or living meaning (Van Manen, 2011).

Structural Description. Based on data analysis, a description of "how" the phenomenon was experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural Description. Based on data analysis, a description about "what each participant experienced" (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions:

This study sought to answer the following overarching question: “How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?”

Informed decisions for how to best engage higher education faculty in relevant conversations about their professional practice in the classroom may be uncovered through exploring the answers to the overarching research question and the following research sub-questions:

- How do faculty perceive change(s) in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on community of practice experiences?
- How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practices within a community of practice?
- What collaborative professional practices evolving from community of practice experiences are perceived by faculty?
- What statements made by community of practice participants illustrate perceived transformation of professional practice within the classroom?

Purpose of the Study

As previously mentioned, Arnie Duncan (2011), U.S. Secretary of Education, stated that in roughly 25 years, our nation has slipped in the rating of college degree attainment, world-wide, for 25-34 year olds from first to sixteenth. Consequently, President Obama has challenged America to once again lead the world in the proportionate number of college graduates by the year 2020. In the 2011-2014 United States Department of Education Strategic Plan, Duncan (2011) purported that, as a nation, if we are to meet this challenge, all children and adults in

America will need to receive the type of rigorous, academic experiences necessary for success in college and careers. Furthermore, Duncan (2011) stressed that reaching the President's goal will require comprehensive, systemic reforms to implement this "cradle to career commitment (p.1). These systemic reforms must include the restructuring of how institutes of higher education engage faculty in discourse about pedagogical practices help students reach their highest academic potential.

To spearhead such a restructuring, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) conducted a study in the spring and summer of 2013 identifying major findings and implications, which included five areas that require significant attention by higher education administration, faculty, and staff:

- More faculty involvement is essential to improve teaching and learning.
- Faculty and staff must embed assessment into their core activities.
- Assessment results must inform institutional actions toward improving student outcomes and be integrated into the institution's governance and organizational structures.
- Governing boards must make student learning a continuing high priority.
- Institutions of higher education must cultivate a culture that values using outcomes assessment results for the continuous improvement of student learning (NILOA, 2013).

The study also reported that over the past few years, institutions of higher education are showing increased support of faculty engagement and involvement in the discussions about their own pedagogical practices and student learning. Specifically, the study acknowledged that faculty engagement has remained a key priority since the previous 2009 study, and moreover, in 2013, provosts participating in the study reported that, most importantly, the following measures are also vital to student success:

- more professional development for faculty (64%),
- more faculty using the results (63%), and
- additional financial or staff resources (56%).

Findings from studies like the NILOA 2013 report do present elements of optimism in regards to the teaching and the evaluation of student learning in higher education, but no existing literature describes the phenomenon of the participant experience in a CoP and the their perceived change(s) in their professional practice. Not enough information is known about faculty members' perception, attitudes, and beliefs about participation in a CoP. This study did not attempt to define specific parameters necessary for the restructuring of systems, but rather identify the essence of the lived experiences of participants engaged in conversation about their own professional practices in the classroom.

In closing, the assessment movement in higher education, which includes a focus on pedagogical practice and its influence on the evaluation of student learning, began some twenty-five years ago. Proponents of the movement back in the 1990s believed that within a few years, cultures of the assessment literacy would be the norm throughout the country (Miller, 2012). Unfortunately, it is still not uncommon to find faculty and administration in higher education struggling with how to systemically and sustainably create institutional cultures that shift from a focus on subject-specific teaching to learning for all students. The challenge still remains rooted in how to create environments with a sharp focus on teaching and learning, allowing all students to learn how to learn and faculty to concentrate on student achievement.

Therefore, it is the opinion of this researcher that the implementation of a CoP model to engage faculty in collective inquiry into their pedagogical practices and student learning is a necessary component in creating systems and cultures that strive to examine practices, measure

student academic achievement, and make data-informed decisions. It is naïve to assume that faculty members have a working knowledge of pedagogical practices necessary to meet the demands of accreditation accountability and public scrutiny. The results of this study add to existing research regarding higher education as institutes of learning, and provide direction to effectively engage faculty in relevant discourse about their own pedagogical practices in relation to student achievement.

Research Methodology

Chapter III provides an in-depth description of the qualitative research design for this study. This section provides a high-leveled overview of the methodology choice and rationale. This study sought to answer the question, “How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practices?” It was the intent of this researcher to capture the essence of the “what” and “how” of the common experience in CoP participation (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142). A phenomenological approach allowed this researcher to, “...grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2015, p. 573).

This study includes interviews with nine higher education faculty members who have participated and continued to participate in university-sponsored CoPs about teaching and learning. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data depicting faculty members’ perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about their perceived change(s) in their professional practices evolving from CoP participation.

Using Moustakas (1994) as a guide to data analysis, this researcher began by bracketing personal experiences, followed by the process of phenomenological reduction. This multistage process began with the process of horizontalization—a data reduction process specific to

phenomenology. During the process of horizontalization (the second phase of the data analysis procedure), topic-related statements of significance were identified and awarded equal value. Following horizontalization, clusters of meaning were created, followed by textural and structural descriptions of the data representing how faculty participants described their lived experiences.

Delimitations and Limitations

Sample size of the study. The study utilized a purposive sample of nine full-time faculty members working at a small, non-profit teaching university located in the Northeast. At the time of the study, all faculty participants were either current or previous members of a university-sponsored CoP. If a larger sample size were used, more data could have been gathered resulting in more reliable results.

Communities of Practice. The study focused on faculty participants engaged in university-sponsored CoPs that met regularly to discuss professional practice. Some faculty participants in this study were part of the same CoPs. If each faculty participant experienced a unique CoP, more data would have been collected.

Timeframe. The study was conducted during the 2015-2016 school year and the results pertain only to that timeframe.

Instrumentation. The interviews were structured using Patton's (2015) standardized, semi-structured, open-ended interview. Using this type of interview presents limited flexibility, therefore limiting responses. If an informal, conversational style interview structure were used, the interview questions would have been matched to the participants, increasing the salience of the responses.

This study did not utilize observational data as part of the study. Observational data was used to assist this researcher in identifying the researcher's role through an epoché (bracketing) process.

Generalizability. This study is limited due to its context and sample size and therefore is not generalizable to the larger population.

Chapter Summary

Higher education faculty engagement in innovations that improve the delivery of instruction to students is crucial. For students to enter the workforce prepared with the deep content understanding and a 21st century skill set for success, they must be engaged in programs of study made up of curriculum and assessment that is relevant and rigorous. All types of assessment are the faculty's most effective tools for informing instruction. If the types of assessment, timing, and follow-through can improve teaching and learning, then faculty must have a deep understanding of how instruction and assessment can support students in meeting proficiency in courses and programmatic outcomes.

Recent literature and governmental reports support the consistent engagement of higher education faculty in professional development with a heavy emphasis in the instruction and the evaluation of student learning. Unfortunately, the transition for many colleges and universities to enact systemic reform including: 1) designs to engage faculty in inquiry-based discussions that include the sharing of ideas; 2) problem solving; and 3) collaboration to foster their own professional learning has been slow.

This study examined the experiences of higher education faculty in CoPs. This research is organized into five chapters. Chapter II examines the shifts in higher education assessment of student learning, and further examines faculty engagement in terms of the individual and group. Chapter III describes the research methodology that was used to collect data leading to the

essence of faculty participation in a CoP. Chapter IV analyzes the individual experiences of faculty members as described through one-on-one interviews. Significant statements are translated into formulated meanings and clustered to identify themes. Chapter V describes findings and makes recommendations for future study.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the shifts in higher education assessment including an overview of more recent initiatives illustrating ongoing commitment to student success. Aligned with the purpose of this study, literature related to faculty involvement at the individual and group level and the conception framework of social theory of learning is included. Finally, a review of three current trends in higher education learning communities is presented. To form the foundation of this study, the application of the social theory of learning, transformational learning, and the cycle of inquiry will be interwoven within the constructs to highlight their significance.

Shifts in Higher Education Assessment

The critical review of assessment practices in higher education in the United States is not a new concept. As identified throughout the literature, the history of assessment in higher education internationally can be traced back to the 13th century assessment traditions of the universities of Bologna and Paris. While there are many characteristics of instruction and assessment practices utilized at the university level from the 13th through the 19th century that can be traced to modern times, Wilbrink (1997) cautioned that it should not be assumed that they upheld the same functions of the modern purpose of instruction and assessment in higher education. Specifically, it was during the second half of the 19th century that American universities transitioned from the questioning and answering instructive form of teaching and the recitation method to more of an informal group discussion within the walls of the classroom.

It was in 1869 that Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard University, introduced the addition of electives to the university's program of studies (Kimmell, Marquette & Olsen, 1998). From this point, college and university study groups were charged with the creation and implementation of accountable systems of academia to compliment the new and often thought of as less structured, academic environment (Kimmell, Marquette & Olsen, 1998). It was during this time that the first groups concentrating on standards in higher education were established: New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (1885), Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (1895), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (1899), Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools (1917) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (1924).

Not long after accrediting agencies were established, the early 1900s saw colleges and universities setting standards for acceptance into their institutions. According to Beale (2012), during the thirty-year period from the 1920s to the 1950s, admission standards shifted from requiring: 1) a degree from a four-year high school; 2) recommendations; and 3) test scores to the adoption of six major factors. These six factors outlined what most colleges and universities relied on when accepting students: 1) degree from a four-year high school; 2) prescribed course requirements; 3) graduating class rank; 4) recommendations; 5) a personal interview; and 6) standardized test scores (Beale, 2012). Toward the end of the 1950s, admission requirements began to change again and the emphasis on academic ability faded to reveal a more holistic focus, creating a more diverse student body by broadening access to colleges and universities for more students.

As a way of providing access to more students interested in pursuing education after high school, in the 1960s colleges and universities shifted expectations and academic rigor, ultimately

lowering standards for entrance into programs to a high school diploma. Not surprisingly, it was then during the 1970s that public and political concerns arose, questioning whether institutes of higher education were able to provide students with the basic skills and knowledge to be successful in the workforce. To affirm this paradigm shift, in 1985 the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) issued a report addressing the nation's colleges and universities decision to lower standards of student outcomes in courses, retention, promotion, and graduation.

Well into the 1980s, colleges and universities were still struggling with issues of validity and reliability of course grades. Few colleges and institutions required successful completion of comprehensive examinations to evaluate knowledge and skill attained beyond study in a specific discipline area. The SREB cautioned that this drive to maintain access and provide educational opportunities for all must not override the importance of high quality and that this must be a state-level concern. The report identified concern that past practice had been to accept all entering freshmen even though an estimated 40-50 percent will be referred to remedial education and colleges may be granting degrees to students who lack basic academic skills. Within the report were recommendations to improve three basic areas in undergraduate education across the nation: 1) beginning college level work; 2) student achievement and outcomes; and 3) faculty and curriculum. This call to action at the state level included recommendations concentrating on collegiate study statewide, which, at the minimum, included student outcomes, standards, and assessments. Additionally, it was highly recommended that institutions statewide come up with definitions for high-quality instruction and assessment that include course grading and student proficiency.

In 1984, a similar report conducted by the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education included recommendations for instruction and the evaluation of

student work and feedback. In terms of proficiency assessments, it was highly recommended that faculty develop their own standardized assessments which could include alternatives to traditional pencil and paper tests. These standardized assessments were intended to evaluate appropriate content and skills necessary to show student proficiency. It was during this time that assessment results were publicized in an attempt to be transparent about what was being assessed at the college level. In addition to standardized assessment, the use of comprehensive examination was thought of as a necessary tool for assessing the students' comprehension and skill resulting from the completion of a program of study (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984). As a result, The Study Group acknowledged that using standardized assessment and comprehensive exams was necessary for professional institutional certification and licensing.

The report also recognized the Study Group's belief that assessment was also "an organic part of learning" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984, p. 53). They surmised that providing pretests to incoming freshman as a benchmark, and formatively evaluating student progress during junior and senior year, would offer a clear indication of the academic growth achieved and areas in need of improvement prior to graduation. This was followed up by their belief that the college or university's use of assessments and the data should determine the rank of the college or university. They stressed that they were "not interested in measurement for measurement's sake, rather in the potential of measurement of individual students, programs or entire institutions to improve learning" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984, p. 65). It is for this reason that the Study Group strongly urged colleges and universities to develop an assessment system to programmatically evaluate the efficacy of curriculum and instruction throughout the

college or university. The tools for measurement of student learning, they cautioned, must be reliable and valid to allow faculty to make data-informed decisions regarding the programs, courses, and instructional delivery methods. Moreover, they recommended that students entering a program should be tested to identify where they are at in accordance with the program. They cautioned that without both of these additions, it is impossible to evaluate whether student academic achievement is the result of the rigor of academic programs or other college experiences.

Finally, and most notably, the Study Group made the recommendation that faculty actively participate in the selection, development, and adoption of assessments to inform instruction. They urged colleges and universities to ensure that their assessment system include faculty participation in the creation of student outcomes, the measurement of those outcomes and the assessments themselves, and instructional strategies. They stated that, "...the more precisely [faculty] can specify the outcomes, the more likely they are to match teaching approaches to those ends" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984, p. 69). Consequently, the Study Group recommended that accrediting agencies hold colleges and universities accountable to creating clear student outcomes, appropriate assessment programs, and an identification of how the institution is measuring the continuous improvement of student learning.

Reporting on the Evidence of Student Success

As identified in the literature, the history of instruction and assessment in higher education demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the continuous improvement of systems and practices that impact student success. Accrediting agencies have raised the bar of accountability, requiring that institutions of higher education put policies and systems in place that produce

evidence of program evaluation based on student learning data, which is data that shows academic growth and is aligned to course outcomes. According to Craig (2015), there is a dire need for data to identify which colleges and universities are producing the best outcomes in terms of student academic success and post-graduate attainment of professional employment. Craig went on to stress that until we can produce valid student learning data that is aligned to course and programmatic outcomes, we will not be able to show the extent of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions students attain as a result of course and program alignment. This lack of relevant, transparent data is a result of a more traditional mindset. This mindset supports the paradigm depicting institutions of higher education being held responsible and paid to deliver 3 credits for 45 hours of seat time, minus the expectation of reporting on the quality and efficacy of this deliverable (Craig, 2015).

Rising voices echoing the need for transparent communications around program quality in U.S. colleges and universities have lead to initiatives such as the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) and the Tuning USA Project. These initiatives focus on enhancing student achievement through the alignment of learning outcomes for various degree levels in any field of study, and ensure the support of relevant and rigorous curricula (Green, 2011). Specifically, the DQP illustrates broad categories of proficiencies profiling areas of learning and the application of new knowledge. The Tuning process engages a variety of stakeholders such as faculty, students, and employers across institutions, professional organizations, and states in conversations about competencies and learning outcomes. The Lumina Foundation notes that this process is not an attempt to standardize curricula. However, the lack of common outcomes and levels of rigor does cause one to question whether U.S. colleges and universities are up to the challenge of competing on the world stage.

Addressing President Barack Obama's 2020 challenge that the U.S. will once again lead the world in the proportion of college graduates, the U.S. Department of Education's Strategic Plan (2011) called on accrediting agencies to hold institutes of higher education accountable for delivering on the promise to provide high quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Additionally, the Strategic Plan acknowledged that institutions of higher education must be held accountable for implementing institution-wide assessment systems that deliver accurate, real-time student learning data, which measure the quality of courses and programs.

One obstacle in this challenge is funding. Even though our nation's economy and postsecondary funding continue to be threatened, postsecondary institutions continue to deal with increasing enrollment with fewer resources (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Among the most vital, but varying resources is the systemic data information system necessary to deliver requested student learning data. Unfortunately, without reliable data systems that track student attainment and completion of postsecondary education programs, reliable, long-term student growth in terms of cohorts meeting course and program outcomes is not measurable.

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) advises the U.S. Department of Education on matters pertaining to accreditation, defined as the eligibility for institutions of higher education to participate in federal student aid programs. This committee and the 19 accrediting agencies such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) are responsible for reviewing the quality of institutions of higher education, thus allowing continued participation in the federal student aid programs. According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2015), the process of accreditation communicates the quality of the institution to the public, government, and community.

In support of the mission to build transparent data reporting systems and hold institutions of higher education accountable for sustaining the quality of student learning, the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (2012) released their guidelines for instruction, assessment, and accountability in their publication, *Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education*. The Alliance asked the fundamental question: “Are our students learning?” as the foundation for the guidelines which framed the iterative practice of setting clear goals, regularly measuring student performance, and reporting evidence of student success. The Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability were: 1) set ambitious goals; 2) gather evidence of student learning; 3) use evidence to improve student learning; and 4) report evidence and results.

The consistent theme of this report is the presence of student and faculty engagement. Most notably, within guideline one, the Alliance strongly suggested that faculty, staff, and administration understand the connection between the student learning data and the impact on their professional practice and pedagogical expertise. In guideline two, systemic processes allowing for faculty and staff to analyze student learning data for growth and make recommendations for the improvement of learning outcomes must be established. Guideline three strongly recommended that ongoing evidence-based discussions take place for the continuous improvement of the institution. Finally, guideline four identified methods of communication for internal constituents be established for the timely reporting of student learning and the data-impacted changes made.

Faculty Engagement in Higher Education

The Identity of Faculty in Higher Education

Werking, Wilson and Hessenger (1986) purported that our Nation's colleges and university classrooms of the 20th century saw a shift from the traditional teacher to the emergence of professional academics with PhDs. Additionally, these professional academics, or scholars, were trained in the early seminar style of teaching. Organically, this shift led to courses instructed by professors who believed that focus on one's academic discipline trumped fidelity to the quality of instruction provided to students. Basically, the reality was that professors attended to the content of their courses, but no one attended to the quality of the instruction and assessment of the students (Werking, Wilson & Hassenger, 1986). Fortunately, since the 20th century, research in higher education has led to additional shifts in a number of areas, some of which include the role of academic faculty as pedagogical experts, and the impact of change in higher education and the professional identities of faculty (Rhodes, 2007).

Clarke, Hyde and Drennan (2013) suggested that for higher education faculty, academic departments typically serve as the sole source of how faculty members come to possess the initial constructs that form their professional identity. It is this type of ongoing professional engagement within the academic department, which includes individual and community learning, doing and meaning-making, that becomes the foundation for professional identity (Wenger, 1998).

Recognizing that discipline-based communities, as described by Clarke, Hyde and Drennan (2013), should not be considered as isolated units, Kuh and Whitt (1986) argued that higher educational faculty across departments share many common attributes. They explained that in spite of the differences in perhaps department norms, standards of professional practice

and interaction, higher education academic professionals do possess a set of common values such as the inquiry of wisdom, production of knowledge, and educating their students. Consequently, professional identity of higher education faculty, which stems from tightly interwoven elements strengthened from professional engagement, experiences and education, strongly influences the development of subject matter expertise and instruction within the classroom (Clarke, Hyde and Drennan, 2013; Wenger, 1998).

For 21st century classrooms, there is no question that subject matter expertise can add relevance and rigor to any postsecondary program, however the question remains, at what cost? How do today's colleges and universities take advantage of the research on professional identity and professional learning? How do we balance the strength of the faculty who bring with them their professional expertise from outside the classroom and those whose strength is focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning?

Hutchings (2011) suggested that embedding best practices of teaching and the evaluation of student learning directly into each discipline or subject matter is best way to support faculty with varying expertise. By explicitly connecting each faculty member's professional strengths with curriculum, instruction, and assessment, faculty will have the opportunity to reflect and engage in "deeper thinking about how and how well students acquire the field's knowledge, practices, values and habits of mind, and how to improve learning in all areas" (Hutchings, 2011, p. 37). Hutchings (2011) concluded that interweaving subject specific and pedagogical practices is an effective way to engage faculty and promote an assessment literate culture.

Indeed, there does need to be balance regarding the interplay of academic discipline and pedagogical practice. The implementation of institution-wide faculty involvement in assessment supports such a balance. According to Banta et al. (1996), faculty involvement in instruction and

assessment is the single most important factor in determining successful implementation of assessment practices. Results based on a study by Mentkowski and Doherty (1984), showed that when faculty maintain involvement in the on-going measuring of student learning outcomes, it leads to discussions about how assessment informs instruction. Hutchings (2010) reinforced this concept but cautioned that many faculty members have not been exposed to the technical aspects of quality instruction and assessment practices, and therefore are reluctant to engage in discussions with colleagues about instruction and assessment. Hutchings went on to provide six recommendations to support faculty involvement in this type of conversation:

- Build assessment around the regular, ongoing work of teaching and learning;
- Make a place for instruction and assessment in faculty development;
- Build assessment into the preparation of graduate students;
- Reframe the work of assessment as scholarship;
- Create campus spaces and occasions for constructive instruction and assessment conversation and;
- Involve students in the evaluation of their learning.

In relation to Hutchings's concern, Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that individuals working together regardless of relationship, i.e. mentor/mentee or apprenticeship, in general generate a power that emerges into identity transformation of the individuals which then impact participation. Thus, there is an evolution of practice as participants share and support each other's learning. Ultimately, the group then is the vehicle for transforming the identity of the individual faculty member which then cycles back to supporting the group.

Learning Communities: Platforms for Faculty Development and Student Learning

Colleges and universities across the United States have established learning communities to address areas of concern including, but not limited to student learning and retention, curriculum coherence, cultural revitalization, and faculty professional development. They can be found in two- and four-year institutions, traditional campuses and online, throughout undergraduate and graduate programs, and in both teaching and research universities. The existence of learning communities throughout higher education as a way to address the challenge of institutional reform has been of interest as early as the 1960s. More recently, the quality and sustainability of learning communities as a means for serving an increasingly diverse student population have become more of national movement (Smith, 2013).

As previously mentioned, it is imperative that faculty take a front seat when looking to embed the evaluation of student achievement into the ongoing work of teaching and learning. Learning communities are effective vehicles for faculty to collectively take hold of their own professional development about teaching and learning through collaborative efforts (Cox, 2004). Smith (2013) asserted that getting the most out of learning communities means that faculty concentrate on building upon the best practices to student learning with explicit intent on transforming professional practice within the classroom.

For the purposes of this study, literature focused on three different types of learning communities is presented: professional learning communities (PLCs), Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs). A figure (Figure 3) illustrating the three types of learning communities presented in this study is below.

Communities of Practice	Faculty Learning Communities	Professional Learning Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found throughout different types of organizations • Participants have various roles within the organization • Participants engage in a process of collective learning • Participants share similar concerns or passions about a topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found in higher education • Higher education faculty, students and staff • Year-long • Specifically structured to include goals • Conversations are based on scholarly teaching practices • Focused on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found in K-12 • K-12 educators and administration • Ongoing • Focus on collective inquiry • Focus on action research and school improvement

Figure 3: Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Once thought of as a K-12 response to the ongoing need for professional development and more notably as vehicles for sustaining school reform initiatives through teacher collaboration, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have made their way onto college and university campuses across the U.S. Strongly influenced by the work of Richard Dufour, PLCs have become what Judith Warren Little (2006) described as vital for effective teacher professional development and student achievement. Higher education implementation of PLCs translates into faculty engaging in a culture of collaboration that promotes critical thinking and risk-taking (Vescio, et al., 2008). This aligns with Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, which states that learning is a matter of participating and actively engaging in social contexts.

According to Hilliard (2012) and Lee, Zhang & Yin (2011), there is no one definition of a PLC, however, research has provided clear and concise information that connects effective professional development and PLCs. Results of this review, which is by no means exhaustive, have shown that the core purpose of a PLCs is to improve both student and teacher learning (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004; Hilliard, 2012; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Additionally, according to the literature, effective professional development is ongoing, collective, job-embedded, results-oriented, and most effective in schools that function as professional learning communities (Dufour, 2014). This collective, job-embedded approach to professional development fosters an institution-wide responsibility to ensure that all teachers work together to collectively evaluate the impact of teachers and programs (Hattie, 2012). According to Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek (2004), PLCs share the following characteristics:

- Shared vision, mission, values and goals;
- Collaborative teams;
- Collective inquiry;
- Action orientation and experimentation;
- Continuous improvement and;
- Results orientation.

Similar to the paradigm shift that K-12 schools have experienced within the last 10 years, Hilliard (2012) claimed that faculty members at colleges and universities throughout the nation are redesigning their professional practice by establishing professional learning communities as part of their culture. As identified within the literature, there are several models for collaborative learning and practice that higher education leadership teams and faculty members have adopted

all in the name of continuous improvement (Hilliard, 2012). Each model is designed to enhance decision-making and have a positive impact on instruction and learning in the classroom.

The cohort model design affords opportunity for faculty members of the same department to meet on a regular basis to align curriculum, improve instruction, provide logistical support, and problem-solve (Hilliard, 2012). In addition to discussing and aligning content, planning, and co-teaching, the topical model allows faculty from discipline specific teams to collaborate together and with students for the purpose of completing advancing research.

As with any teaming process, PLCs in education are only as effective as their impact within the classroom. For this reason, effective PLCs incorporate regular evaluation of their work as a community, which includes progress reports in meetings with set goals and objectives and ultimately the impact on the academic behaviors of both teachers and students (Hilliard, 2012).

Faculty Learning Communities

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) are based on the constructs of communities of practice and the social theory of learning (Wenger, 1991). FLCs are defined as “trans-disciplinary faculty, students and professional staff of a group size 6-15 who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning...” (Developing Faculty Learning Communities Website, Miami University, n.d.). FLCs found in colleges and universities can, and most often do, include students while maintaining the focus on the scholarship of teaching learning. On the Developing Faculty Learning Communities website (n.d.), are two types of FLCs: cohort-based and topic-based. Cohort-based FLCs address the professional learning needs of a cohort that has been impacted by negative circumstances such as isolation, fragmentation, and stress. For cohort-based FLCs, the focus is on teaching and learning

topics of interest to them. Examples of this type of FLC include, but are not limited to: junior faculty, senior faculty, and preparing graduate students for future faculty positions. Topic-based FLCs concentrate on addressing institution-wide teaching and learning needs and are open all faculty, graduate students, and appropriate professional staff. Certain topic-based FLCs may end when the topic has been sufficiently explored. According to the Developing Faculty Learning Community website (n.d.), FLCs are structured and intensive, and can include scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching with a focus on the social aspects of building team and community.

Daly (2011) conducted a one-year study of seven universities: two private liberal arts colleges, two community colleges and three public universities in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, for the purpose of implementing (FLCs) as part of their professional practice. Similar to the essentials of PLCs in K-12 and higher education, FLCs are implemented for the purpose of improving teaching and learning as a direct impact on the classroom and to foster a campus-wide cultural change to positively impact teaching and learning. A total of 51 faculty volunteers were selected based on their personal characteristics, teaching experience, academic discipline, and their observed desire to engage in continuous improvement. Each FLC was facilitated by faculty members of the college or university for the purpose of building facilitation and leadership capacity within each respective institution. Grant funding was provided to ensure stipend release, time for the volunteer participants to engage in weekly meetings, readings and research, as well as attend related events within all participating institutions.

At the conclusion of the yearlong study, results indicated that faculty learning and development did occur and enhanced the participants' motivation to improve teaching and

learning (Daly, 2011). Specifically, participants reported that they felt a strong sense of autonomy since the structure of the meeting times allowed them to develop their own agendas, activities, needs assessment surveys, analyze their own data, and assign their own readings. Additionally, participants reported that since they were empowered to design their own learning environments, they were able to take ownership of the faculty professional development process. Study participants also indicated that as a result of a safe environment, collaboration, data analysis, and readings, their pedagogical knowledge also increased. Participants within the FLC, in their respective institutions and across institutions in the study, reported a strong desire to connect professionally and provide others with similar professional development opportunities.

As Daly's (2011) study reported, as higher education faculty engage in professional reading, dialogue, reflection, and collaboration, awareness of one's own practice will emerge. Moreover, as colleges and universities design professional structures of trust and open communication—which include self-directed goal setting and action planning—pedagogical change directly impacting student achievement would occur (Daly, 2011).

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that learning is more than building knowledge; it is about the impact on changing identity. The authors claimed that the concept of situated learning occurs as a continuous, interactive process that transforms the identity of newcomers in a group. This approach to learning is based on informal social interactions instead of enforced, involuntary meetings. Engagement in CoPs incorporates the views and opinions of all participants and encourages the sharing of varying understandings for the good of the group (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In Wenger's (1998) later work, he added that CoPs are better defined as groups that join together through 'mutual engagement' to create a common understanding. Moreover, within a CoP there are differing levels of participation, skills, and abilities (Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger, (1998) learning involves four constructs which frame his social theory of learning, community, identity, meaning, and practice. This paradigm, as Wenger (1998) maintained, impacts the individual's sense of personal and professional identity, which is formed through this shared experience.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) introduced another addition to the concept of CoPs: the value of innovation and problem solving. The authors expanded on the definition of CoPs by stating that CoPs are made up of individuals who share concerns and interests to deepen their own knowledge by meeting on an ongoing basis. This more comprehensive definition of CoPs does not exclude the premise that individuals must voluntarily meet for the purpose of building common understanding, nor does it omit the impact on individuals' identity.

A study by Blanton and Stylianou (2009) explored a CoP perspective as applied to professional development in higher education. They raised several important factors that research identifies as valuable to teacher learning and analyzed whether a CoP perspective could inform the context of faculty in higher education and the issues unique to discipline-specific professional development. At a mid-size state university in the U.S., researchers designed seminars for faculty in the mathematics department. All faculty participants were tenured and attended voluntarily, however the university did pay each of them a stipend for their attendance at each seminar. Seminars were also designed to allow faculty to examine artifacts such as student work and videotaped instruction for the purpose of motivating discussion about students'

misconceptions and share solutions to proofs. The intent was to foster discussion rooted in mathematical content, which would, in turn, motivate conversation around pedagogical practice.

Blanton and Stylianou, (2009) reported positive results within their seminar-based CoP. The majority of participants were willing to share student work and videotaped lessons and were actively engaged in discussions involving their practice. These researchers found that more emphasis on looking at student work, discussions about pedagogical practice and, most importantly, the impact of CoPs on instruction in the classrooms was needed.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the chapter focuses on the shifts in higher education assessment and faculty involvement in the ongoing practice of improving teaching and the evaluation of student learning. A review of the literature is presented on national and private organization initiatives urging greater faculty involvement in institution-wide approaches rooted in the creation of student learning outcomes, the measurement of those outcomes and the instructional strategies that bridge the two. It is important for higher education administration and faculty leaders to support faculty in their efforts to balance their professional expertise and quest to develop pedagogical practices necessary to foster student academic achievement, regardless of the discipline. The review of the literature also provides information about learning communities in higher education as vehicles for collaborative, inquiry-based conversations about teaching, learning and assessment and, most importantly, the transformation of professional practice in the classroom.

In the following chapters, an investigation into the lived experiences of higher education faculty participation in CoPs is presented. A focus on the universal essence of their experiences in four university-sponsored CoPs aligns with the theoretical framework of this study.

Participant interviews provided valuable insights about what it is like to participate in a CoP as well as the aspects they found necessary to promote continuous engagement.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain greater insight into higher education faculty perception, attitudes, and beliefs of their lived experiences participating in a community of practice (CoP). Specifically, this study seeks to answer:

- How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?

Of the three models outlined in the literature review, PLCs, FLCs and CoPs, the CoP model was selected as the focus of this study. The theoretical framework is based on the earlier works of Wenger (1998), specifically the social theory of learning: an initial inventory. The social theory of learning is the impetus for the continuation and cultivation of CoPs across various types of institutions. Conversely, using the CoP model as the foundation for collecting data about higher education faculty's experiences and their perceived changes professional practices seemed to be the most appropriate.

According to Seidman (2013), few studies on education in the United States are based on the perception of faculty whose individual and collective experiences support the foundation of the institution. This study provided an opportunity to delve into an area not previously explored in higher education literature. While higher education faculty have been interviewed about their experiences in CoPs as forms of professional development, at the time of research, this was the only study in which interviews with faculty were used to collect data on their perceived change(s) in professional practices evolving from their CoP experiences. Thus, this study utilizes

a phenomenological methodology since, “that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

This chapter describes the selection of the participant sample, the methodology design, and rationale used to explore the phenomenon of how higher education faculty make sense of their individual and collective experiences within a CoP. Using Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning as the framework, faculty members who have and continue to voluntarily participate in a CoP at their university were interviewed about their individual experiences in a university-sponsored CoP. More information about the university-sponsored CoP program is located in the context section of this chapter. The focus of the data includes the following areas: learning/assessment, faculty relations, attitudes and beliefs, and faculty dialogue.

Interviews with faculty about their experiences in a CoP provided data that was transcribed and analyzed using a social constructivist perspective. A social constructivist perspective focuses on how individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013). According to Charmaz (2006) and, more recently, Creswell (2013), embracing a social constructivist perspective produces data that represents, “... diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views and actions ” (p. 132). Therefore, to embrace this diversity, Patton’s (2015) semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to increase the comparability of the responses and allow participants to express their own perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about CoP experiences in their own terms.

Nine months prior to the faculty participant interviews, I began reflecting on my own identity as a researcher. Based on my years working in K-12 and higher education, I was already aware of my personal bias regarding this study’s phenomenon: experiences in a CoP. I needed to suspend my judgment about participation in CoPs, in order to investigate the different ways the

faculty participants experienced their CoPs in its pure form. Consequently, a central tenet of my methodology is bracketing for the express purpose of capturing thoughts and beliefs that might impact my ability to procure the stories told by the faculty participants.

According to Wenger et al. (2002), the best way to learn about the experiences of participants engaged in CoPs is by collecting stories. I accepted this assertion and was therefore committed to listening and *surrendering* to the data to tell their story. My commitment to their story began with an observation of a university-sponsored CoP. This observation provided context and allowed me to bracket out the world and create an epoché (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The epoché helped not only identify my biases, it also provided a fresh point of view as I experienced the phenomenon for itself.

As previously stated, a qualitative methodology was employed for this study. Qualitative research is used when we wish to empower participants to tell their stories in favor of building a detailed understanding of a problem (Creswell, 2013). Hence, my focus as a researcher was to intentionally listen as the faculty participants shared perceived details of their lived experiences. According to Patton (2015), researchers who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of everyday lived experiences are able to capture this essence of the human experience through phenomenology. In preparation for my qualitative study, spending considerable time examining my researcher's identity helped me to decide to use a phenomenological approach.

Researcher's Identity

When I began my journey as a novice researcher, I knew I was on the threshold of identifying how my prior, personal and professional experiences might influence my ability to be a researcher who listens and observes with precision. In order for me to be truly present with the faculty participants as they share the essence of who they are, their stories and their insight, I

needed to engage in a reflective practice. My reflection allowed me to uncover my own judgments, assumptions, beliefs, and philosophies about the role that communities of practice (CoP) play in the development of rigorous and relevant learning paradigms for faculty in higher education. My research interest in the phenomenon of CoP experiences and impact on instruction and assessment practices originates from 27 years' experience in both K-12 and higher education.

In this section, I put forth a number of critical assumptions based on these lived experiences and the research that I have done in preparation for this study. To begin, I will identify experiences stemming from more than 25 years teaching and administering in K-12 education, consulting at the state level, and higher education instruction and administration. Historically, as these facets began to intersect in practice, I became acutely aware of the urgent challenges that continue to face traditional institutions of higher education. Presently, I continue to delve deeper into the politics and philosophies of instruction and the evaluation of student learning in higher education. Through professional experiences, it is becoming clearer that to support and impact the sort of change viewed as necessary and beneficial to higher education faculty and students there is still much to learn.

First and foremost, my experience tells me that institutions of higher education are presented with the everyday challenge of meeting the needs of diverse populations and increasing accountability to student achievement of course and programmatic outcomes. It is through my experiences as a doctoral student that I became aware that traditional and non-traditional students enrolled in courses expect faculty to have the pedagogical background to assist them in the acquisition of skills and content sufficient for them to meet the outcomes identified for courses and programs. My lived experiences as an adjunct faculty member, an

Outcomes and Assessment Specialist, and currently the Assistant Director of Outcomes and Assessment at an institute of higher education, have lead me to perceive that not all higher education faculty members have an understanding of instruction and the evaluation of student learning to fully support their students to reach their academic potential.

Full time and adjunct faculty members are hired to be the subject matter experts and deliver their professional expertise to the students. They are not, however, hired to be pedagogical experts. Consequently, both full-time and adjunct faculty members enter into their departmental assignments having varied levels of teaching and learning experience. Moreover, each faculty member brings to the role beliefs and assumptions about instruction, assessment, and learning outcomes based on their lived experiences. Unfortunately, this uneven and inconsistent paradigm is often the reason that the evaluation of student learning in general in higher education can be considered invalid and unreliable. Indeed, being a subject matter expert is an important part of leading and teaching in higher education, but this is not the only component required to increase student achievement.

As I enter into the last stretch of my doctoral journey, I am fully aware that my personal and professional focus is to be a better change agent, a better educational leader and advocate for higher education faculty and their students. It is my intent that identifying assumptions, beliefs, and philosophies about teaching and the evaluation of student learning evolving from higher education faculty participation in CoPs, will provide another lens for higher education administration and faculty leaders. Using this lens, the stories of higher education faculty who participate in communities of practice will be told.

Through self-analysis, I realized that my ontological assumptions or how I view reality could be best interpreted through the social constructivism and transformational frameworks.

Creswell (2013) argued that qualitative researchers embrace the idea of multiple realities.

Through social constructivist and transformative lenses, my role as researcher was to capture the essence of participants' multiple views and then interpret their meaning in an effort to advocate for higher education professionals seeking to learn new teaching and assessment practices through CoP participation.

Epistemology is the study of what counts as knowledge (Creswell, 2013).

Epistemologically, my experience has revealed that knowledge can be found in the descriptions of the lived experience of the higher education CoP participants. It is therefore my assumption as a researcher, that when faculty have dedicated time to talk with each other about teaching, there is an influence on instructional and assessment decisions made in the classroom. These decisions, of course, are then based on their prior knowledge of pedagogical practices and new knowledge evolving from their CoP experiences.

I have witnessed firsthand the transformation of pedagogical practice that evolves from this type of professional, community engagement. My experience as a K-12 teacher and administrator has revealed that providing time for teachers to engage in professional discussion about meeting the needs of their students can influence positive changes in professional practice in the classroom. Throughout my research, I kept focused by constantly examining my bias that told me all of the positive changes in professional practice that could result from higher education faculty participating in a CoP. I continued to examine my bias about how this paradigm can occur for full-time and adjunct faculty in higher education. I knew that if I was truly going to tell their story and advocate for them, I needed to clearly hear them and analyze only their words to reveal their attitudes and beliefs about their practices based on their CoP experiences. I wanted to advocate for them so that if indeed the data revealed that engagement in

a CoP is beneficial to effectively improving teaching and learning, then their CoPs could continue to evolve and become regarded as an essential part of their ongoing professional development. In order to accomplish this, I made every effort to become a researcher who has clarity about my own preconceptions and uses a focused lens that does not allow for bias as I tell their story.

Bracketing

Bracketing (*epoché*) is the first step in phenomenological analysis and provides an element of clarity about the researcher's preconceptions (Creswell, 2007, Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) cautioned that it is imperative for the researcher to look inside in order to become aware of personal bias, thus reinforcing an element of rigor through a phenomenological shift accomplished through bracketing. Before I began data collection and analysis, I reflected on my personal and professional experiences through a bracketing procedure. As the researcher, I knew that it was imperative that I spend time identifying beliefs, assumptions, and philosophies that were essentially 27 years in the making. Through reflection, I became acutely aware that as the researcher, I needed to be certain that I was accurately identifying my bias prior to listening to their stories. I made arrangements to observe a CoP at an institute of higher education so that I could be certain to clearly articulate for myself all preconceptions about faculty participation in CoP. As a result, I was certain that my new, unsullied perspective would not interfere with my interpretation of the faculty participants' experiences.

Overview of Information Needed

The data collection process began with approval from the institution's internal review board. Prior to using any data collection instrument, my advisory group was formed and used to help identify any study issues that would limit the relevance and trustworthiness of my research.

My advisory was made up of four staff members who work at an institution of higher education and were in no way exposed to any other part of my study. We met for one hour prior to my data collection so that each member could provide feedback on my interview protocol and questions. More information about the role of my advisory is found in my section on research design.

I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews of full-time undergraduate and graduate faculty using Patton's (2015) semi-structured in-depth interview protocol, organized using past, present, and future timeframe questions.

The following questions guided my study:

- How do faculty members participating in a community of practice (CoP) describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?
- How do faculty perceive changes in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on CoP experiences?
- How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practices within a CoP?
- What collaborative professional practices evolving from CoP experiences are perceived by faculty?
- What statements made by CoP participants illustrate perceived transformation of professional practices within the classroom?

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), stated that there are four areas of information needed to sufficiently describe the kinds of information required to answer the research questions guiding my qualitative study: contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical. The following section will describe the contextual, perceptual, and demographic information that was collected based on the research questions.

Contextual

Contextual information refers to the culture and environment in which the participants work or reside (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the context was a small, non-profit, teaching university in the Northeast. My contact, the university's Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), shared that the university defines itself as a teaching university and its mission lived and/or expressed is that teaching comes first. Additionally, the Director informed me that at the time of data collection, there were no union or contractual agreements mandating participation in a university-sponsored CoP.

For the purpose of this study, faculty participants from four separate CoPs were interviewed. The university's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) organized a yearlong CoP program to engage their faculty in relevant conversations about teaching and learning in higher education. Two CoPs represented in this study were a part of this program. The expectations of this program were that each respective CoP meet at least once every three weeks and share outcomes of their meetings with colleagues within and outside of the university setting. Each CoP determined the format through which outcomes were shared. Faculty participants of the CTL organized CoPs did not receive stipends, but the CoPs did receive a small stipend to support their community activities. The other two university-sponsored CoPs were facilitated and organized independently by faculty and met approximately once every month. These CoPs were not held accountable to the CTL's expectations therefore, they did not have to organize the sharing of outcomes within or outside of the university. These independent CoPs did not receive a stipend from the CTL to support their community activities. The topics and agendas of these CoPs were in alignment with the CTLs focus: to engage colleagues in conversations relevant to teaching and learning in higher education.

Perceptual

Since this research included the collection of qualitative data, interviews became the primary source for collecting what Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) identified as “the most critical of the kinds of information needed,” namely, perceptual information (p. 106). One strength of well-collected qualitative data is that there is a strong potential for revealing meanings that people give to events, situations, processes, and experiences (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). For this study, emphasis needed to be placed on the connections that the faculty participants made between their perceived experiences in a CoP and their professional practices. Therefore, most of the information collected perceptual information.

Consequently, there were four different types of perceptual information needed to answer the research questions. First, information about the faculty participants’ attitudes, beliefs, and expectations regarding their professional practices was needed. Second, information identifying how the faculty participants describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice was needed. Thirdly, it was necessary to ascertain if any data revealed information about the faculty participants’ perceptions about collaborative professional practices evolving from their CoP experiences. Lastly, a determination needed to be made to reveal if there were any statements made by the faculty participants that illustrated perceived transformation of their professional practice within the classroom.

Demographic

Demographic data for this study was collected to capture the profile of each of the faculty participants for the reader. This data included: gender; school or college affiliation within the university; their current role at the university; a description of their current faculty status as either professor, associate professor, or other; approximate number of years serving in current

position; highest academic degree attained; number of years working in higher education; and approximate number of years participating in a community of practice. This information was collected using an electronic survey.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), this type of information assists in explaining certain data that may be directly connected to participants' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. They also recommended that demographic data be organized in a chart and used in conjunction with data analysis. Therefore, the demographic information that was collected is presented in table form to assist with the analysis and interpretation of the findings of my study. This table (Table 1) is found in the forthcoming research design section under participant sample.

Research Design

This research design is described in terms of context, data collection, and phenomenological reduction. This phenomenological study follows Patton's (2015) methods of research design and data collection. As previously mentioned, prior to data collection, electronic surveys were sent out to the faculty participants in order to collect demographic data. Following the survey, an observation took place as an epoché to bracket out presuppositions, allowing me to identify data in pure form and tell my participants' story. According to Patton (2015), it was important for me to remove or, at the very least, become aware of the prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon being studied. Once I took on a fresh perspective from the epoché, Patton's (2015) semi-structured, in-depth approach to interviewing allowed me to collect data about the faculty participants' experiences in their respective CoP meetings. This approach to interviewing provided instrument reliability since each interview was conducted using the same sequence of questions—in addition to probes—to create what Patton (2015) referred to as a conversational interview.

Prior to the faculty participant's involvement in interviews, informed consent was collected and the purpose of this research was shared with each of them. Contact with the university's Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning occurred to ensure full disclosure and understanding of this study. A figure (Figure 4) showing this research design divided into three phases is shown below.

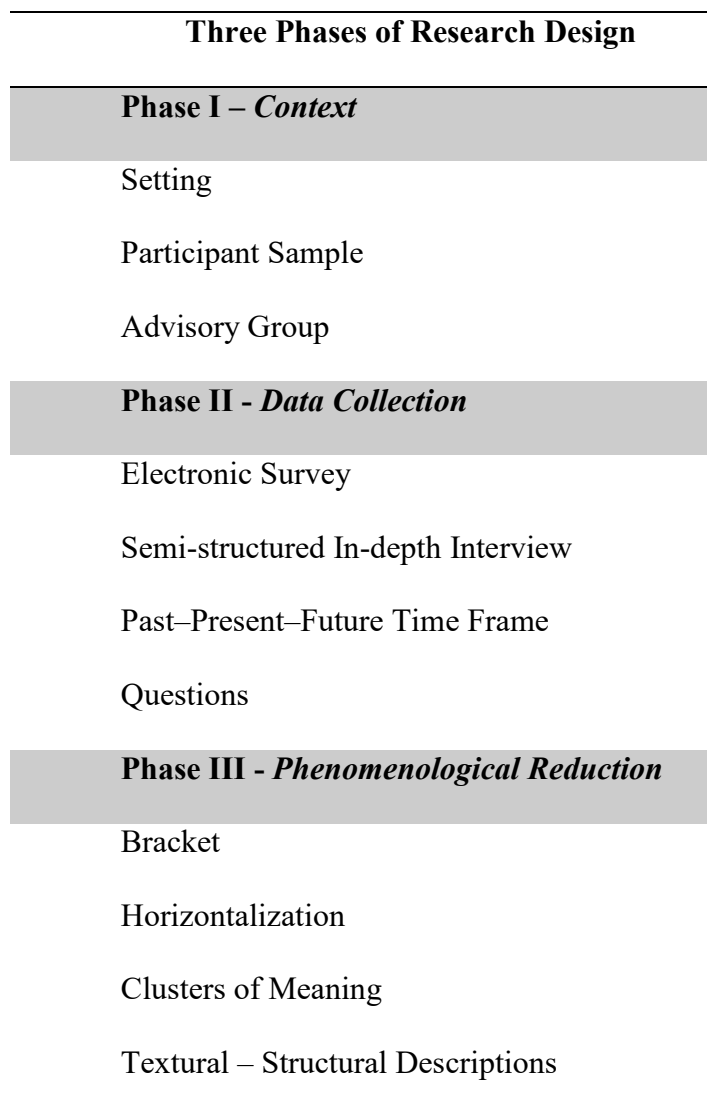


Figure 4. Research Design Overview

Setting. The setting for this study was a small, non-profit teaching university in the

Northeast. In addition to regional accreditation, several of the university's undergraduate and graduate programs also carry specialized programmatic accreditations. The university is made up of several schools and colleges all with their own curriculum and faculty. There is a campus made up of several locations as well as an online college with over ten areas of study offering several degree levels. Participation in a CoP was not required for adjunct or full-time faculty as part of their formal evaluation. It was important for the purposes of this study, that CoP participation be voluntary to maintain fidelity to the definition of a CoP, as defined by Wenger, et al (2006).

Participant Sample. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) argued that in qualitative research the goal is transferability rather than generalizability. In other words, the knowledge and understanding gained from this study must be applicable in other similar contexts and settings. Generalization to the entire population is not the purpose of qualitative research. Rather than using a random sample of faculty to participate in the interview process, I needed to limit the pool of potential faculty to those who had experience participating in a university sponsored CoP. Therefore, in order to capture the most accurate interpretation of faculty members' perception of change(s) in professional practice that evolve from CoP experiences at a small, non-profit, teaching university, a purposive sample of faculty was collected.

Phenomenological research requires the investigation of the lived experiences as described and perceived by participants, however it would have been inappropriate that a CoP be formed for the purpose of my research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Hence, it was imperative that, at the time of my data collection, all of the faculty participants had prior or current experience participating in a CoP. Participant criteria required that the faculty participants be limited to those who voluntarily had participated and continued to participate in CoP meetings

coordinated and facilitated by university faculty. They also needed to be currently teaching or occupied with activities related to teaching and learning within programs at the university.

This phenomenological study required that the faculty participants be able to describe their individual CoP experiences in detail. Since data for this study was collected through virtual interviews, it was necessary that for each faculty participant to be comfortable interviewing using a web conferencing platform. It was imperative that they recognized the method through which interviews would be conducted would not be face-to-face and would require a certain level of technical understanding. Each participant needed to have access to a computer with Internet access, and possess the ability to log on to the web conferencing platform of his or her choice. Then, through interpretations of each individual experience, the essence of their common experiences could be revealed.

Once approval from the university's institutional review board was received, I reached out to the university's Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). In January 2016, I asked the Director to assist me in selecting faculty participants who had experience participating in a university-sponsored CoP. She provided me with a list of twenty faculty members who registered in the fall of 2015 to participate in a university-sponsored CoP. In February 2016, I contacted the twenty individuals on the list via email and requested that they review the information about my study and reach out to me by email or phone if they were interested and whether they were able to participate. Eventually, nine faculty members indicated interest in participating in this study and were then asked to complete a short, electronic survey and sign an attached consent form prior to our interview. As previously mentioned, the purpose of the electronic survey was to collect demographic information and further determine whether each one fit within this study's criteria. The following table (Table 1) illustrates the participant sample demographics.

Gender	Number of Years of CoP Participation	Number of Years in Higher Education	Number of Years in Current Role	School	Current Role
Female	1	15+	1+	School of Business	Full time Faculty
Female	1	20+	5+	School of Education	Full time Faculty
Male	1+	5+	3+	School of Business	Full time Faculty
Male	1+	10+	3+	School of Arts and Sciences	Full time Faculty
Male	1+	15+	1+	School of Arts and Sciences	Full time Faculty
Female	1+	20+	1+	School of Business	Full time Faculty
Male	3+	20+	10 +	School of Arts and Sciences	Full time Faculty
Female	5+	5+	5+	School of Business	Full time Faculty
Female	5+	15+	10+	School of Business	Full time Faculty

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Advisory Group. My advisory was made up of four staff members working at an institute of higher education and was in no way exposed to any other part of my study. Their role was to help me in determining the face validity of my interview questions. Face validity refers to the transparency and relevance of the questions (Creswell, 2013). I knew that the questions needed to be well designed in order to assure my participants that this study was designed appropriately to obtain the answers driving the study (Creswell, 2013). I needed their lenses to help me flesh out each question, ensuring that each one would help me to reveal the essence of faculty participants' CoP experiences.

We met for one hour prior to my data collection, which allowed me to share an overview of my study and the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Members were then asked targeted questions about my interview protocol for the purpose of evaluating the questions

for their relevance prior to the scheduled interviews. My advisory was asked the following questions about my interview protocol:

- Are my questions worded to show that they are aligned to my primary research question?
- Do any questions contain bias?
- Is the language confusing or misleading?
- Is there a better way to state the question?

Several members suggested making changes to the wording of a few questions and as a result, I made minor modifications to several interview questions. Overall, their insights helped me to refine my interview protocol and questions.

Data Collection Methods

The primary source for data collection for this study was nine semi-structured interviews of faculty participants. According to Patton (2015), the purpose of the interview is to delve into the perspectives of the participants in order to tell their story. A table (Table 2) with the interview anchor questions is below.

Interview Protocol Anchor Questions	
1. What are your Community of Practice (CoP) meetings like?	
2. How is this different from your initial community of practice meetings?	
3. What will your community of practice look like in the next five years?	
4. What do you think about the topics covered during your community of practice meeting time?	
5. When did you perceive any changes?	
6. Can you tell me about a time when you brought up a topic or made a suggestion during your CoP; how was it received?	
7. In your opinion, how will <u>this</u> influence future community of practice topics covered during your meeting time?	

Table 2. Interview Anchor Questions

An interview protocol was written to better ensure consistent experiences for each faculty participant. The interview protocol included the research questions, procedural guidelines, and anchor questions. A copy of the full interview protocol can be found in the Appendices.

Electronic Survey. An electronic survey was utilized prior to conducting interviews to collect demographic data and identify participants to interview. The electronic survey was sent via email to interested faculty members in February 2016. Questions were written to collect contact information, additional background information for my study, and to determine whether each faculty member was an appropriate participant for the study. Survey questions can be found in the appendices.

Semi-structured Interview. According to Seidman (2013), the goal of phenomenological interviewing is to provide the opportunity for the in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences. Through semi-structured interviews, timeframe questions were used to inquire about the past, present, and future in order to understand the faculty participants' experiences and make meaning in context to answer the questions with greater flexibility (Patton,

2015). The interview protocol was designed to ensure that each faculty participant was asked the same questions and in the same order. The intent was to ask the faculty participants questions to better understand the universal view of the experiences through their individual perspectives. A table (Table 3) with sample timeframe anchor questions is shown below.

Question Focus	Present	Past	Future
Behaviors/experiences	<i>If I attended one of CoP meetings, what would I observe?</i>	<i>How is this different from your initial CoP meetings?</i>	<i>What will your CoP look like in the next five years?</i>
Opinions/values	<i>What do you think about the topics covered during your CoP meeting time?</i>	<i>Have you felt this way in the past? When did you notice any changes?</i>	<i>In your opinion, how will this influence future CoP topics covered during your meeting time?</i>

Table 3. Sample Timeframe Anchor Questions

As previously mentioned, nine faculty members were interested and willing to participate in this study. Each participant completed the consent form and returned it prior to the one-on-one interview. Each one-hour interview was conducted using a web conference virtual platform. All interviews were recorded using the web conference software, which were immediately downloaded and saved to a secure hard drive. Once the recordings were saved to the hard drive, they were deleted from the software.

During each interview, faculty participants were told that I would be taking brief notes to capture details they shared about their CoP experiences. By taking notes, I would be able to circle back at the end of the interview if previous responses required clarification. As previously explained, all of the interviews were conducted virtually. This meant that we could see and hear each other, but the computer screen limited the range of sight. I wanted them to know what I was doing while they were talking so that I did not seem uninterested or that I was multi-tasking

while I was actually taking notes.

Clarifying and probing questions were delivered beginning with the following phrases: *Would you clarify what you meant by...? And could you tell me more about...?* I ensured that eye contact was made as often as possible and affirmed and nodded on occasion to maintain an interpersonal connection. At the end of each interview, I asked faculty participants if there was anything else they wanted me to know about their experience in their respective CoP. Most responded that they were grateful to go through the interview because it gave them opportunity to think more deeply about their CoP experiences. They then concluded by sharing that they should reflect on their CoP experiences more often. As my research continued, I reviewed and analyzed each faculty participant's interview as I went along. I began to notice common elements connecting each individual experience. It was not long before I realized that I had discovered shared essences among the faculty participants and I knew that further interviews were not necessary.

All nine interviews were conducted between March and May 2016 and proved to be enough to capture the essence of the phenomenon of their experiences in their respective CoPs. Due to the sensitivity of this type of study, it was essential that I established clear, honest, and transparent communication with the faculty participants throughout the study. In the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study and thanked each participant for signing and submitting the consent form back to me. Even though on the consent form I acknowledged that all interviews would be recorded for transcription purposes, I confirmed permission from each participant to record the conversation at the beginning of each interview.

Following the interviews, I personally transcribed each one-hour interview and saved the transcript in my secured hard drive. All transcriptions were carefully coded to maintain

anonymity of the faculty participants. At no time were participant names or any additional personal information reported throughout the study. Also, at no time were names or personal information, including physical characteristics and name of the university, used when collecting and recording data. Above all, I acknowledged the sensitivity of my study and remained attentive to ensure that all of the faculty participants retain autonomy (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2015).

Phenomenological Reduction

Data analysis began with my self-analysis and researcher identity. By observing a CoP at a higher education institution, the bracketing process allowed me to review personal bias and reveal a fresh lens to identify the data in its true form. Following my transcriptions, I reviewed all of the data prior to reduction in order to capture a holistic view of the lived experiences of the faculty participants. Phenomenological reduction takes the researcher through a series of stages to provide a deeper dive into the participants as individuals and as a group as well as the essence of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

Earlier in this study, I mentioned that I personally transcribed each interview. It was not until I was actually experiencing this process for myself that I realized its true value. During the transcription process, I was able to truly listen to the words of the faculty participants so that I would not make any assumptions about how they were describing their CoP experiences. Essentially, this allowed me to holistically review each transcript twice; the first time was during the actual transcription process and the second time was through another comprehensive read of each transcript prior to my analysis. I knew that it was also important to review each transcript as if it were standing on its own. I continued to consider all data as if it had equal value through horizontalization. Looking at each statement, or horizon, keeps the possibility for new discovery

unlimited. Each time we see the horizon we reconsider “the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).

To organize the data and identify patterns, I used imaginative variation, which allowed me to approach the phenomenon from the divergent perspectives of the faculty participants. Moustakas (1994) surmised that the major task of imaginative variation is to describe the essential structures of the phenomenon. Hence, through my analysis, I aimed to uncover the fundamental aspects of how the faculty participants experienced their CoPs. I read through the transcripts to identify horizons, which are non-repetitive invariants that directly described the lived experiences of the faculty participants within their respective CoPs. The invariant statements found to be significant were then given equal value and placed in a table for examination. I then gave each significant statement a formulated meaning.

Prior to grouping each significant statement into meaning clusters, I asked for feedback from the faculty participants through a member check-in. Each faculty participant was sent all of the identified significant statements and relative meanings. I asked them to carefully review the data and to let me know if there were any areas of misinterpretation. The significant statements and formulated meanings with similar implications were grouped into clusters of meaning. My advisory group was then brought back together to provide collective feedback about the formulating meanings for each cluster. Although the clusters remained intact, several advisory members did provide some feedback, which ultimately influenced a recommendation resulting from the study. At that point, the formulated meanings were grouped until themes emerge that best represented commonality among the faculty participants.

The themes and subthemes related to the research question were then synthesized into a descriptive narrative that holistically described the faculty participants’ perceived change(s) in

professional practice based on their CoP experiences. Through phenomenological reduction, it became clear to me that the essence of their CoP experiences was indeed made up of tightly interwoven elements of their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about their professional practice. The final narrative, located in Chapter V, captures the universal essence of the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that the faculty participants were sharing with me during the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stressed the importance of conducting research that is both intellectually compelling and ethical. It is for this reason I was mindful of all ethical considerations throughout each aspect of the study. All efforts as described in my application to the university's institutional review board were strictly adhered to so as to protect the confidentiality of the faculty participants and not produce any negative effects on those who participated in this study. My added concern will be to answer the following questions: Will the participants be described in a way that is respectful, authentic, and does not promote any stereotypes? Will their story be told in a manner that is meaningful, accurate, and insightful? To address these questions, I utilized member check-ins and the support of my advisory group.

The following safeguards were put into place to minimize potential harm to participants.

Informed Consent. First, prior to any involvement in the study, all faculty participants were presented with a conformed consent form that stated the purpose of my study, how the data was stored for confidentiality, and how the results would be used and their rights as participants. I recently acknowledged the sensitivity around this type of research, hence, it was a priority of mine to ensure that each faculty participant had a clear understanding of what my study would involve. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) cautioned that participants and administration must know the following information prior to the onset of research:

- The focus of the research;
- How the data will be collected;
- Who the participants should be and how they will become involved;
- What the participants will be involved in;
- How the participants and materials will be treated with confidentiality;
- The level to which the participants will review, critique or participate in the analysis;
- The benefits of the research to both the participants and the researcher.

Therefore, I ensured that the above information was presented to the participants and the university's Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning prior to any involvement in the research. A copy of the informed consent can be found in the appendices.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Almost ten months ago I set out to tell the story of nine higher education faculty members' experiences in a CoP. Each faculty participant came to their interview with their own prior personal and professional experiences. This personal, prior history created the lens they used as they shared with me their personal perspectives about the how and what of participation in a CoP. My responsibility was to put my personal history aside, as described in my epoché and tell their story. Therefore, I ensured from the onset that the faculty participants received transparent communication about the purpose of this study, where the data would be stored, how it would be analyzed, and that I conduct member check-ins to verify my interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2013). Each faculty participant was asked if they wanted an electronic transcript of his or her interview. Several faculty participants did request copies.

During the interviews, neither the interviewer nor the participant actually knows what impact the interview experience will have on the participant (Patton, 2015). It is for this reason

that I remained focused on the purpose of the interviews and followed the semi-structured questions to gather reliable, high-quality data. Additionally, Patton's (2015) ethical framework was utilized throughout my research:

- Clear, honest, and transparent communication will occur between the researcher, participants and administration;
- The participants' time will be respected;
- Any promises made to the participants will be kept;
- No harm will be done;
- Ethical and legal dimensions of confidentiality will be maintained.

Delimitations and limitations

Sample size of the study. My study concentrated on small CoPs that met on the campus of a small, non-profit teaching university in the Northeast. Twenty faculty members were invited to participate but only nine chose to participate in my study. If a larger participant sample size were used, more data could be gathered, resulting in more reliable results. My study concentrated on the lived experiences and perceptions of the faculty participants without any measures to see if there was impact on student learning.

Timeframe. My study was conducted during the 2015-2016 school year therefore the results pertain only to that timeframe.

Instrumentation. The interviews were designed using Patton's (2015) semi-structured interview. Using this type of interview presents limited flexibility therefore limiting responses. If more of an informal, conversational-style interview structure were used, the interview questions would be matched to the participants, increasing the salience of the responses.

Generalizability. My study is limited due to its context and sample size and therefore is not generalizable to the larger population.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain greater insight into higher education faculty perception, attitudes, and beliefs of the changes of their individual and collective professional practices resulting from CoP experiences. My research design adhered to the characteristics of phenomenological research. Interviews of faculty participants with shared experiences allowed me to capture deeper insight into their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about their professional practices and their experiences with the CoP. The data *spiraled* as I engaged in the process of managing, reading, describing and finally representing the essence of the data (Creswell, 2013).

A purposive sample of faculty members employed at a small, non-profit, teaching university in the Northeast was invited to participate in my study. The participants were voluntary members of existing CoPs sponsored by their university.

Following informed consent, contextual, perceptual, and demographic data was collected through the use of an electronic survey and interviews following Patton's (2015) semi-structured interview protocol. Prior to interviewing the participants, an advisory group was organized for identifying the relevance of the interview questions. Following the interviews, member check-in and the continued use of my advisory group helped to validate the accuracy of the data collected and assist with transparent communication between the faculty participants and myself for the purpose of building trustworthiness.

Ethical considerations were taken into account during each aspect of the study. Informed consent and careful collection and storage of the data were maintained to protect the faculty

participants' privacy through anonymity. Patton's (2015) ethical framework guided me throughout while remaining focused on the scholarship of this study.

Chapter IV

Findings

This phenomenological study was conducted to gain a greater insight into higher education faculty perception, attitudes, beliefs, and perceived transformation of professional practice evolving from CoP experiences. Moustakas (1994) stated that knowledge sought through phenomenological research emerges from the descriptions of the essences of life experiences. He asked phenomenological researchers to “seek possible meanings” and “approach the phenomenon from divergent perspectives” to discover how the experience came to be what it is (p. 94).

I deliberately asked faculty participants open-ended questions using Patton’s (2015) Past-Present-Future protocol to provide an opportunity for them to describe their perceptions about who they are as professionals; engagement in their respective CoPs; and collaborative practices evolving from experiences in their CoP.

My research question asked, how do faculty members participating in a CoP describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?

- How do faculty perceive change(s) in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on their CoP experiences?
- How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice within a CoP?
- What collaborative professional practices evolving from CoP experiences are perceived by faculty?
- What statements made by CoP participants illustrate perceived transformation of professional practice within the classroom?

This chapter outlines findings based on the analysis of transcripts from interviews with nine higher education faculty members. Each was a member of at least one out of four CoPs sponsored by their university. Three of the CoPs were organized by the University's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and the Chair of a Department coordinated the fourth.

The themes and sub-themes were revealed through phenomenological reduction. Using Moustakas' (1994) process of horizontalization, "significant statements" were highlighted and aligned with formulated meanings (p. 98). Utilizing member checking, the "significant statements" and formulated meanings were validated by faculty participants to maintain validity and accuracy of the data collected during the interviews (Patton, 2015, p. 576). Clusters of meaning were then organized and analyzed in order to create themes and sub-themes. Themes and their sub-themes were then used to write textural descriptions of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). From there, the "essence" was captured for each theme to tell their story or the "what" and "how" of their CoP experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). This chapter, therefore, is not simply an outline of themes, but rather an authentic portrayal of higher education faculty who have experienced the same phenomenon within their respective CoPs.

When possible, faculty participants' exact statements and phrases were used to describe how they experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). To articulate the universal essence of the phenomena, I will refer to the interviewees as faculty participants allowing a singular voice to appear.

Four themes emerged from the data. It is important to note that the themes are iterative, not isolated, and found to influence each other. The four themes are:

- CoP engagement has an effect on how higher education faculty perceive their professional identity.

- Higher education faculty perceive a sense of belonging to their CoP.
- Collaboration among higher education faculty occurs during and outside of CoP meetings.
- Transformation of professional practice from CoP into the classroom was limited by time and perceived comfort levels of higher education faculty.

A table (Table 4) showing the alignment between this study's research questions, conceptual framework, the clusters of meaning, and themes is below.

How do faculty members participating in a Community of Practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?			
Questions	Conceptual Framework	Clusters	Themes
1) How do faculty perceive change(s) in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on their CoP experiences?	Social Theory (Learning as Becoming) Transformational	Identity	CoP engagement has an effect on how higher education faculty perceive their professional identity
2) How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice within a CoP?	Social Theory (Learning as Belonging) Transformational	Sense of Belonging	Higher education faculty perceive a sense of belonging to their CoP
3) What collaborative professional practices evolving from CoP experiences are perceived by faculty?	Social Theory (Learning as Experience) Transformational	Collaboration	Collaboration among higher education faculty occurs during and outside of CoP meetings.
4) What statements made by CoP participants illustrate perceived transformation of professional practice within the classroom?	Social Theory (Learning as Doing) Transformational	Perceived Transformation	Transformation of professional practice from CoP into the classroom was limited by time and perceived comfort levels of higher education faculty.

Table 4. Research Questions, Clusters, and Themes

Theme One: Identity

The concept of identity is the result of the meanings of lived experiences through participation in social communities (Wenger, 1994). Consequently, CoPs are formed through the consistent interplay of the individual identities of its members. This interplay between the individual identities and membership in the CoP then transforms the perception of competence of practice, which also establishes individual identity of the self as a learner.

Statements from faculty participants provided data for the theme of Identity. The first theme is: CoP engagement has an effect on how higher education faculty perceive their professional identity. It aligns with the following research question: How do faculty perceive changes in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on their CoP experiences? Because of the high volume of recollections, statements were divided into four subthemes. During the interviews, faculty participants reflected about: 1) the self as a learner; 2) intrinsic motivation; 3) positive affirmation about professional practice; and 4) improving practice. A figure (Figure 4) for theme one is below.

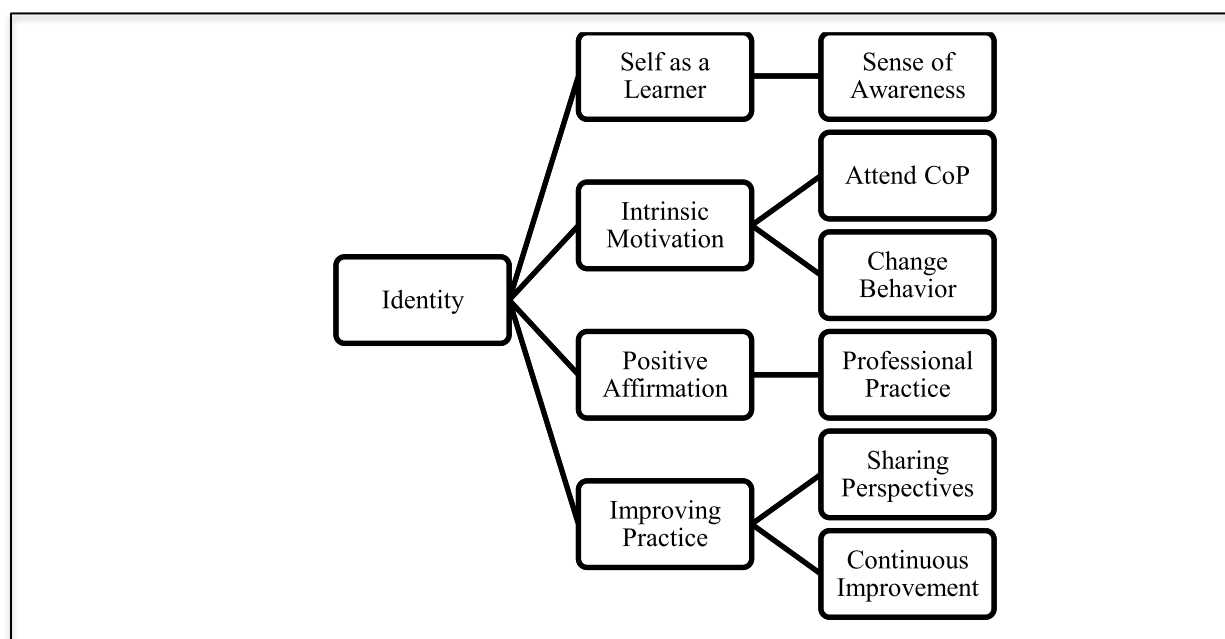


Figure 5. Theme One - Identity

Identity: The Self as a Learner.

All faculty participants shared that due to their CoP experiences, perceptions of how they view themselves as learners, i.e. knowledge of learning style and competence, has changed. For one faculty participant, conversations about teaching and learning with colleagues during CoP meetings led to more focus when listening to colleagues: “I think I became a better listener and took it seriously. It was great.” Other faculty participants shared that when reflecting on their own professional practice with students and their level of efficacy in the classroom, overall they believed that they were a little kinder to themselves. There was a sense of recognition that they were not the only ones struggling with new strategies or challenges in the classroom which helped them to be a little more patient with where they were at in their own learning: “I’m a little kinder about myself thinking about my own practice.” Several faculty participants also believed that their CoP experience did impact their professional growth as a faculty: “I feel that I’ve grown a little bit as a teacher.” Others shared that they believed that due to their engagement with colleagues during CoP meetings, their ability to listen to colleagues and share with colleagues was positively impacted: “I am a good talker and I think I talked less and I was glad to let other people talk.”

Sense of Awareness. For most faculty participants, their CoP experience led them to reflect on their role as a higher education faculty member. Several shared that conversations with colleagues during CoP meetings were relevant and substantive. CoP discussions often involved the sharing of ideas, which led to group problem solving about issues or challenges in the classroom. This type of interaction, for several faculty participants, became defining moments leading to a renewed sense of what the profession means to them as higher education faculty: “There were lots of evolving defining moments... and you realize why haven’t I’ve been

doing this all my life?” One faculty participant commented about how the CoP experience brought about a renewal of pedagogical ideas and strategies: “And someone would say, yes, I’m doing this and I say well, I have done that before. Why am I not doing that now?”

During the interviews, several faculty participants reflected on their CoP experience and indicated that attending CoP meetings is value-added for faculty who are hesitant and cautious about making changes to their practice: “I think its value is going to be assuaging fears in people like myself and anxieties.” One faculty participant realized that even though the sense of uncertainty inhibits the use of new pedagogical practices, listening to colleagues and sharing ideas during CoP meetings has allowed for a greater sense of readiness to try something new in the classroom: “I would say that the community of practice has pushed me further in that direction.”

During the interviews, faculty participants often paused and thought about the conversations they had within their CoP, and any subsequent influence these conversations had on their practice with students in the classroom. For many faculty participants, reflection during the interviews led to general responses, which included examples, but one faculty participant wondered about whether the level of participation in conversations during any given CoP meeting actually had an impact on whether or not there would be an attempt to try a new strategy in the classroom: “I wonder if the level of interaction impacts my actually trying something?”

Finally, there was evidence that some faculty participants recognized that because of their participation in their CoP, they changed in the way they look at their practice within the classroom. One faculty participant noted that based on discussions with colleagues during CoP meetings, changes in pedagogical practice in the classroom do not need to be complex, changes in pedagogical practice can be small yet effective for students: “It makes me feel like things are

often easier than we make them out to be. I can choose to make a change and it can be fairly simple to do.”

In sum, during the interviews, many faculty participants shared that because of their participation in their CoPs they had developed a new sense of awareness about how they filled their role as higher education faculty members. Additionally, this aforementioned evidence uncovered that their experience in a CoP brought to light new perceptions and beliefs about how their professional practice in the classroom has grown, which in turn then translated once again into their beliefs of their level of ability as higher education faculty.

Identity: Intrinsic Motivation.

Attend CoP. Faculty participants clearly demonstrated that individual motivation to attend their CoPs revolved around intrinsic factors. It is worth noting again that faulty participants in this study were not paid an additional stipend to attend their CoP. Moreover, the university did not require faculty to attend CoP meetings and not one faculty participant described attending their CoP because of a directive. Contrariwise, most faculty participants explicitly shared that for them, participation in their CoP was aligned with intrinsic motivation. One faculty participant explained: “There was no external reward. It was totally intrinsic. We went for you, yourself, your own goals for getting better at what you did.” To support this even further, another faculty participant recognized that prior to experiencing the CoP meeting, the expectation was that attending would be considered a burden. However, this faculty member went on to describe that once involved in the CoP, there was a sense of eagerness to spend time with colleagues and talk about pedagogical practice: “I thought it was going to be more of a burden and then I started to look forward to it.” For other faculty participants, once they attended their CoP, they shared that they were excited about the prospect of continued participation in

their CoP or another if their CoP ended: “It really made me want to continue. The experience made me want to continue in a community of practice whether will be this one or another one.”

Faculty participants in my study recognized that when they attended their CoP meetings with colleagues who shared a similar sense of intrinsic motivation and interest in improving professional practice, they were more inclined to attend meetings. Specifically, it seems that when some faculty participants realized that their colleagues were just as motivated to share strategies focused on student achievement as they were, they wanted to work with them more often in the CoP setting: “...[T]o be working with people who kind of have the same energy and who want to reach our students because at the end of the day that's why we're there.” For a few faculty participants, the focus on student achievement and their efficacy in the classroom directly led to their continued attendance and participation in their CoP: “It is what we want to accomplish in our classrooms and that keeps me motivated.” As previously mentioned, some faculty participants went a bit further in their descriptions of their engagement with colleagues during CoP meetings. They shared that not only did this engagement influence their attendance and discussion during the meetings, it also motivated them to try new strategies to support students, which was ‘eye opening’: “Listening to the other professors talk about how they use it and suddenly seeing some actual practical application ...it opened up my eyes.” Overall, for these faculty participants, attending meetings and engaging their colleagues in conversations about teaching and learning thus not only motivated them to continue with their CoP, it also enthused them to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement: “It's, like, kind of been like I've been allowed to be latent for a long time and all of a sudden waking up and I'm getting a little crazier than I used to be in a good way.”

Change Behavior. Several faculty participants in my study acknowledged a sense of motivation to change their behavior as it relates to their professional practice working with colleagues. This evidence uncovered two layers. The first layer revealed an overall desire to change professional practice in the classroom due to continued discussions about professional practice during CoP meetings. It seems that for some faculty participants, there was a recognition that if they continue engaging in CoP conversations about professional practice, they will be more motivated to try new strategies in the classroom: “So, changing the behavior. I think that is the key piece and that's the ongoing piece that I can get energized by listening to people.” Moreover, some faculty participants stated that they realized the connection between their attendance at CoP meetings, engaging colleagues in conversations about teaching and learning and the implementation of new strategies in the classroom: “If I don't meet with that community of practice, and I don't implement, and I don't stop by colleagues’ offices to chat with them; it's not going to happen.” The second layer showed a willingness to either revisit past professional practices or consider new professional practices: “Sometimes they'll be something that I never heard of or something I've done but I haven't done for a while and I go, ‘Oh, yeah. That's right and that was a good thing to do. Oh, yeah, I like that exercise. I'm going to have to start doing that.’” Thus, faculty participants overall described how they found themselves becoming interested, excited, and motivated to try new strategies in the classroom when they hear their colleagues talk about the many ways they can support students in the classroom: “It gets me fired up to hear about it and think that could be something I could look into doing the future.”

Identity: Positive affirmation about professional practice. Based on the data, it was evident that overall faculty participants experienced positive affirmation about their professional practice as a result of their CoP attendance. Specifically, they acknowledged that they enjoyed

sharing experiences and helping colleagues sort through the challenges they were having in the classroom. Problem solving with colleagues during CoP meetings left faculty participants feeling a sense of satisfaction derived from helping their colleagues:

“If I feel like I can provide some sort of value to somebody else around my experiences and it may not be the exact same subject area, but even if they can pick up on something of some value and use it, then hopefully it will be a good session for them also. That's the way I look at it.”

Overall, faculty participants recognized that sharing professional experiences during CoP meetings actually helped them to feel better about their own abilities as higher education faculty, specifically around meeting the needs of their students: “I feel better professionally and I feel even more confident.” Additionally, some of them realized that even making small changes to their practice resulted in positive affirmation. For one faculty participant, since participating in the CoP meetings, there is the realization that trying a new strategy that is somewhat simple to implement or changing something small about professional practice in the classroom can still be considered a positive change: “It’s very minor and limited, but if I can do something like that, I think it's great.”

For most faculty participants, their connections with colleagues during CoP meetings allowed them in general to feel better about and more satisfied with their role at the university: “I think some of that attitude, at least for me, some of that carries over into more job satisfaction and I’m happier in the job. I like the people I work with.” A few faculty participants reflected that this feeling of job satisfaction also transferred into the classroom and their professional relationship with students: “It really allowed me to make a better connection with the students. I

could see students getting it faster, understanding it better and it was like, yeah, a breakthrough. It made me feel good.”

Identity: Improving Practice.

Continuous Improvement. For these faculty participants, their engagement in a CoP helped them to reflect more on their own professional practice as a higher education faculty. Time to reflect on their abilities to support students in the classroom was supported by the conversations they had with colleagues and led them to want to continuously improve their practice.

“I think that has helped me [continue] to think about the practice of teaching and that I can always improve and that I need to improve and that's what I strive to do.”

Their genuine desire to improve pedagogical practice made them want to attend CoP meetings to learn more from colleagues. They knew that they needed to continuously work on their practice in the classroom and that their colleagues could help them: “I want to go with these groups and listen to what they have to say so they can help me. And I do need to be better at what I do. There's always room for that.”

CoP topics for most faculty participants did not seem to influence whether or not they would attend meetings. On the contrary, most of them reported that they wanted to simply continue to learn new ways to apply strategies in their own classroom: “To me it's less about the topic and more about what other people are doing and how they are handling it and what I can do with that in my own classroom.” Some faculty participants shared that hearing how colleagues applied strategies in their classroom encouraged them to make even the smallest change to their practice. Making small changes in practice was

viewed as just as important as making large scale changes. As previously stated, what mattered most to these faculty participants was listening to colleagues and making a conscious decision to improve practice, even at the smallest scale: “Maybe it's a change in my attitude. Maybe it's the way I word something with a student.”

Sharing Perspectives. During their CoP meetings, time to listen to the perspectives of their colleagues proved to be an important part of their experiences. For some faculty participants, as they listened to colleague’s perspectives, they were able to make connections to their own practice and think about how what they were hearing could be applied in their own practice. They appreciated this opportunity to learn relevant applications from colleagues: “For me it was a good learning experience; hearing others’ perspectives, maybe getting another way of looking at some of the experiences I was having in the classroom... It was a good eye-opening experience from that perspective.” There was one faculty participant who came to the realization that hearing the perspectives of other colleagues was not simply an interesting part of the CoP meeting, it also allowed for reflection about the importance of having diverse perspectives when seeking to improve professional practice in the classroom: “It certainly has changed my approach a little bit and made me realize that it’s a big tent and we need both perspectives in there.” One faculty participant posited the idea that engaging each other in conversations about teaching and learning in an attempt to seek new strategies during the CoP meetings allowed them to make changes to their practice while staying true to themselves as faculty: “It's a combination of seeing changes that you want to make and trying to implement them but then also being authentic, too.”

Theme Two: Sense of Belonging

According to Moustakas (1994), things become clearer each time they are considered. During analysis, I focused on viewing the data from different angles to push possibilities of emerging textures and meanings. Theme two is: Higher education faculty perceive a sense of belonging to their CoP.

All participants described feeling a sense of belonging to their CoP by way of the relationships they formed within their communities. It is the interplay between individual and community relationships that fosters their perception of a sense of belonging to their respective CoP. According to Wenger (1998), our sense of belonging to a CoP is based on a negotiation between our practice and interactions with others.

It was through the process of phenomenological data reduction that I came to realize that participants were not simply describing types of relationships formed within their CoP. They were describing a deeper, underlying essence which formed a bond connecting them to their CoP. This theme aligns with the following research question: How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice within a CoP? The four subthemes are: 1) relationships; 2) community; 3) isolation; and 4) trust and respect. A figure (Figure 5) for theme two is shown below.

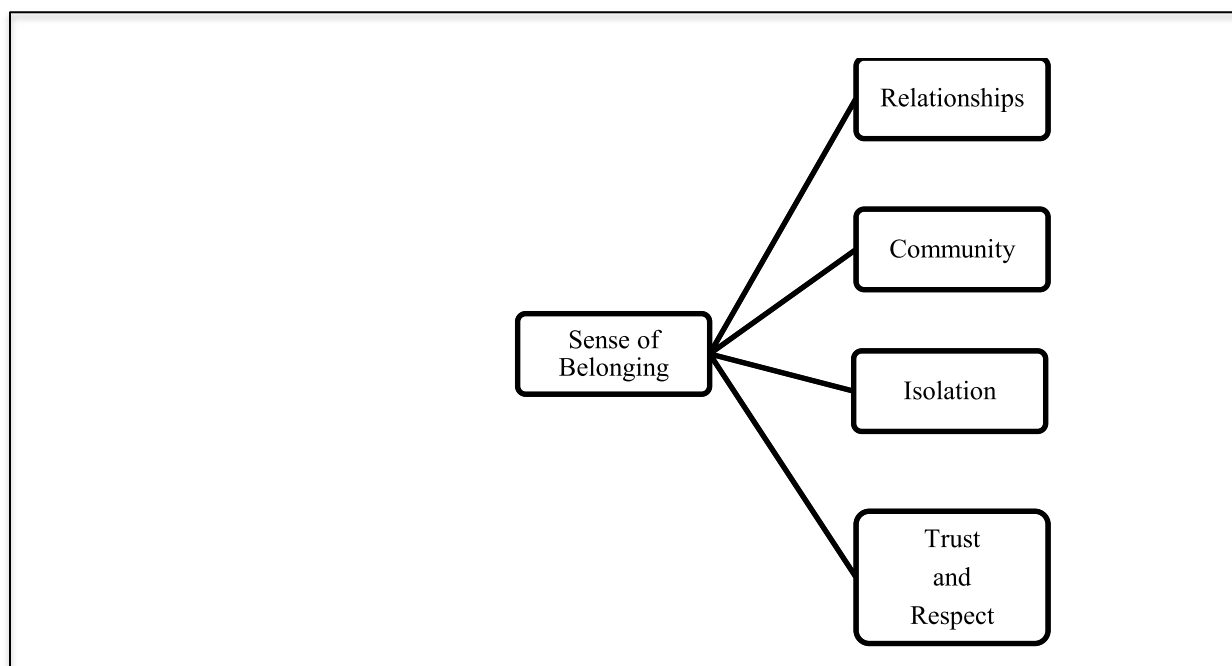


Figure 6. Theme Two – Sense of Belonging

Sense of Belonging: Relationships.

Social. Overall, time to socialize with each other motivated faculty participants to attend their CoP meetings. For most of the faculty participants, attending their CoP meetings allowed them an opportunity to spend time with colleagues. They explained that without their CoP time they would not have the chance to talk with each other, something that they valued as individuals and professional faculty: “We spend a good part of our day with our students and there's not necessarily a lot of social time.” Since opportunity to participate in university-wide CoPs was offered to all university faculty, attendees made up diverse groups from different departments, backgrounds, and years of experience in the professional sector and as higher education faculty. This diverse makeup of cross-departmental faculty provided faculty participants with an opportunity to socialize with colleagues they would not necessarily speak with otherwise: “Most of the people in my department don't go to them, so it's actually like a social meeting.”

Meeting with colleagues from other departments during CoPs help faculty participants form welcomed, social relationships that extended outside of the organized CoP meetings: “I

would never have known him so now that I see him on the campus we can chat [and] say, ‘Hey, how you doing?’” As mentioned earlier, the purpose of establishing CoPs in this university was to help faculty throughout all departments improve their professional practice in the classroom. During the interviews, it was important for several of the faculty participants to express that for them, it was just as important to see and socialize with colleagues during CoP meetings as it was to discuss and learn about the actual topics: “...it's as much the official topic of the session as it is just the ability to be among colleagues.”

The self-described social time for the aforementioned faculty participants helped them to form professional, intimate relationships. These professionally intimate CoP relationships fostered the development of important bonds, which spanned across university departments and schools, and without the CoPs, may otherwise not exist: “We had that conversation on a regular basis and it allowed for relationships to develop across schools.” For other faculty participants, they too were aware and valued these bonds across departments and schools, and they also acknowledged a basic need to just form relationships with colleagues: “I needed to have an intimate experience with colleagues in a community of practice...” Finally, for these faculty participants they shared that, overall, simply getting to know each other and forming relationships proved to be a very important part of their CoP experiences: “...getting to know other people...that was very important to me and I would never downplay that.”

Learning. Most faculty participants shared that in addition to valuing professional relationships and time to socialize with colleagues, they valued time to learn from colleagues. Time to have conversations with colleagues from across the university about focused topics on teaching and learning in higher education stood out as important parts of their schedules. The diversity that university wide representation can bring to a conversation about professional

practice was very significant to several faculty participants: "...what was valuable for me and maybe it was on a meta-level...the opportunity to actually talk about... actually engaging in the topic in a different way with colleagues who I don't see and you know, except the opening day of the semester."

As mentioned in various contexts throughout this analysis, faculty participants shared that they wanted to learn practical ideas from colleagues and how to apply these new ideas in their classrooms: "To keep open the potential for perhaps new ideas and learning about the ways that other people do things." The learning of new ideas and practical application also seemed to inspire and engage faculty participants to continue learning from each other. One faculty participant captured the sense of passion he felt when sharing and learning from colleagues during CoP meetings: "We learn from each other's passion for what we're doing and a lot of times that involves not just the formal discipline related concepts, but it involves everything becoming practical and meaningful." Moreover, several faculty participants mentioned that indeed learning practical and relevant application from colleagues during CoP meetings occurs out of a shared sense of trust and comfort between colleagues. The sense of trust and comfort is an important component of CoP meetings because it allows faculty to ask pertinent questions as they explore new ways to help students achieve: "There's a shared understanding that allows us to critique each other well, both positive and critically, so I would say that's a big factor."

Finally, most faculty participants described that learning from colleagues was not just about always leaving meetings with new ideas ready to apply in the classroom. Attending CoP meetings often meant that they would walk away having heard new perspectives and what has worked for colleagues: "That's probably why we are a part of the community of practice as well. Just to learn from each other, and hear what works for other people, and it may or may not

always work for us, but at least it gives us something to go by that could be a different perspective.” Similar to being inspired to apply new ideas, faculty participants joined in their colleagues’ excitement when they were hearing how encouraged they were over new strategies and positive results students were having in their classroom: “Just being energized about what someone else is doing even though I’m not fully a part of that.”

Sense of Belonging: Community.

All faculty participants in my study believed that an important aspect of meeting as a CoP is the actual time spent working with colleagues to create meaningful conversations about teaching and learning. According to one faculty participant, meeting with the CoP helped this faculty participant develop a strong connection to the other participants. This faculty participant shared that specifically, the other CoP participants were considered to be very important connections at the university and referred to them as, “my people”: “This is my group! These are my people!” Making connections with colleagues during CoP meetings seemed to develop, for most faculty participants, a sense of belonging to their CoP.

The sense of belonging to a group of colleagues who meet and discuss teaching and learning is significant and a big motivator for faculty participants to attend meetings. One faculty participant expressed that there is a sense that as a participant of a CoP, you are part of a team: “A big thing with a community of practice isn’t necessarily the practice as much as it is the community. It’s the fact that you know now you’re part of a team.” The sense of belonging to a CoP and referring to other participants as a “*team*” is reinforced with the belief that they could support each other by listening and sharing ideas to solve problems higher education faculty must currently address: “Then there’s a group of people who are saying, ‘Maybe we can do better and we can put our collective heads together.’”

The meaningful conversations that faculty participants had during their CoP meetings were valued for several reasons. One reason that stood out for most of the faculty participants was the amount of support they received from colleagues. While these faculty participants believed that they could think on their own about their courses, they appreciated knowing that their colleagues would help them out with problem solving: “I’ve always felt that everyone around the table is in the same game together. We want to help each other and assist each other.” In addition, most faculty participants shared that the sense of belonging to their CoP was enhanced by intimate connections with the CoP members, resulting from their common experiences as higher education faculty. Several faculty participants described intimate connections based on commonalities as higher education faculty served as a foundation for the CoP community: “I’m able to kind of understand from a personal perspective exactly what they’re talking about when we sit around the table so it reinforces the relationship and the goals that were all striving for collectively.”

As individual members of their respective CoPs, faculty participants expressed that this intimate connection was in large part due to similarities that had with colleagues, which not only reinforced the sense of belonging to a CoP, it also motivated them to attend and engage during meetings: “For me, that keeps me very motivated to want to attend the meetings, to participate to want to be involved because at least in that community, everyone understands each other’s language.”

Sense of Belonging: Isolation. Although not as predominate, there were a few faculty participants who mentioned their engagement in a CoP helped them to not feel as isolated in their practice and more connected to colleagues across the university: “So it was like this light bulb went off that we are not directly working in silos. We are not in isolation.” A few faculty

participants recognized that although it is not uncommon for higher education faculty to work in isolation, their experiences in a CoP had given them an opposite feeling—one that is collaborative by nature: “I mean what we do is so collaborative. I think it wouldn't be impossible [to work in a silo] but, I don't think it would bode well for the students in the end.”

Sense of Belonging: Trust and Respect. Most faculty participants included evidence that perceiving a sense of belonging to a CoP relies on also perceiving a sense of trust and respect during CoP meetings. As faculty participants got to know each other, they began to trust each other enough to feel more comfortable with asking questions and sharing ideas. They acknowledged that as they learned who their colleagues were and their comfort levels increased, they became more motivated to attend their CoP meetings: “You start to learn over time who among your colleagues... you can be more open with or less open when with... which is why I keep going back because I've become more comfortable.” Some faculty participants shared that as they became more comfortable and learned to trust the other members of their respective CoPs, they felt as though they could share and learn from their colleagues: “Once the trust and the bond are established, what you are learning becomes very broad and what you were doing becomes brought out into many different ways of learning and practicing.”

Finally, faculty participants who did not believe that they could trust colleagues in their respective CoP were aware that overall participation among CoP participants was limited. A sense that one can trust that colleagues will listen to the perspectives and opinions of others without criticizing does seem to weigh heavily on whether or not faculty participants are willing to engage in CoP conversations: “I am very aware of the fact that there are people in the room and in the meeting who probably would like to say something but won't. I'm hesitant to bring up some information...”

Theme Three: Collaboration

Overall, the data showed that faculty participants experienced different forms of collaborative practices resulting from their CoP experiences. These forms of collaboration fall under two overarching categories: 1) problem solving; and 2) collaborative practices outside of the CoP meetings. The theme three is: Collaboration among higher education faculty occurs during and outside of CoP meetings. This theme and its findings align with the third research question: What collaborative professional practices evolving from CoP experiences are perceived by faculty? A figure (Figure 6) for theme three is shown below.

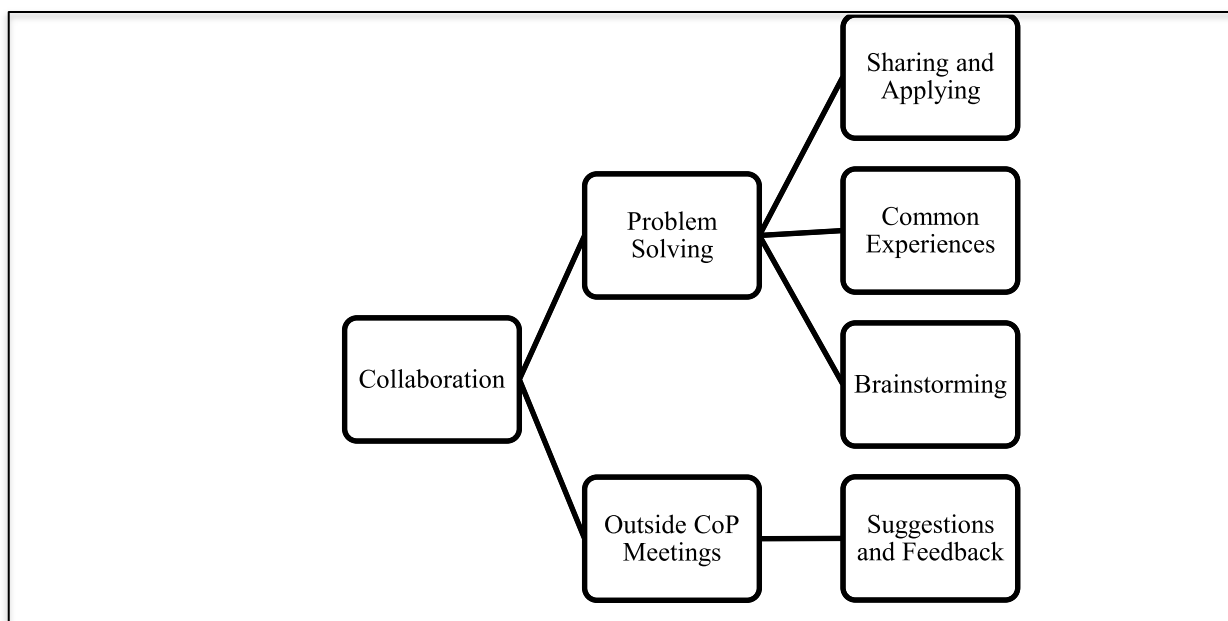


Figure 7. Theme Three - Collaboration

Problem Solving.

Sharing and applying new classroom strategies. Faculty participants described their conversations with colleagues during CoP meetings as essential elements in their own professional learning. Specifically, time to discuss relevant topics and pedagogical strategies was considered beneficial for general discussion and feedback. Overall, faculty participants believed that their conversations during CoP meetings about pedagogical practice contributed to the

learning of the all CoP participants. Several faculty participants indicated that they believed their respective CoP collaborated to help participants problem-solve ways to utilize or adapt new strategies in their classroom: “It was good because we would end up talking about that we could do it this way or that way to try to help other people see ways in which they could use it in their subject matter.” All faculty participants described their time engaging with colleagues in their CoP as collegial and collaborative.

Although faculty participants attended different CoPs, they experienced similar conversations with their CoP colleagues. Topics ranging from new instructional strategies, formative and summative assessment practices, and classroom management were commonly discussed. For one faculty participant, the CoP meeting was the place to receive new ideas on such topics as well as support: “I guess that is where I can get ideas from other people and assistance from other people around different things; classroom management and exercises and so forth.”

Participating in these meaningful conversations with colleagues not only contributed to the sharing of ideas and helping each other think of ways to apply new strategies, it also helped establish learning as a collegial community. Several faculty participants described this type of collegial engagement and how conversations within their CoP was a way to check-in with their community and stay aligned as a faculty: “I think that collaboration is important. It checks to see if we are in alignment or not, but it is important to discuss different perspectives. Collaboration is good for that.” While most faculty participants focused on the essence of learning as a community in more formal ways, one faculty participant described that even though CoP meetings were about professional learning, time to engage with colleagues for this faculty participant seemed more informal and causal: “The group is a playing field.”

As previously mentioned, for faculty participants, time to problem solve in their respective CoPs was time well spent. Faculty participants described their respective CoP in terms of colleagues' experiences in education; K-12 experience, former and current positions at the university, subject matter expertise, and years teaching in higher education. A product of these diverse memberships, as described by faculty participants, was a wide range of feedback and possible solutions to the problems they presented to their CoPs: "So, by being able to ask those questions of the community, you're able to get different opinions and different viewpoints and share the experiences across the table."

Using common experiences. Even though faculty participants appreciated the diverse backgrounds of their respective CoPs, they also acknowledged that hearing suggestions from colleagues who have experienced similar professional situations in the classroom allowed them to feel more comfortable trying new practices: "It's always nice when someone has gone through it and they can share what worked and what hasn't...be on the lookout for pitfalls and have a little more confidence and higher expectations about what will happen." One faculty participant shared a sense of satisfaction and affirmation knowing that there were other colleagues in the CoP who could provide solid advice about certain situations they had experienced first hand: "I feel if I'm reflecting and questioning something I've done, I can go readily ask somebody who is going to give me really good advice because he's been there before."

Brainstorming as a collective. Overall, faculty participants described participation in their respective CoPs as being part of a collective, whose overarching purpose was to flesh out challenges and present solutions for those individual members requesting support: "It was a nice way for us to brainstorm around some of those actual problems that we're experiencing and listening to solutions that other people had implemented." Diversity among faculty within their

CoPs was also valuable when, as a collective, the CoP brainstormed ways for faculty with various subject matter expertise to apply new ideas into their classroom. More diversity among CoP participants contributed to a wider range of solutions to problems: “It was good because we would end up talking about that we could do it this way or that way to try to help other people see ways in which they could use it in their subject matter.” Finally, for several faculty participants their respective CoPs were dedicated, as a collective, to helping each other find solutions. For one faculty participant, the CoP was dedicated to the point that if the CoP was not able to come up with appropriate solutions, they would work together to find the answers: “Even if other members around the table don't know the answers, they'll say, ‘Okay, we need to figure this out.’”

Collaboration Outside CoP Meetings.

Suggestions and Feedback. Several faculty participants shared perceptions about collaborative professional practices that evolved from their CoP experiences. For example, problem solving among CoP participants did not occur only during CoP meetings. Among those faculty participants who made statements about problem solving and generally seeking support with colleagues outside of their respective CoP meetings, a few commented that they felt comfortable reaching out at any time to other CoP members for suggestions and feedback:

“Even if we're not physically at the table, I feel very comfortable picking up the phone or shooting an email and saying, ‘Hey, has anyone experienced this? I'm in this particular situation. Who do you recommend I contact? What should I do? Does anyone have any experience?’”

Other than those few faculty participants who discussed reaching out to CoP colleagues for support outside of CoP meetings, there was very little additional substantial evidence showing that other forms of collaboration outside of CoP meetings took place consistently among faculty participants. Of those faculty participants who did discuss collaborative practices outside of CoP meetings, there was a general sense that this type of collaboration should happen. One faculty participant described that the essence of a CoP does, by its very nature, include collaborative practice outside of meetings:

“A community of practice by definition would extend outside of those boundaries (meetings). A community of practice is not about breaking boundaries but about flexible and permeable boundaries.”

Overall, collaborative practices such as co-planning or co-teaching occurring outside CoP meetings that directly evolved from CoP experiences were limited to one faculty participant. While participating in the CoP, this faculty participant was working with a two colleagues from the university, but neither were participants of a CoP at the time. One colleague was from another school within the university, and one had presented information about professional practices with this faculty participant. This faculty participant described that he had experience collaborating with other faculty members prior to joining his CoP. For the faculty participants engaged in my study, collaborative practices occurring outside of CoP meetings did not seem to be integral elements of their CoP experiences.

Theme Four: Transformation

Moustakas (1998) stated that as we consciously attend to and reflect on what we perceive, what ultimately stands out is, what is meaningful to us. Throughout the interview process, faculty participants reflected on their CoP experiences, both positive and negative, in an effort to provide this researcher with data. Theme four is: Transformation of professional practice from the CoP into the classroom was limited by time and perceived comfort levels of higher education faculty. This theme aligns with the following research question: What statements made by CoP participants illustrate perceived transformation of professional practice within the classroom?

Through phenomenological reduction, it was discovered that several faculty participants made significant statements where they described perceived transformation of their professional practice in the classroom. These statements fell into three overarching categories: 1) Sense of disappointment; 2) Time; and 3) Comfort level. A figure (Figure 7) for theme four is shown below.

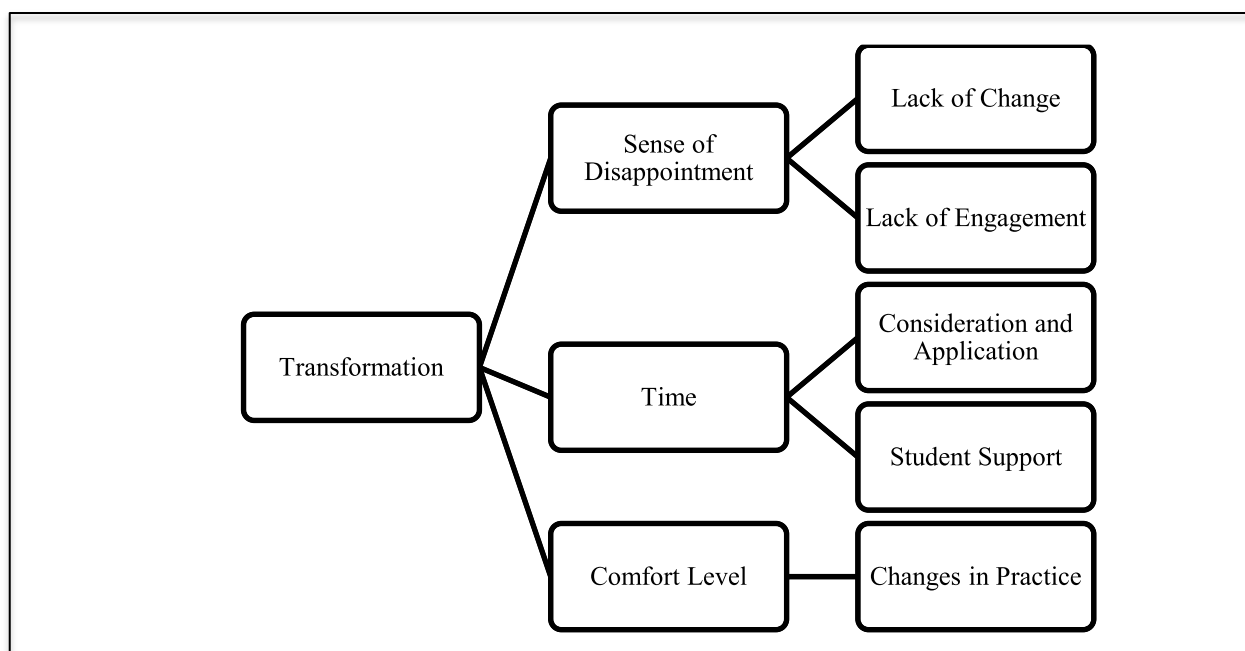


Figure 8. Theme Four - Transformation

Perceived Transformation: Sense of Disappointment.

Lack of Change. All faculty participants acknowledged that their experience within their respective CoPs allowed them to engage in conversations about their professional practice as higher education faculty. As some faculty participants were discussing their experiences with this researcher, they expressed a sense of disappointment at their perceived lack of change in their professional practice. Engagement in a CoP for one faculty participant was valued, but upon reflection noted that overall engagement during CoP meetings could have been better: “I don't think I've ever chosen not to [share]. I just haven't done it to the extent that I would have liked to.” In addition to reflecting on individual engagement during CoP meetings, a few faculty participants discussed the changes to practice that they did attempt. For one faculty participant, even though she attended CoP meetings, engaged in conversations with colleagues, and made changes to her professional practice, she still believed that her efforts, when compared to other CoP participants, were not considered good enough: “[I made some changes but] not as much as they would have liked me to.”

Attending CoP meetings and engaging in conversations with colleagues reminded faculty participants of strategies and activities they utilized in the past to support students. However, when considering the change to current professional practice and using those familiar strategies again, change in practice still did not occur to the extent one faculty participant would have hoped: “Then, of course, I'm a creature of habit, so I've fallen out of using those skills. But I do try to remind myself to use them.” There was also evidence that some faculty participants perceived a certain level of change in their professional practice, but were unclear of the extent of the change or if the change would last. As one faculty participant expressed, there might be change to practice, but it might not be recognized: “As to whether I've changed, I wouldn't say greatly, but maybe a little bit because I think we all change, but we don't really realize it.”

Lack of Engagement. A few faculty participants acknowledged that they believed that a lack of engagement during CoP meetings could result in some CoP participants experiencing anxiety and a feeling of inadequacy. One faculty participant clarified that because of the topics and number of participants engaged in the discussions, he believed that some CoP participants were not as comfortable sharing or asking questions: “There were some who I think probably felt threatened.”

One faculty participant described the dynamic between more veteran faculty and those who were more relatively new to the faculty position. This faculty participant explained that for some of his colleagues, this perceived sense of inadequacy felt during CoP meetings could create more of a divide between “*older*” or veteran faculty and those who are relatively new to the faculty position. He went on to share that some discussions were about using different presentation tools in class and cooperative group activities that engage students in student-centered discussions. Some CoP participants were, for the most part, not comfortable trying new strategies, but attended CoP meetings to listen. This type of discussion, according to this faculty participant, did point out those faculty who are more comfortable with more traditional methods of teaching and learning and thus created this divide of the two groups: “[CoP meetings] really address maybe some of we older faculty who are more in the old days’ lecture format...”

Finally, participation in CoP meetings result in some faculty participants feeling as though their colleagues did not value their perceptions, again, leading to anxiety and disappointment. One faculty participant shared that the anxiety felt during CoP meetings influenced a lack of engagement: “Physically, I'm getting tense. I'm getting a headache. I am being very conscious of what I say or what I don't say. Pretty soon I just shut down and just listen and then move on.”

Perceived Transformation: Time.

Consideration and Application. As previously reported, most faculty participants shared that they made changes to their professional practice, but changes occurred gradually over a period of time. One faculty participant explained that after attending several CoP meetings, she did slowly attempt to make changes in several of her classes: "...I slowly began trying to change many projects and stuff like that in my other classes ..." Most faculty participants expressed that after attending CoP meetings, there was a need to let time go by so that they could consider how and what changes to make, and then apply new strategies within the classroom setting: "Some of the ideas people share certainly need to be vetted more thoroughly with respect to the courses I teach." One faculty participant explained that she needed to attend and listen to more conversations during CoP meetings so that she was clear what strategies they tried and what the results were: "It all takes time. It takes time to listen to people." However, even though they expressed needing time to incorporate changes, several described awareness that, overall, they believed that they did change their approach. One faculty participant who described himself as a more traditional faculty member, explained that after attending CoP meetings and engaging in conversations with colleagues, he did make changes to his practice: "I'm someone who started as a traditional lecturer. You do your reading and come to class ready to talk about it. That's not happening, frankly, anymore."

Student Support. Finally, there was evidence that in spite of the time needed to consider and apply changes, faculty participants perceived that, in general, changes to their professional practice positively effected how they support students. For this faculty participant, making changes to the way instructions and expectations are communicated to students made a positive impact on her instruction: "I like to think that I become a better instructor as a result of that. I

think I'm a little clearer in my instructions to the students. I'm a little bit clearer in explaining to them what my expectations are.” One faculty participant shared that after making some changes to his classroom activities, students were sharing that they were enjoying his class and looked forward to attending: “...It was fun for them [students] and it was effective.”

Perceived Transformation: Comfort Level.

Changes in Practice. As previously mentioned, statements about perceived transformation made by faculty participants fell into two categories: time and comfort level. The method of phenomenological reduction provided descriptions that showed that the two were interwoven. Specifically, faculty participants described the two phenomena as one resulting from the other; as in faculty were attending meetings and interested in making changes to practice, but they just needed more time to become more comfortable with such change: “It becomes a challenge because there may be some faculty members that are really just more comfortable kind of doing the traditional PowerPoint slides and asking them to step outside their comfort zone may take a little time.” In addition, there was also evidence as one faculty participant perceived, showing that as faculty become more comfortable with making changes to their professional practice, even at the smallest level, it might lead to a building confidence, which might lead to more changes: “I know it, myself, that confidence then translates to the action...”

Chapter Summary

My research question asked how higher education faculty members participating in CoPs describe perceived change(s) in professional practice. Nine one-hour interviews resulted in the analysis of significant meanings, reduced to twenty-nine meaning clusters, and then grouped into four themes. These themes represent the intersection of the individual experiences of faculty participants in CoPs and thus capture the universal essence of the phenomena. Overall, the four

themes revealed that the faculty participants acknowledged that their engagement in their respective CoPs did have an influence on how they perceive who they are as higher education faculty—their professional identity. They identified themselves as motivated learners, dedicated to improving their professional practice as higher education faculty in the name of student achievement. They also described a sense of belonging to their respective CoP, which seems to be cultivated through the forming of professionally intimate relationships that support each other's learning. Many faculty participants did share that during CoP meetings, they experienced collaborative efforts to support their individual and collective learning. While not all faculty participants shared that they perceived a transformation of professional practice within the classroom, several did acknowledge that with more time to attend their CoP meetings, perhaps their comfort around trying new strategies would increase. Chapter V will provide a synthesized narrative and additional literature that summarizes the essence of the faculty participants' shared experiences and offer recommendations based on the data.

Chapter V

Findings and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to contribute to the literature relating to higher education faculty participation in communities of practice (CoP) to improve professional practice in support of student achievement. The findings and recommendations presented in this chapter result from the analysis of interview transcripts of nine higher education faculty working at a small, non-profit, teaching university located in the Northeast. Nine faculty participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences in a CoP to gain greater insight into their perception about their attitudes, beliefs, and perceived transformation of professional practice evolving from CoP experiences. As mentioned in previous chapters, the nine faculty participants were involved in four university-sponsored CoPs. Two CoPs were organized by the university's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and two were facilitated and organized independently by faculty. Analysis of each faculty participant's interview revealed common themes that emerged from each person's individual story about their experiences as participants in their respective CoP. This chapter blends those common themes to reveal the essence of the faculty experience in a CoP and addresses the main research question: "How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?" Therefore, this chapter considers the findings and themes of my study in light of the literature and theories described in previous chapters and includes additional research in relation to the findings.

As previously mentioned in Chapter IV, the four themes that emerged from the data are not isolated units of analysis, but rather are tightly interwoven intricacies that together make up the essence of the phenomena. To embrace the universal essence, this chapter is structured as a

narrative to tell the story of nine individual experiences, coming together as one. Following the narrative which captures the major findings, recommendations will be provided for higher educational leaders to incorporate or further the establishment of communities of practice in their institutions and provide closing thoughts.

Major Findings

Professional Identity

According to Wenger (1998), an individual's professional competence based on what is known, familiar, and understood translates into an identity. It is then through community engagement as a source of learning, doing, and meaning-making that common identity among participants is formed. What matters most in this paradigm is not whether the unit of analysis is the individual or the community, but rather the interplay between the two (Wenger, 1998).

Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan (2013) surmised that professional identity is an unstable, complex entity formed through personal experiences. Therefore, professional identity can be considered a product of the relationship between the individual's identity through experiences and the ability to make meaning in the context of the CoP.

During the one-on-one interviews, faculty participants were asked to reflect on their personal experiences participating in their CoPs. Each one took time to consider the questions and make connections to the many evolving aspects that occurred throughout their pre- and post-CoP experiential "journey." Overall, they seemed aware that as higher education faculty, they fill two very important roles: 1) discipline-based experts defined as "faculty" and 2) academics as "teachers." When asked to describe their experiences, they identified themselves as either "faculty" or "teacher." It is possible that further probing would have explicitly revealed relationships between their discipline-based identities and perceived level of pedagogical expertise, and whether or not that influenced their identification as "faculty" or "teacher." Regardless, based on the evidence found within the data, it does seem likely that faculty perceptions of their professional identities are influenced by their disciplined-based identities, perceived level of pedagogical expertise, and participation in a CoP.

Self as a Learner: Positive Affirmation.

Regardless of whether they identified as “faculty” or “teacher,” during the interviews their desire to improve their pedagogical practice was evident. Most notably, all faculty participants were willing to use their own time to attend CoP meetings with colleagues across university schools and departments. Interestingly, this evidence does align with the university’s focus on teaching rather than research. When first asked about their CoP experiences, many began by describing their CoPs as diverse groups made up of faculty members with various years of experience in higher education and professional backgrounds. This finding is similar to findings outlined in a report by Teeter et al., (2011). In their report on CoPs and professional development, they concluded that ability to engage in cross-disciplinary discussion combined with diverse experience provided ample opportunity for participants to discover new approaches. Additionally, they purported that more diversity within CoPs offers differing perspectives that help participants apply the new approaches to their own practice. Building upon this research, this study found that because of the diversity and experiences of the CoP participants, the faculty participants were overall inspired and motivated to try new strategies to foster student success. Specifically, several faculty participants stated that they wanted to improve their practice and believed they could by listening and learning from the other CoP participants. The belief that they could improve their practice led to a positive change in their attitudes and beliefs about their level of pedagogical expertise, with some even identifying that they have become “better teachers.” One faculty participant described this experience as a “defining moment” that ultimately led to more purposeful listening to not only learn more from colleagues, but to share their classroom experiences with colleagues.

Self as a Learner: Improving Practice

Indeed, the majority of faculty participants commented that the diversity of their CoP offered rich and varied alternatives to their pedagogical approaches in the classroom. However, in contrast, Blanton and Stylianou's (2009) study reported that CoPs established for the purpose of sharing pedagogical practices should be made up of faculty who share similar backgrounds and expertise instead of having more diversity. Maintaining the findings of this study, capitalizing on the professional diversity found within institutions of higher education, and intentionally fostering cross-departmental CoP membership is a better alternative. It seems as though CoPs with more diverse memberships offer multiple perspectives and experiences to improve one's professional practice in the classroom. Multiple perspectives and experiences from cross-departments are more likely to result in richer, more interesting conversations about pedagogical practices.

Self as a Learner: Professional Identity

As previously mentioned, faculty participants explained that their CoP conversations were typically about learning new approaches to structuring instruction and assessment. For a few of the faculty participants who identified themselves as more "traditional" faculty—even though they engaged in conversation during their CoP about new approaches they were still inclined to utilize more traditional approaches to classroom instruction and assessment. For these self-identified "traditional" faculty members, attending their CoP meetings resulted in awareness that: 1) the new strategies were worth the time and energy and would result in higher student achievement, or 2) they were not convinced that at that time, making changes to their instruction and assessment practices was the right move for them, professionally. For these faculty, even though they acknowledged that they wanted to improve their pedagogical skills, they still seemed

to relate more to their discipline-based identity and were more comfortable using more traditional approaches to instruction and assessment. It seems as though a big challenge is actually merging what they know to be true in their discipline with the new pedagogical strategy or theory at the center of the CoP conversation. It is not because they were unable to meet the challenge of trying a new pedagogical strategy; rather it was more likely that they became caught up in the ebb and flow of the school year and could not picture how they would make the changes work given their current responsibilities as faculty. However, at the same time, they were aware that even choosing to make small changes to their pedagogical practice in the classroom could be simple to do, take little energy, and still serve as a benefit to the students.

In line with Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory, higher education faculty struggling to balance professional and academic identities must critique their belief and assumptions about professional practice in the classroom against those of their colleagues. Ongoing participation in CoP discussions about pedagogical approaches allow faculty to negotiate their perceptions about how their respective discipline should be taught and assessed. Wenger (1998) describes the development of identity as a negotiated experience, as community membership, and as learning trajectory: "We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going" (p. 155). An important element to establishing and sustaining CoPs for faculty is to allow for different levels of involvement. Each faculty member will come to the meetings with their own professional identity and interest. This diversity must be embraced and cultivated, and all participants must be valued to encourage continued participation.

A Sense of Belonging

Social Relationships. Perhaps it is best to begin with a consideration of Lave and Wenger's (1991) definition of a CoP as a foundation for this finding, "a system of relationships

between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98). Faculty in this study revealed that relationships formed between CoP participants were primary motivators for them to attend their respective CoP meetings. Specifically, they perceived the development of what several faculty participants referred to as “professionally intimate” relationships. The ability to form close relationships with colleagues within CoPs is a positive outcome that can support the ongoing professional learning of its participants by motivating them to attend meetings. Two assumptions of adult learning theory are that adults are mostly driven by internal rather than external motivation and that they need to know the reason for engaging in learning something new (Merriam and Bierema, 2014). Therefore, encouraging higher education faculty to build professional relationships with other CoP participants as a motivator to attend meetings will help to cultivate personal bonds and deeper levels of professional inquiry about practice.

Forming social relationships is complex and requires time for faculty to engage in discussions and practices with other members of their community. However, the findings of this study appear to support the work of Blanton and Stylianou (2009). Their study showed that developing CoPs that are sustained over time requires a culture accepting of professional development. This study found that socializing with colleagues is as important as learning about new pedagogical practices. Therefore, in order to build and cultivate CoPs and a culture accepting of professional development within institutes of higher education, consideration must be made to the development of social relationships within and outside of CoPs.

Learning Relationships. According to social constructionist theory, knowledge is constructed through interaction with others and, therefore, is socially situated. Our daily interactions with others help define what is true for us. Learning, as defined by Lave and Wenger

(1991) is an “integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p. 35). For faculty participants in this study, learning from colleagues was valued and inspired them to apply pedagogical strategies that they would otherwise not have considered. Several faculty participants recognized that although they may not be able to apply all strategies to their respective discipline, they appreciated hearing what worked and what didn’t work in other classrooms. Learning within a CoP is the result of the accumulation of individual knowledge evolving into collective knowledge through their CoP activities and interactions (Wenger et al., 2002). I will caution that listening to colleague’s perspectives and engaging in discussions based on inquiry does not always translate into taking away new, applicable pedagogical strategies at the end of each meeting and therefore, should not be an expectation and imposed on faculty. Nonetheless, based on my findings, it should be an expectation that in addition to attending CoP meetings, faculty engage in metacognitive practices by reflecting on their CoP experiences. This type of reflective practice will lend itself to faculty thinking about their own learning in relation to their participation in their CoP.

Wenger et al. (2002) argued that there are varying forms of participation in a CoP. Some faculty will join a CoP because they wish to improve their pedagogical practice in the classroom. Some will join because they care about the topics or cultivating CoPs within the institution. Others will join to socialize and form relationships with colleagues who share similar passions. Consequently, CoPs within institutes of higher education are made up of participants with varying backgrounds, areas of expertise, interests, and motivations. These varying elements, in turn, determine the level and consistency of participation for each CoP participant and should be mutually accepted. In reality, building new knowledge that leads to a change or transformation of behaviors in the classroom takes time and should be recognized as a complex but worthwhile

product of CoPs. Ultimately, it is through a blending of prior and current experiences and exposure to diverse perspectives and inquiry that allow higher education faculty to negotiate meaning on their own and continuously build their professional practice.

Community. As the faculty participants sifted through the many layers that made up their CoP experiences, it became clear to them that participation in their CoP was personal. Overall, forming interpersonal connections with colleagues essentially influenced their attendance, engagement, and commitment to their CoPs. Learning engagement in a CoP does, by nature, connect participants in ways that foster deeper, interpersonal relationships (Wenger, 1998). Cultivating CoPs to reinforce and sustain this type of professional relationship provides a foundation for discussions about pedagogical practice through inquiry.

In this study, the importance of interpersonal relationships seemed to go beyond fostering a cycle of inquiry about pedagogical practice. First, there was an overall understanding among faculty participants that attending every meeting was voluntary. Second, in spite of the voluntary nature, faculty participants shared a sense of commitment to attend and mutually contribute to discussions so that they would not disappoint their colleagues. There was a strong sense of dedication to support colleagues by helping to problem solve common and uncommon issues which, as a result, reinforced relationships and motivation to attend meetings. My findings suggest that this type of commitment and reciprocity relates back to the forming of interpersonal or professionally “intimate” relationships. Consequently, cultivating a CoP becomes contingent on the development of relationships. Over time, without interpersonal relationships and commitment to individual and group learning, a CoP might not develop. As stated in a previous chapter, my findings are not isolated fractures of thought; they are tightly interwoven aspects of the universal essences of CoP experience. Indeed then, as the relationships develop, processes,

personalities, and expectations shift from the unfamiliar to familiar and the uncomfortable to comfortable. It is then the essence of this shift that fuels professional “intimacy” and cycle of inquiry, which ultimately become part of the group’s identity.

Trust and Respect. Establishing a safe environment for faculty to engage each other in conversations about perceptions of pedagogical practice and their respective discipline was a consistent message found throughout my study. A study by Engin and Atkinson (2015) on the usefulness and effectiveness of a community of practice model for higher education professional development, noted that faculty appreciated being able to share ideas and problem solve in a safe CoP. Similarly, faculty participants in this study expressed that in order for them to feel safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts about pedagogical applications in the classroom, they need to first trust the other participants in their CoPs.

There are three essential characteristics of a CoP: the domain, the community, and the practice (Wenger, 1998). Cultivating these essentials, according to Wenger (2006), will develop a shared repertoire of practices, understandings, routines, actions, and artifacts within the CoP. It is necessary for CoPs in higher education to devote time to develop relationships achieved through sustained interaction. Higher education faculty, as practitioners of their discipline and stewards of learning, will join in discussions to share information and help each other solve problems. However, these relationships will only develop if the environment permits.

Collaboration. Understanding the relationship between pedagogical practices and student achievement and then identifying gaps in one’s knowledge is the first area of focus in professional learning for higher education faculty. As previously mentioned, my study revealed that relationships were primary motivators driving faculty to attend CoP meetings. Within their respective CoPs, two types of relationships were identified: social and learning. Earlier

discussion about social relationships revolved around connections and commitments faculty participants made to one another and were described as professionally “intimate.” Professional “intimacy” overall, as explained by the faculty participants, did include aspects of socialization, however they also clearly identified with relationships based on a mutual desire to learn. It was through collaborative discussions about student support and pedagogical strategies that faculty began to identify their own learning needs and ask each other for help. Indeed, higher educational faculty must engage in conversations about student learning and pedagogical practice in order to identify the next steps in their own professional development. The question remains, what key elements must be present so that faculty can analyze their own learning to have the greatest impact on student learning?

Transformation of Practice: The Missing Piece

According to Timperley et al. (2011), faculty can analyze their own learning through the cycles of inquiry and knowledge building. The five dimensions of the cycle revolve around inquiry, placing faculty and students at the center. Their cycle begins by asking faculty to identify what knowledge and skills the students need; then what knowledge and skills they need as faculty; finally circling and resulting in a deepening of professional knowledge and a change in professional practice within the classroom. The authors surmised that it is through collaborative conversation using the cycle of inquiry that faculty can co-construct solutions with colleagues that essentially fill in their professional learning gaps.

CoP conversations, as described in my study, seemed to revolve around identifying problems and finding solutions, which, at first glance, appeared to be the appropriate context for relevant professional conversations about pedagogical practices. On the contrary, faculty participants indicated they perceived their colleagues as being resourceful, providing ideas and

potential solutions to problems, but not everyone perceived this as entirely beneficial. For several faculty participants, their hopes to learn new pedagogical strategies that could be implemented in their classrooms seemed to fall short. It is possible that they needed more professional support and guidance from their CoP, but it could be that either they were not metacognitively aware of this need or did not recognize its full potential. Furthermore, it seems as though these faculty participants were missing some of the key elements required for building new knowledge that can be readily integrated into their professional practice. One potential explanation for this finding is that those in the aforementioned CoPs were not aware of the cycle of inquiry and its use in professional learning, nor was the cycle of inquiry outlined as a structure for their CoPs.

It goes without saying that elements such as commitment, dedication, relationships, motivation, diversity, and commonalities are excellent criteria for cultivating and sustaining CoPs in higher education. This study revealed that these are aspects of the universal essence of the experiences of the faculty participants. However, the CoP element that appears to be missing from their experiences is a structure that frames, outlines, and articulates the purpose, expectations, outcomes, and most importantly, support available to faculty as they seek to work together to improve their pedagogical knowledge.

Wenger et al. (2002) argued that a common ground, or domain of knowledge, is what brings the CoP together and guides their learning. In this regard, the CoP depends on the domain to organize and maintain focus on the development of new knowledge and practice within the community. CoP participants share an understanding of their domain, whether explicit or implicit, and use this understanding as a compass for making decisions for the group. In my study, even though faculty participants remembered the origin of their CoP, success of their communities will likely depend on their ability to remain stewards of their new knowledge and

skills and foster continued CoP development. Faculty participants were overall delighted with their new professional relationships and their ability to play “in the sandbox” with their colleagues. However, this seems to be more like a honeymoon period with an underlying sense that at some point these features will decrease in value.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the analysis of nine transcripts from interviews of higher educational faculty about their experiences in a CoP. The findings, theories, and applicable literature, along with the limitations of this study, are considered foundations for each of the four recommendations. Higher education administration and faculty leaders can learn from these faculty experiences and involve their faculty in ongoing professional conversations about teaching, learning, and assessment. The data from this study revealed that by establishing or cultivating existing CoPs within their institution higher education administration and faculty leaders can provide relevant and transformational experiences for faculty that can transfer into the classroom.

Embrace Diversity. CoPs made up of participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences will provide rich contexts for engaging conversations about teaching, learning, and the evaluation of student learning in higher education. It is crucial that faculty be exposed to diverse perspectives based on backgrounds and experiences when seeking to learn new pedagogical strategies, including formative and summative practices to evaluate what students know and can do. In my study, faculty participants enjoyed learning from colleagues who had varying areas of content and pedagogical expertise: “So by being able to ask those questions of the community you're able to get different opinions and different viewpoints and share the experiences across the table.” Even though it might be more accessible to form CoPs with

faculty from similar fields of study, meeting as a community to learn about pedagogy and assessment practices is also a strong motivator for building shared practice, even if that is the only thing they have in common (Wenger et al., 2002).

Along with professional backgrounds, experiences and subject expertise diverse years in service, abilities and skillsets should also be encouraged when organizing a CoP. Blending novice faculty with veteran faculty in terms of years teaching in higher education can also result in balanced support for all participants. Faculty bring with them prior years' experiences from their profession and the classroom. For novice faculty, this can mean learning historically what seems to work and what doesn't when supporting their student population. For veteran faculty, perhaps it is about learning new ideas originating from outside of the institution: "You play off of each other's strengths and experiences in a way that now having the age difference and multi-generational faculty can go a long way as long as you're open-minded to it." Consequently, by encouraging diverse faculty participation in CoPs, institutions could create cross-departmental bridges that connect faculty throughout the university, potentially establishing institution-wide CoPs.

Relationships Matter. Relationships take time to develop. It takes time for faculty to build to a level of trust conducive to having conversations about teaching, learning and evaluating student learning in the classroom. Wenger et al. (2002) asserted that with the right structure in place, CoPs do build trusting relationships over time. Faculty participants in my study expressed that until they felt comfortable enough with the other participants in their CoP, they hesitated to share too much about their perceived strengths and weakness: "You start to learn over time who among your colleagues you can be more open with or less open when with, which is why I keep going back because I've become more comfortable."

Building relationships that form social bonds are just as important as building relationships that foster trust. Both are necessary for deeper, interpersonal relationships to emerge. There was evidence that suggested social relationships motivated the faculty participants to continue attending their CoP meetings. They enjoyed getting together with colleagues and discussing their common and unique approaches to problem solving. As time went by, a sense of community established through their engagement in practice: “A big thing with a community of practice isn't necessarily the practice as much as it is the community. It's the fact that you know now you're part of a team.” Findings in my study indicate a need for higher education administration and faculty leaders to organize and provide ongoing, consistent and dedicated time throughout the year for team building and relationships to form within the CoPs.

Encourage Inquiry. CoP facilitators or faculty leaders should set up inquiry-based approaches to guide faculty through conversations about teaching, learning and evaluating student learning. For faculty to be fully engaged in their own professional learning, they must first engage in metacognitive and reflective practices to identify the need to acquire a particular skill (Temperley et al., 2008 & Knowles, 1975). CoP participants should be encouraged to be the stewards of their own learning through inquiry. As owners of their own learning, it is more likely that they will be better prepared to engage each other in inquiry-based conversations designed to analyze their students' learning and their own learning in order to identify areas of weaknesses and strengths. Faculty engaged in CoPs must also be certain that they will receive appropriate levels of support as they implement any new pedagogical and assessment practices. They need to know that they can rely on the administration and faculty leaders as well as their colleagues within their CoP as they make even small changes to their professional practice in the classroom.

The quality and effectiveness of inquiry-based approaches will be enhanced through the diversity of its CoP participants. The findings in my study show evidence at the importance of CoP diversity, especially when it comes to conversations about pedagogy and the evaluation of student learning. Just as the faculty participants enjoyed the diverse perspectives other CoP participants provided, they also appreciated the depth of thought that went into collective problem-solving stemming from the variety of perspectives. Establishing CoPs that have the aforementioned diversity characteristics will enrich inquiry-based conversations, allowing for more varied solutions and options and, overall, a balanced sounding board.

Scholarship. Participation in a university sponsored CoP should be recognized as a genuine form of academic study or scholarship. Surely, in order for higher education administration and faculty leaders to consider this, formal processes must be put in place to ensure that faculty actively engage in conversation with colleagues as a process for developing sound pedagogical practices within the classroom. There is ample research that addresses higher education faculty engaging in professional development to improve their teaching efficacy. Certainly, institutes of higher education have benefited from such research including those that have implemented policies on professional development and established centers for teaching and learning. Unfortunately, there is also evidence that these types of initiatives are not as effective as once expected (Temperley et al., 2008). Findings in my study reveal that some faculty participants were very thoughtful about their conversations with colleagues and the structure of their time during CoP meetings: “We took our community very seriously and we had very structured, well-planned, and thought-out goals and outcomes that we were striving to accomplish.”

Recognizing the limitations of this study, these findings, however, should not be overlooked when considering CoP participation as a form of scholarship. Wenger et al. (2002) stressed the importance of establishing the CoPs value within the organization. They argued that when an organization acknowledges the value in its CoPs, the knowledge and skill of its participants is then acknowledged and legitimized. Additionally, it must not be overlooked that faculty engagement in a CoP shows commitment to their learning, the learning of their students, and the value of the institution.

Future Research

This phenomenological study focused on the universal experiences of nine higher education faculty in CoPs. It is recommended that future research extend the limitations of this study. All of the qualitative data from this study was collected from one, non-profit, teaching university in the Northeast. Further study of higher education faculty attitudes, beliefs, and perceived transformation of professional practice evolving from CoP experiences would provide more information for higher education administration and faculty leaders as they best determine how to establish or cultivate existing institution-wide CoPs.

Further investigations could include a mixed-methods study to learn the impact institutional culture has on CoPs as they transition through the stages of development defined by Wenger et al., (2002). A study of this nature could also involve learning more about faculty experiences in CoPs, including an examination of the influence faculty participating in CoPs have on their peers across the institution. Several faculty participants spoke about sharing information gathered during CoP meetings with colleagues outside of their respective CoPs. It would benefit higher education administration and faculty leaders to learn more about how to leverage different types of relationships across departments and throughout the institution to

foster more CoPs as a primary way to build an infrastructure that fosters collaborative work as it relates to professional practice and student achievement.

Further analysis of Wenger's (1991) initial inventory for CoPs, which identified the different components of social theory of learning and faculty identity through participation in their CoP is highly recommended. As identified in my study, faculty professional identity is influenced by their disciplined-based identities, perceived level of pedagogical expertise, and participation in a CoP.

Some faculty participants in this study acknowledged their engagement as being on the periphery of the CoP: "Well, I'm not that kind of a personality, so it seems that I'm absorbing." Wenger's (1991) earlier work regarding participation in CoPs stressed that not all experiences are equally important or significant, yet they all shape our experience of identity. It is important that when higher education administration and faculty leaders establish or cultivate existing CoPs, they have relevant information guiding them in determining institution-wide CoP expectations. Therefore, future studies should investigate levels of faculty participation in a CoP and their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about their professional identity.

Additional research on the different contexts of CoPs and faculty experience is also recommended. My study collected data from nine faculty members who individually participated in one or more of the four different university sponsored CoPs. As mentioned in Chapter III, two CoPs were part of a program organized by the university's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The other two CoPs were university sponsored, but without the expectations of the CTL program. Based on the findings of my study, further investigations could concentrate on the differing contexts, expectations, responsibilities, and other CoP norms and faculty perceptions of professional practice and identity. Higher education administration and faculty leaders would

benefit from learning more about different CoP structures when deciding how best to engage faculty in relevant conversations about teaching, learning, and supporting students throughout programs.

Finally, future research on faculty participation in CoPs and impact on student learning is highly recommended. This study focused on faculty perceptions about their professional practice evolving from CoP engagement. Several faculty participants did perceive both collaborative practices and transformation of practice within the classroom setting resulting from engagement in their respective CoPs. Therefore, future mixed-methods research could build upon my study by investigating the impact faculty participation in a CoP has on student learning or the student experience. Does engagement in conversations about different classroom strategies, formative feedback, rubric use, and summative assessments influence faculty decisions made in the classroom? Do faculty perceive change(s) in professional identity and practice resulting from this type of relevant conversation? Do students perceive a positive change in their classroom experience? Again, my research could not determine any of these questions, but they are certainly worth investigating.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to answer how higher education faculty participating in CoPs describe perceived change(s) to their professional practice. Consequently, this study tells the story of nine faculty participants' experiences in four different university-sponsored CoPs. My goal was to reveal the universal essence of these experiences to create a collective representation of what happens when faculty engage in relevant conversations about their own pedagogical practices in relation to student learning.

This study found that the nine faculty participants were dedicated to improving their professional practice in the classroom to better support their students. They attended their CoPs to discuss new ideas about pedagogical strategy, share problems, and collaborate to form solutions. Descriptions of their experiences within their CoPs included essential layers, which seemed to cultivate their continued participation. Common threads surfaced from the data that appeared to revolve around the relationships they formed within their CoP. These relationships fostered a sense of belonging to each CoP which supported faculty participants as they learned more about themselves as learners and professionals.

This research can serve higher education administration and faculty leaders as they work together in pursuit of sustainable reforms and the continuous improvement of professional practice in order to support their students. For higher education administration and faculty who question the value of CoPs in higher education, the findings outlined in this study provide evidence that implementing CoPs in their respective colleges or universities does promote relevant professional dialogue about teaching, learning, and assessment.

I will caution however, that establishing and cultivating CoPs takes time. The data from this study suggests that relationships must be allowed to develop to foster CoP environments suitable for faculty with various backgrounds and comfort levels so that transformation of professional practice in the classroom can occur. Higher education faculty who participate in CoPs leave the perceived safety of their classroom to engage in conversations that may challenge their perceptions of who they are professionally. In time, the CoPs will successfully establish the sense of community necessary to build relationships that develop in order to sustain. I return to two quotes from Chapter IV, which summarize the phenomenon of interest: “This is my group! These are my people!” and “A big thing with a community of practice isn't necessarily the

practice as much as it is the community. It's the fact that you know now you're part of a team.”

With institutional support and time to develop, CoPs can offer institutes of higher education a way to build collective, institution-wide responsibility to ensure all students meet their highest academic potential.

References

- Association of American Colleges and Universities' (1985). Integrity in the college curriculum: A report to the academic community. The project on redefining the meaning and purpose of baccalaureate degrees. Washington, D.C.
- Astin, A.W., Green, K.C., and Korn, W.S. (1987). The American freshman: Twenty-year trend, 1966-1985, Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, Graduate School of Education. University of California.
- Banta, T. W. (1996). Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles To Work on College Campuses. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104.
- Baumgartner, L. M. (2012). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning from 1975 to present. The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice, 99–115. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blanton, M. L., & Stylianou, D. A. (2009). Interpreting a community of practice perspective in discipline-specific professional development in higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, 34(2), 79–92.
- Brown J. S. and Duguid P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities of practice: Towards a unified view of working, learning and innovation. *Organizational Science*, 2, pp. 40–57.
- Clyde, M., Hyde, A., & Drennan, J. (2013) Professional identity in higher education.
- Craig, R. (2015). College Disrupted: The Great Unbundling of Higher Education. Macmillan.
- Cox, A. (2004). What are communities of practice? A comparative review of four seminal works. University, Loughborough, UK.

- Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 97 (Spring 2004), 5–23.
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation Home Page. (n.d.). Retrieved May 4, 2015, from <http://chea.org/>
- Daly, C. J. (2011). Faculty learning communities: Addressing the professional development needs of faculty and the learning needs of students. *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, 4(1), 3–16.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Developing Faculty Learning Communities. (n.d.). Cox, M. D. Retrieved from: www.units.miamioh.edu/flc/index.php.
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- Dufour, R., Dufour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- DuFour, R., & Mattos, M. (2013). How do principals really improve schools. *Educational Leadership*, 70(7), 34–40.
- Engin, M. & Atkinson, F. (2015). Faculty learning communities: A model for supporting curriculum changes in higher education. *International journal of teaching and learning in higher education*, 27(2), 164–174.
- Foden, F. (1989). *The examiner. James Booth and the origins of common examinations*. Leeds: School of Continuing Education.

- Fullan, Michael. (2011). *Change leader*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
- Green, M.F. (2011). Lost in translation: Degree definition and quality in a globalized world. *Change: the Magazine of Higher Learning*, 43(5), 18–27.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. London: Routledge.
- Hersh, R. H. & Keeling, R. P. (2013). *Changing institutional culture to promote assessment of higher education*. National Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment.
- Hilliard, A. T. (2012). Practices and value of a professional learning community in higher education. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 5(2), 71–74.
- Hutchings, P. (2010) *Opening doors to faculty involvement in assessment practices*. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.
- Hutchings, P. (2011). From departmental to disciplinary assessment: Deepening faculty engagement. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 43(5), 36–43.
- Kasworm, C. E., & Bowles, T. A. (2012). Fostering transformative learning in higher education settings. *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 388–407.
- Kezar, A., & Maxey, D. (2014). Student outcomes assessment among the new non-tenure-track faculty majority. *Occasional Paper*, (21).
- Kimmell, S. L., Marquette, R. P., & Olsen, D. H. (1998). Outcomes assessment programs: Historical perspective and state of the art. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 13(4), 851.
- Knowles, M. (1973). *The adult learner: a neglected species*. Houston: Gulf.

- Knowles, M. (1984) *The adult learner: a neglected species* (3rd ed.) Houston: Gulf.
- Kuh, G. D., & Whitt, E. J. (1986). *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, No. 1). Washington: The George Washington University.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, J. C. K., Zhang, Z., & Yin, H. (2011). A multilevel analysis of the impact of a professional learning community, faculty trust in colleagues and collective efficacy on teacher commitment to students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(5), 820–830.
- Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*.
- Little, J. W. (2006). Professional development and professional community in the learner-centered school.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: a data collector's field guide*.
- Mentkowski, M., & Doherty, A. (1984). *Careering after college: Establishing the validity of abilities learned in college for later careering and professional performance*. Final Report to the National Institute of Education. Overview and Summary. [Revised.].
- Merriam, S.B. & Bierema, L.L. (2014). *Adult Learning Theory: Linking theory and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in process*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand

- Oaks, CA: Sage. Miller.
- Miles, M., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. *Qualitative Data Analysis. A Methods Sourcebook*. 2014.
- Morphew, C., & Eckel, P. (Eds.). (2009). Privatizing the public university: Perspectives from across the academy. *Choice Reviews Online*, 47(03), 47-1548-47-1548. doi: 10.5860/CHOICE.47-1548
- National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* (1983).
- New Leadership Alliance For Student Learning And Accountability (2012) *Committing To Quality: Guidelines For Assessment And Accountability In Higher Education*. 1st ed. Washington, DC: New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability, 2012. Print.
- Omidvar, O. and Kislov, R. (2014). The evolution of the communities of practice approach: Toward knowledgeability in a landscape of practice. An interview with Etienne Wenger-Trayner. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 23(03), 266–275. DOI: 10.1177/1056492613505908
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rhoades, G. (2007). The study of the academic profession. In P. J. Gumport (Ed.), *Sociology of higher education. Contributions and their contexts* (pp. 113–146). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers College Press.

Smith, B. L. (2013). The challenge of learning communities as a growing national movement.

Retrieved from www.aacu.org.

Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, National Institute of Education/U.S. Department of Education (1984). *Involvement in learning: Realizing the potential of American higher education*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education/Department of Education.

Teeter, C., Fenton, N., Nicholson, K., Flynn, T. (2011). "Using communities of practice to foster faculty development in higher education." *Collected essays on learning and teaching (CELT)* (4).

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80–91.

Wilbrink, B. (1997). Assessment in historical perspective. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. 23. pp. 31–43.

U.S. Department of Education, (2011). Department of Education Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2011-2014. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/strat/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education, (2014). Department of Education Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2014-2018. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/strat/index.html>

VanVan Meter, E., & Murphy, J. (1997). *Using ISLLC standards to strengthen preparation programs in school administration*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Van Manen, M. (2011). A Resource for phenomenological inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/methodology/reductio/>

phenomenological-reduction/

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., & Snyder, W. (2000). *Communities of practice: The organizational frontier*. Harvard

Business Review. January-February, pp. 139–145.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A*

guide to managing knowledge. Harvard Business Press.

Werking R. H., Wilson P. & Hassenger R., (1986). *Review of Intergrity in the college*

curriculum: Three perspectives. The University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4307968>

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2006). Examining the teaching life. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6),

26–29.

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Proposal # 2015-086

Research Proposal Cover Page Issued by the IRB

The following is to be filled out by the principal investigator of the proposed study:

Researcher(s) involved with the proposed study:

Lisa Desruisseaux

Date Submitted:

11/23/2015

Address of Principal Investigator:

60 N. Gate Rd
Manchester, NH 03104
ldesruisseaux@snhu.edu

Title of proposal:

Communities of Practice: Professional Practices and the Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty

Type of Review: Exempt ☐ Expedited ☒ Full ☐

The Decision of the Committee is as follows:

☐ Approved

☒ Approved with the following recommendations/ comments:

I am a member of a CoP on campus.

☐ Disapproved

Comments:

Reviewer(s) Signature(s):

Christina J. Clapp

12/17/15

Chris CB

12/12/15

Paul R.

12/16/15

Chair, IRB

Date

Provost/VPAA

Date

Appendix B

Communities of Practice: The Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty

Consent Form for Research

Name of Principal Investigator

Lisa R. Desruisseaux

Doctoral Candidate

School of Education/Southern New Hampshire University

Contact

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Lisa Desruisseaux via email l.desruisseaux@snhu.edu or phone (603) 582-1880.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the SNHU IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the IRB, contact Thomas Beraldi at t.beraldi@snhu.edu or 603-645-9695.

Recipients

This informed consent form is for higher education faculty members who have in the past or continue to participate in a community of practice sponsored by the university.

Introduction

I am Lisa Desruisseaux, a doctoral candidate in the Ed. D. in Educational Leadership Program here at Southern New Hampshire University. I am conducting a research study to capture the shared experiences of faculty members participating in a community of practice. The essence of the shared experiences will be based on the most accurate depiction of faculty members' descriptions of their perceived changes in professional practice that evolve from community of practice participation.

I am inviting you to be part of this research. Prior to making your decision, feel free to talk with anyone you feel comfortable with about this study. If you would like additional information about the study, please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Purpose of this Research

This researcher is recommending that institutes of higher education adopt the communities of practice model as the framing for ongoing professional development for their faculty. For faculty, this model would provide ongoing, dedicated time to participate in robust conversations that include the sharing of different perspectives and understandings about the professional practice of instruction and assessment, and the impact on student learning.

This type of professional development model is an answer to the continuing criticisms of higher education. Specifically, higher education faculty continue to experience scrutiny concerning public and political perceptions around lowered academic standards, the validity and reliability of course grades, and students' lack of basic skills and knowledge to be successful in the workforce. On top of that, higher education institutions, in general, continue to be held to increasingly stricter accreditation requirements including the development and implementation of institution-wide assessment systems.

Consequently, higher education faculty need a different professional development paradigm in order to meet these demands. We must establish relevant robust professional development opportunities that offer high levels of engagement with a focus on student achievement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to capture the shared experiences of faculty participants and the descriptions of their perceived changes in professional practice that evolve from a community of practice. This study seeks to answer the question: How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe change(s) in their professional practice?

Type of Research Intervention

This research study will involve your participation in 1 or 2 1:1 interviews. Each interview will take one hour.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you have prior or current experience in a community of practice that is sponsored by Southern New Hampshire University.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to not participate, your involvement in the university-sponsored community of practice will not change. Your decision about whether to participate in this study will not impact your current position at the university or any work-related evaluations or reports. If you choose to participate and change your mind at any time during the study, you may stop participating.

Procedures

I am asking you to participate in this study to learn more about how faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice. If you accept, you will be asked to participate in a one hour, 1:1 interview and potential follow up interviews with myself. The interviews will be conducted virtually at a date and time that is convenient for you. During the interview, if you do not wish to answer any question, you may let me know and I will skip to the next question. The interview will be recorded and stored in a passcode protected hard drive until transcribed. The information recorded will be confidential, and no one else will have access to the information documented during your interview. During the interview, your name will not be revealed.

Following your interview, I may request time to observe you in your classroom working with students or colleagues. You are not obligated to accept this request. Your decision to accept or decline this potential request will not have any impact on the use of your data, your current position at the university or any work-related evaluations or reports. If you accept the request to observe but change your mind at any time after, you just need to let me know.

Prior to your interview, you will receive via email an electronic survey provided and then collected by me. The survey will collect demographic information and will be stored in a passcode protected hard drive attached to my computer. No one else will have access to your demographic information. Your name will not be kept on the survey, only a code will identify you and no one else but me will have access to that information.

Duration

This research will take place over the spring semester, beginning in February 2016. During that time, you will be interviewed one time for one hour. You may be asked to participate in follow up interviews or observations.

Risks

I am asking that you share your perceived changes in professional practice based on your participation in a community of practice. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any question or take part in follow up interviews or observations if you do not wish to do so, that is fine. You are not obligated to give a reason for not answering a question, participating in follow up interviews or observations. Every attempt will be made to maintain a comfortable, non-judgmental atmosphere during the interview(s), and potential observations.

Benefits

Although you will not receive a direct benefit, your participation in this study will add to the research about higher education faculty participation in communities of practice. The intent of this research is to inform higher education administration and faculty leaders' decision-making regarding faculty professional development and overall student success.

Compensation

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in this research.

Confidentiality

I will not be sharing any information about your involvement in this research. Survey data, interview data and potential observation data will be kept confidential. Any information about you or shared by you will be codified. I will be the only person who has access to this information and it will be kept in my passcode protected hard drive.

Sharing the Results

Nothing that you share during the interview(s) or potential observation will be attributed to you by name. The information that you share with me will be shared with you prior to sharing with the public. I will organize member check-ins with you to ensure that I am describing your perceptions and descriptions with accuracy.

Rights to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research and choosing to not participate will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in any way. You may stop participating in the research at any time. I will organize member check-ins to provide you with opportunity to modify or remove portions of your responses if I did not understand you correctly.

Communities of Practice: The Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty**Certificate of Consent**

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate

Dear (name),

My name is Lisa Desruisseaux and I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed. D. Educational Leadership Program at Southern NH University. I received your name from the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. She recommended that I invite you to be part of my research study to investigate the shared experiences of faculty members participating in a community of practice (CoP).

My study asks: *How do faculty members participating in a community of practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?*

Why get involved?

Your participation in this study will add to the research about higher education faculty participation in CoPs as it relates to administrative and leadership decision-making. Specifically, the intent of this research is to investigate the shared experiences of faculty members' participation in a CoP, and the descriptions of their perceived changes in professional practice as a result of this participation.

Details:

- Your participation in this research study would be voluntary.
- Your participation will consist of 1 or 2 one-hour interviews with me (1:1).
- Interviews will be conducted virtually (in the comfort of your own home perhaps?)
 - Skype/Lync, Google Hangout, Adobe Connect (your choice)
- Exact date(s) and time(s) TBD –We can work out a date/time that fits your schedule.
- Interview Timeline March – April

- Please let me know whether or not you are interested no later than Friday, March 4, 2016.

Interested?

Attached to this email is my formal Consent Form. If you are interested, please carefully read the form and sign the Certificate of Consent located at the end of the form. Feel free to sign the certificate electronically or by hand and return the signed document to me via

l.desruisseaux@snhu.edu

Short Demographic Survey

I would like to collect demographic data for my study. Once you sign the Certificate of Consent and submit it to me, click [HERE](#) for the link to my secure survey monkey account.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this study. Please feel free to contact me via email or my personal cell phone [REDACTED] with any questions.

Appendix D

Electronic Survey

Community of Practice Participant Survey

Welcome to the Community of Practice Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey.

The purpose of this survey is to collect demographic data that will inform me of potential research participants' past and current experience in a community of practice.

Before taking this survey, please make certain that you have signed and submitted the Consent Form for Research (Communities of Practice: The Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty) to Lisa Desruisseaux via email: l.desruisseaux@snhu.edu.

1. What is your first and last name?

2. What is your Southern New Hampshire University email address?

3. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

4. Which school/college within the university are you affiliated with?

5. What is your current role at Southern New Hampshire University?

6. Which describes your current faculty status?

7. About how many years have you been in your current position?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ At least 1 year but less than 3 years
- ☐ At least 3 years but less than 5 years
- ☐ At least 5 years but less than 10 years
- ☐ 10 years or more

8. What is the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree

9. About how many years have you worked in higher education?

- ☐ Less than 5 years
- ☐ At least 5 years but less than 10 years
- ☐ At least 10 years but less than 15 years
- ☐ At least 15 years but less than 20 years
- ☐ At least 20 years but less than 25 years
- ☐ 25 years or more

10. About how many years have you participated in a community of practice?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ At least 1 year but less than 3 years
- ☐ At least 3 years but less than 5 years
- ☐ At least 5 years but less than 10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Communities of Practice: The Shared Experiences of Higher Education Faculty

Research Question, “How do faculty members participating in a Community of Practice describe perceived change(s) in professional practice?”

Procedural

Be sure to be mindful of the time. Use a timer and adjust questioning to keep within 60-minute window.

1. Thank the interviewee for their time.

2. Introduce yourself to the interviewee and briefly explain the purpose of the interview.

3. Frame the purpose so that the interviewee sees how the research may help their efforts.
 Let them know that the interview is designed to take 60 minutes.

4. Ask the interviewee if they have signed the consent form and if they have any questions prior to the interview.

5. Let them know that in order to efficiently capture the data and the essence of the interview, you would like to record the interview.

6. Ask the interviewee for permission to record the interview. If they do not give permission. Let them know of your understanding and make adjustments to take notes.
7. Talk about member check-in: that I will be checking in with them to share my analysis of transcript to make certain I have represented their thoughts appropriately.
8. When starting the recording, state that the interviewee has agreed to the recording.
9. Set the timer and begin with the interview questions.
10. If there is a need based on the conversation, ask if a follow up interview or an observation can be scheduled.

Anchor Questions:

1. What are your Community of Practice (CoP) meetings like?
This question is intended to be the foundation of the interview.
2. How is this different from your initial community of practice meetings? How is the experience different now from the way it was in the beginning?
3. What will your community of practice look like in the next five years? What do you anticipate is the future of your CoP? Based on your experiences within the CoP, what do you think that it is going to look like?

4. What do you think about the topics covered during your community of practice meeting time? Now that you have engaged in a CoP, what do you think about the topics?
5. When did you perceive any changes?
6. Can you tell me about a time when you brought up a topic or made a suggestion during your CoP; how was it received? How are topics brought up or suggested in your CoP?
7. In your opinion, how will this influence future community of practice topics covered during your meeting time?

Procedural:

1. Thank the interviewee for their time.
2. Ask the interviewee if they have any questions.

Considerations:

- Probing questions will keep within the Community of Practice Theoretical Framework.
- Summarize key ideas back to the interviewee to ensure that the proper understandings of the answers are recorded.

Research Sub Questions

1. How do faculty describe perceived change(s) in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on their Community of Practice experiences?
2. How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice within a Community of Practice?

3. What collaborative professional practices evolving from Community of Practice experiences are perceived by faculty?
4. What statements made by Community of Practice participants illustrate the perceived transformation of professional practice within the classroom?

Appendix F

Coding Manual

How do faculty describe engagement in professional dialogue about their professional practice within a community of practice?

Sense of Belonging

Relationships: Social

CoP_1 I think that intimacy part and the way we grew as a sense of belonging as a group and got used to the group process really started to help

CoP_1 ...it was truly an opportunity to get to know people intimately, professionally.

CoP_2 ... we had that conversation on a regular basis and it allowed for relationship to develop across schools

CoP_2 I needed to have an intimate experience with colleagues in a community of practice...

CoP_3 ...getting to know other people and that was very important to me and I would never downplay that

CoP_4 I would always have coffee and tea, even though that sounds silly, because people might go there for the motivation to have a quick cup of coffee and then they stay and talk.

CoP_6 ...it's as much the official topic of the session as it is just the ability to be among colleagues

CoP_6 I just maybe need to be around other faculty members and be collegial and just commiserate or get ideas or get support

CoP_6 We spend a good part of our day with our students, ... and there's not necessarily a lot of social time.

CoP_6 ... being around other people who are in a similar role and may or may not be experiencing similar day-to-day activities...

CoP_6 I definitely feel like I know these people a little bit better...

CoP_6 I wonder if we'll get to a point where it just becomes a more social than anything.

CoP_7 ...most of the people in my department don't go to them so it it's actually like a social meeting.

CoP_7 I've gotten to know some of them and they'll ask me how my daughter is doing and that's really cool.

CoP_7 we were coming down the hill, after the meeting, It was a little icy... He grabbed my arm...so I wouldn't fall... if we hadn't gone to those meetings together I don't think he would have felt comfortable to grab my arm and help me down the hill.

CoP_7 ...those are kind of the foundations that when you go to the meeting and you get to know these people it's good.

CoP_7 I would never have known him so now that I see him on the campus we can chat say, hey how you doing?

CoP_7 I wouldn't have had those experiences without being able to take an hour once or twice a month and just kind of talk about those things.

Sense of Belonging

Relationships: Learning

CoP_1 ...and valuing each other's thoughts and what they are sharing

CoP_1 I learn from other people, number 1, that we all have similar needs

CoP_1 I've gotten to know you enough and I want to learn more from you.

CoP_1 I learned a lot about people I would not typically have had the opportunity or taken the time to get to know and what they do.

CoP_1 And maybe even value what people are all over struggling with and what they do the best.

CoP_2 It's a very intimate group so not only do we share connections as a community many of us are on the same faculty committees

CoP_3 They had a lot of very good, positive things to say and instruct the rest of us.

CoP_3 ...what was valuable for me and maybe it was on a meta-level...the opportunity to actually talk about... actually engaging in the topic in a different way with colleagues who I don't see and you know, except the opening day of the semester

CoP_3 To keep open the potential for perhaps new ideas and learning about the ways that other people do things.

CoP_4 ... the relationship just broadens and it's not teaching, it's not just learning, it's mentoring, advising.

CoP_4 It's helping one another out through the rough spots...

CoP_4 ...we learn from each other's passion for what we're doing and a lot of times that involves not just the formal discipline related concepts but it involves everything becoming practical and meaningful...

CoP_4 ...my enthusiasm gets boosted by their enthusiasm, and their enthusiasm gets boosted by mine and that passion becomes very interactive.

CoP_4 But you're also learning emotionally in a deeper way.

CoP_4 My passion gets ignited when I'm dealing with somebody and then in a give-and-take, it becomes almost a total involvement

CoP_4 ...his passion for this really got me ignited and involved...

CoP_4 We teach each other and the students who take it.

CoP_4 We ended up realizing that even though we were from different disciplines our sense of learning communities of experiential learning were very similar.

CoP_4 ...there's a shared understanding that allows us to critique each other well both positive and critically so I would say that's a big factor.

CoP_4 So, in a kind of way I don't want to say you become an alter ego but you become a shared ego in a way.

CoP_4 ...on the professional side we have a really valuable thing

CoP_4 Then we're able to be professional and be humorous at the same time which the students just seem to like

CoP_4 ...I would say I had something and somebody who we can share experiences and learn from each other;

CoP_4 somebody who in some ways in some ways is different as we are personality-wise has a common core and we share our passion

CoP_4 And we tell each other both professional and anecdotal stories about how things are going, about what we've learned from each other.

CoP_4 because I think we just want to share our experiences and what's working.

CoP_5 ...we talk about other things which are all related to teaching so it's not a bad thing to do that and it ends up being kind of an organic, for lack of a better word, meeting when we get together.

CoP_5 ...that's probably why we were a part of the Community of Practice as well, just to learn from each other and hear what works for other people and it may or may not always work for us but at least it gives us something to go by that could be a different perspective.

CoP_5 I think that's the part that energizes me that's what energizes me.

CoP_5 just being energized about what someone else is doing even though I'm not fully a part of that.

CoP_5 hearing about it, it's so great to hear you know...

CoP_5 I'm not going to get energized around what it is we're doing and talking about, not that I can't get energized by myself I can but generally I like to share with people too.

CoP_5 I get a lot of value from other people but hopefully I add some value.

CoP_5 We may not all agree on things and that's fine. We might not at all, that's ok.

CoP_6 it doesn't matter what the topic is it's more just hearing other people's experiences and learning from them

CoP_6 ... just being able to interact with other faculty members and in the hopes of learning what they're doing

CoP_6 ...sort of an assumption that we're all here to learn and you can walk away from here with nothing you could walk away from here with an idea...

CoP_6 ...it was really cool that she gave her time to do that and shared an idea...

CoP_6 ...the situation being smaller and more intimate and more questions...

CoP_6 ...whoever is in the room and needs to hear a particular thing ...becomes the student of the rest of us... the next time someone else's the sharer and someone else is the student

CoP_6 ... there are some people who I probably won't agree with ... but I still find their perspective interesting

CoP_6 ...that people are there because they want to help and they want to be helped

CoP_7 I like to just listen to what they're saying... because they're so creative...

CoP_7 One thing I love to hear about is how other people approach other situations

CoP_7 Because you learn from other people and not that everything that they talk about you can implement but it's just really neat ideas.

CoP_7 They've given me ideas to enrich my class.

CoP_8 That there are other people you can bounce ideas off of or turn to for help or support. I think that's a big part of it...

CoP_8 ...so that would lead to kind of a spirited debate even a little bit of an argument with one of the other professors ...So ... those kinds of discussions can come out of the community of practice too and I think they can lead to a better understanding.

CoP_8 So it is sort of like picking it up by osmosis from hanging out with them

CoP_9 ... if you know that someone is not going to be excited about hearing some news...you taper down the way you deliver it even though you want to be jumping off a building and shouting and I'm typically the one who's jumping up the building and shouting, but not in this case.

CoP_9 The difference is these are all the things that I'm doing and I want you to see them. I want you to experience them. I want you to give me ideas, versus I'm doing all these things over here but I'm only giving glimpses of what's being done.

Sense of Belonging

Community

CoP_1 In the formal setting, there is a little bit more, to use the word community established because we use the same people.

CoP_1 You have all common reading or theme and when you get to the meeting you're all focused

CoP_1 If you belong to a group you can go to the next level, that sense of belonging

CoP_1 I'm with you and we're in a community of practice.

CoP_1 I made a commitment to that formal [group] and I feel a sense of responsibility

CoP_1 That sense of commitment, because of a sense of belonging we're all in this together I don't want to let you down. I want to contribute because you're contributing to me so I want to contribute to you...

CoP_1 I just want to do what everybody else seems to be doing.

CoP_1 Then there's a group of people who are saying, maybe we can do better and we can put our collective heads together?

CoP_1 This is my group; these are my people!

CoP_1 Maybe you don't have as much at stake in the informal group.

CoP_1 You know at stake is a commitment to learn.

CoP_2 it was really interesting to see even though we were from different disciplines, different schools we were still facing similar frustrations, similar obstacles...

CoP_2 ...so for me, being fairly new to the [school] community it was really kind of encouraging to see that other faculty members were experiencing the same frustrations.

CoP_2 For me, that keeps me very motivated to want to attend the meetings, to participate to want to be involved because at least in that community, everyone understands each other's language.

CoP_2 ...and then all of a sudden all of us coming together into one cohesive community...

CoP_2 And so now that we're in these communities this year I feel like we're making progress.

CoP_2 those experiences together builds the community...

CoP_2 ...I'm able to kind of understand from a personal perspective exactly what they're talking about when we sit around the table so it reinforces the relationship and the goals that were all striving for collectively....

CoP_2 ...I didn't feel that no one understood the language I was speaking...

CoP_2 I'm fortunate to have the community of practice

CoP_2 We're all on the same page together, we're not trying to out do one another...

CoP_2 Actually from the beginning, I felt like our community has been open and accepting. I've never felt a sense of not belonging.

CoP_2 I've always felt very welcome.

CoP_2 I've always felt that everyone around the table is in the same game together. We want to help each other, and assist each other.

CoP_2 we took our community very seriously and we had very structured well-planned and thought-out goals and outcomes that we were striving to accomplish

CoP_3 ...last few meetings that I've attended the focus was really on addressing concerns that people like myself have.

CoP_3 ...we were already there because we already agree with the value of such experiences...

CoP_4 ... [CoP meetings] it becomes more personalized.

CoP_4 ...the relationship becomes less hierarchical and more egalitarian...

CoP_4 It's just that you have a designed time and place and maybe even a topic but it's still very... there's a real casual collegiality in a good sense if that makes sense.

CoP_4 ...every so many weeks we'd have a general topic where people could come in and talk about how to do things and share information.

CoP_5 I think having other people, meaning all of my big picture community of practice, all of my colleagues to talk to... was great...

CoP_5 ...really the folks who are going to those types of sessions, the people who I'm talking to are the people who are all in and they're looking to accomplish the same thing; maybe not the same exact way but trying to accomplish the same thing, which is good.

CoP_6 ...they all maybe have a common interest in improving and improving themselves as faculty and for the for the students that we're teaching.

CoP_6 ...because the community changes because the ideas and topics change each time we meet... it's more reactive.

CoP_6 ...if I'm going to do anything, these are some of the people that I probably want to be doing that with.

CoP_7 it's such a neat group that once they get started on something, they are so passionate that they just keep going.

CoP_7 And sometimes it's really interesting to just listen to other departments just so you can see what they're going through.

CoP_7 When you see them on campus, somewhere else, you have that connection and you can say hi.

CoP_7 Without those meetings, I would not have had the connections

CoP_7 How would I have felt overall? I wouldn't have felt connected. Definitely not as connected. I would know fewer people and I would not feel as connected.

CoP_8 ...the people who attended this community of practice... it's almost all of the usual suspects.

CoP_8 They are clearly putting in the time outside of the classroom and are there because they want to be not because someone you know we'd like you to attend this.

CoP_8 You know there's definitely some picking on each other in a fun way that goes along with it too. It's a really informal conversation but yet I think we help each other a little bit more with resolving classroom issues.

CoP_8 a big thing with a community of practice isn't necessarily the practice as much as it is the community. It's the fact that you know now you're part of a team.

CoP_8 Where for me, it's more about the community and meeting with people that I like and respect than necessarily sitting down specifically to come up with a policy or practice. It's the people end of it.

CoP_8 That's what it feels like and I think it is kind of like as we've gotten to know each other better and appreciate our skills and approaches, it's not that bad anymore

CoP_8 But it's kind of cool seeing some of us that are maybe a little bit longer in the tooth a little bit older with maybe some more life experience and then coming together as a team and then all the sudden those barriers are down

CoP_8 You play off of each other's strengths and experiences in a way that now having the age difference and multi-generational faculty can go a long way as long as you're open-minded to it

CoP_9 I think the main difference is that there are more people who don't want to put up with it [the behavior] than they were before and aren't going to continue.

CoP_9 there are some that are more process-oriented or they want to have time to think and can never do that because there's no space for that, which is what I try to create but it just doesn't happen.

CoP_9 Because the people who are doing it [resisting] should be retiring and they're burned out and they have gotten burned

CoP_9 it's been viewed as a club, a joiner, a commonality, a bonding point and it isn't that anymore. It's more of... a disconnect. It was a bonding. It was a mutual pity party

CoP_9 The group-think has shifted... Because I think that after a while you get sick of hearing the same thing and you just want to try something and you want to be able to do it

CoP_9 ...it's actually been described as lawyers in the same room but never really talking.

CoP_9 Because [negative] behaviors were allowed to continue for far too long and should have been nipped in the bud years ago and never were and therefore got out of control.

CoP_9 The norm was also to not like it [negative behavior] but never say anything...It squelches everything.

CoP_9 I think it [negative behavior] is accentuated based on resistance to want to deal with conflict by myself and others.

CoP_9 So what I'm looking at is creating a culture or the community practice that I want now versus the one that was handed to me.

CoP_9 [positive CoP meetings] It's energy flowing versus energy blocked... I think it is less...more natural, more flowing, it's less compartmentalize, more just the focus.

CoP_9 I think in any Community Practice, it is limited by the group-think... and the group think was... I can't do it, you can't do it.

CoP_9 If I could have found a way to short-circuit it and change it... I wish I could have, but I could not find a way to do it.

CoP_9 I wish that I could have figured out a way to do something differently ... because it's still my community.

Sense of Belonging

Isolation

CoP_1 I definitely feel less isolated, that's a specific change...

CoP_2 So it was like this light bulb went off that we are not directly working in silos. We are not in isolation

CoP_2 Well the best part about it is I don't feel isolated.

CoP_2 ...informal meetings, they just happen as you're wandering around the school and in the hallways or you say to somebody, "Stop by for 5 minutes. I want to chat about an idea."

CoP_5 ...as adjunct faculty you don't have as many touch points with other folks in the University.

CoP_5 I really think it's having those touch points where now and in the past I might have met with folks from time to time to talk about the classroom and what was going on but a lot of times you're on your own verses being here full-time being able to talk to people on a daily basis.

CoP_5 I think no one should work in a silo no matter what you're doing.

CoP_5 I mean what we do is so collaborative, I think it wouldn't be impossible (to work in a silo) but it wouldn't I don't think it would bode well for the students in the end

Trust and Respect

CoP_1 ... you do see people who are equally sharing...

CoP_1 ...there has grown a comfort level with knowing each other

CoP_1 And you would not have originally thought a group of people who don't know each other and now do know each other and trust each other and can laugh together.

CoP_1 When you have these conversations and you feel safe you can then ask questions or bring up subjects that you may feel a little bit unsettled by...

CoP_1 I don't know them so I haven't developed that trust or that connection with those people.

CoP_1 I think that sense of belonging again, it goes back to trust and rapport and comfort.

CoP_1 I realized I was taking more of a risk or some piece of a risk because these were my colleagues.

CoP_1 I did think, “What are they going to think? Is that going to sound stupid?” And you should see how many people put in qualifiers in like, “This might sound stupid, but...” I think those kind of expressions went away as the group gelled.

CoP_1 And again for me, initially, was that little uncertainty about how my comments would be received among my group of peers

CoP_1 Imposing my own feelings on or what I was feeling like at that time but if I tell them I'm doing this and then going to, what are they going to think of it?

CoP_1 ...we really listen to each other and I think it goes back to the respect and the trust and the sense of belonging

CoP_1 ...because members change, because there's no membership anybody can come. You haven't built that comfort level.

CoP_2 I've never questioned myself. I've never questioned, should I bring this up? Should I ask this question?

CoP_2 I've never felt embarrassed. I've never felt intimidated

CoP_2 You need to be able to vent your frustrations in an unbiased group.

CoP_2 ...where you didn't feel like no one was going to retaliate against you or take notes, like I'm going to report you or anything like that

CoP_2 where you can express your concerns in a very cooperative, supportive way; in a supportive manner to other individuals

CoP_4 ...once the trust and the bond are established what you are learning becomes very broad and what you were doing becomes brought out into many different ways of learning and practicing...

CoP_6 ...how I interact changes based on who the group is and how large of a group is because most people think I'm outgoing but I'm actually not.

CoP_6 I find groups intimidating and draining emotionally...My goal is to listen not necessarily to share and sometimes I do share...

CoP_6 ...in the smaller group where I'm a little more comfortable I'm more apt to ask questions...

CoP_6 I also come to either trust or consistently not agree with some of the things they say

CoP_6 I'm not afraid to speak my mind and how it relates to the disagreement thing.

CoP_6 I feel comfortable enough that there are times when I can speak and I won't necessarily be judged...and that is who the group is.

CoP_6 ...[They're] not just there because they have to be there so that lends itself to that sort of trust...

CoP_6 You start to learn over time who among your colleagues... you can be more open with or less open when with... which is why I keep going back because I've become more comfortable...

CoP_7 ...where the same people maybe talk a little bit too much which doesn't give other people enough time to even talk or feel capable of talking

CoP_8 We even got into some heated discussions about it in a good way. I think everybody was respectful for the exchange of ideas and differences of opinions but there certainly were quite a few differences

CoP_8 ...it felt like a really nice support group and we were able to bounce ideas off of each other without a whole lot of judgment taking place.

CoP_9 There would be hostility, there would be a few people dominating the conversation,
there would be a constant reminder of history

CoP_9 I am very aware of the fact that there are people in the room and in the meeting who
probably would like to say something but won't. I'm very aware that this is not a
discussion that it's a direction

CoP_9 I'm hesitant to bring up some information and then it happens...

How do faculty describe perceived change(s) in their attitudes and beliefs about their professional practice based on their community of practice experience?

Identity

The Self as a Learner

CoP_1 In the future I would like to continue it because now that I've experienced it I feel that, I feel that I've grown a little bit as a teacher and I definitely got a variety of um, and I've gotten things out of it and I've grown.

CoP_1 I think as I've been able to have the time to professionally talk with other colleagues, I'm a little kinder about myself thinking about my own practice.

CoP_1 I like it. I enjoyed the process and going more than I thought.

CoP_1 I am a good talker and I think I talked less and I was glad to let other people talk.

CoP_1 ...I think I became a better listener and took it seriously. It was great.

CoP_2 ...a year ago we were not and I personally was not at the stage I am now...

CoP_2 ...the topics that we've been covering [are] all the issues I've been dealing with day to day.

CoP_2 ...the topics are very relevant because they are things I'm interested in

CoP_2 So having that information has been tremendous because otherwise I wouldn't know where to start

CoP_3 really addressing maybe some of we older faculty who are more in the old days lecture format it so it was very pedagogical...

CoP_3 ...perhaps we need to be a little bit more aware of how our constituencies are different from when we started in the profession.

CoP_3 turn the classroom in a way that most of us hadn't been invested in or had any experience in before.

CoP_3 ...that sounds pretty compelling but sometimes I think beyond my capabilities.

CoP_3 ...what's interesting about it is that of course it generated a lot of debate and that in some ways had to do maybe with generational issues, although I don't think so entirely.

CoP_3 There were some who I think probably felt threatened. Those like, I've already lectured and that's good enough.

CoP_3 ...well I'm not that kind of a personality so it seems that I'm absorbing,

CoP_3 I would say that the community of practice has pushed me further in that direction.

CoP_3 ...not as much as they would have liked me to.

CoP_3 I think its value is going to be assuaging fears in people like myself and anxieties

CoP_4 So, you learn multimodal learning okay? You're not just learning from one since you're learning from multiple senses.

CoP_4 There were lots of evolving defining moments... and you realize why haven't I've been doing this all my life?

CoP_4 ...to the slow realization that something you've been doing is growing and changing and I would say in this motion has been the slowly evolving shining moments

CoP_4 ...and generally I'm told that the students and the students tell me how they appreciate the learning style.

CoP_4 Well some of this is personal, if I was to be fully honest; this is how I am most effective with students.

CoP_5 You would think after teaching this long you would have it down but students change, you change

CoP_5 It all takes time. It takes time to listen to people; it's kind of like my subject matter.

CoP_5 ...it takes time to implement different things that you want to implement and have your behavior change... All of that takes time and effort.

CoP_5 ... as to whether I've changed, I wouldn't say greatly, but maybe a little bit because I think we all change but we don't really realize it.

CoP_6 And someone would say, Yes, I'm doing this and I say well, I have done that before. Why am I not doing that now?"

CoP_6 It makes me feel like things are often easier than we make them out to be. I can choose to make a change and it can be fairly simple to do.

CoP_6 Those are the kind of things that are low risk if I try it doesn't work it's not the end of the world.... it's enough of a reward to make it a low-risk

CoP_6 I wonder if the level of interaction impacts my actually trying something?

CoP_6 ...I'll always listen and I'll always take something away

CoP_6 Then of course, I'm a creature of habit so I fallen out of using those skills but, but I do try to remind myself to use them.

CoP_6 I don't think I've ever walked away from something thinking that was a waste of time. I always get some nugget out of being there.

CoP_7 It was interesting and I never would have had that thought.

CoP_7 I want to get better and I can do that by watching other people, listening to other people and learning from their experiences.

CoP_8 I was not shy about bringing in my opinion

CoP_8 We even got into some heated discussions about it in a good way. I think everybody was respectful for the exchange of ideas and differences of opinions but there certainly were quite a few differences.

CoP_8 I think I'm a little bit more in line with some of the academic way of thinking. I understand a little bit more.

CoP_8 ... I think I've been able to make similar contributions too...

CoP_8 So I have a lot more respect for the people who've done it whereas probably before these community of practice meetings where I have learned more about it, I don't think I had that respect for it

CoP_8 It certainly has change my approach a little bit and made me realize that it's a big tent and we need both perspectives in there.

CoP_8 So what has it done to change me? It's change my attitude.

CoP_9 Physically I'm getting tense. I'm getting a headache. I am being very conscious of what I say or what I don't say.

CoP_9 Pretty soon I just shut down and just listen and then move on.

CoP_9 I don't think I've ever chosen not to [share]. I just haven't done it to the extent that I would have liked to.

CoP_9 ...was I impacted by how I was perceiving things and did I behave differently and the answer is yes.

CoP_9 I think it's attitude in the meeting and attitude outside. In the meeting, it's directly affected but outside by most it is not.

CoP_9 I would think long-term it [negative behavior] would create turnover, low morale, a desire to move, I mean long-term. I think in the short-term it has not, ...

CoP_9 For me I do my very best to leave everything outside the door when I walk in the classroom...Unfortunately...sometimes it takes 20 minutes to make that shift happened... If it takes me longer than that, then I feel it starts to affect the students.

Identity

Motivation

CoP_1 I have seen people pretty much walk away satisfied or turned on a little bit

CoP_1 It really made me want to continue. The experience made me want to continue in a community of practice whether will be this one or another one.

CoP_1 I notice right away that change about you.

CoP_1 ...initially I thought it was going to be more of a burden and then I started to look forward to it

CoP_1 There was no external reward. It was totally intrinsic we went for you, yourself, your own goals for getting better at what you did.

CoP_2 ...what we want to accomplish in our classrooms and that keeps me motivated.

CoP_2 It's encouraging and now they're coming to me as a resource...

CoP_3 ...basically saying this is possible, this is doable and it's not just aspirational...

CoP_5 ...sometimes they'll be something that I never heard of or something I've done but I haven't done for a while and I go, "Oh yeah. That's right and that was a good thing to do", "Oh yeah. I like that exercise I'm going to have to start doing that."

CoP_5 ...it gets me fired up to hear about it and think that could be something I could look into doing the future

CoP_5 But then that's just talking with people but all of the reading that I got into so it made me think about the practice of teaching and continue to again try to improve but getting more involved in some of the reading that I was reading made me rethink some of the way I teach as well.

CoP_5 So, changing the behavior I think that is the key piece and that's the ongoing piece that I can get energized by listening to people, by going to conferences, by talking to colleagues, by reading but then I need to implement which I do but again that isn't always super quick.

CoP_5 ...if I don't meet with that community of practice, and I don't implement and I don't I don't stop by colleagues' offices to chat with them, it's not going to happen.

CoP_5 ...to be working with people who kind of have the same energy and who want to reach our students because at the end of the day that's why were there.

CoP_5 I think it's hard to catch it and realize it.

CoP_6 ...that was just a new and exciting idea and I thought well, how can I do that in my class...

CoP_6 I do think there are times when I have the low-hanging fruit and I can go back to the class...

CoP_6 ...some of them are even things that I've done before... sometimes we just get caught up... I get reminded and I try them again.

CoP_7 Being able to listen to other people and see how they can motivate and excite classes, that's the kind of stuff that I like to listen to, and to see how I can apply.

CoP_8 ...listening to the other professors talk about how they use it and suddenly seeing some actual practical application ...it opened up my eyes

CoP_8 it's like kind of been like I've been allowed to be latent for a long time and all of a sudden waking up and I'm getting a little crazier than I used to be in a good way.

CoP_8 It's kind of fun going into a room and knowing that I'm definitely not the smartest person in the room

CoP_8 ...if you really want to do a community of practice right you have to put the time into it. You have to put time into it.

CoP_9 [There's] Impact on sharing. I don't think there's an impact on motivation.

Identity

Feeling Good About Practice

CoP_1 the light bulb turns on and it just feels good.

CoP_3 ...It's very minor and limited but if I can do something like that I think it's great.

CoP_4 ...the students will write a note that says to the effect that watching how we bounce off of each other is really important for how they learned they start early enjoy it by the way we tease each other.

CoP_4 ...having not just one but having two people doing the same thing validates my teaching

CoP_4 ...now groups on experiential learning and learning communities and research is coming out saying yes, this works and I feel pretty good about that.

CoP_4 I've grown and evolved as a teacher and I absolutely love it.

CoP_4 I'm having more fun and I'm getting paid for it then I deserve to.

CoP_4 And students come into my office and want to talk about this stuff and one student said to me, "You know, we talked about your class outside of class." and then I said, "Oh, that makes me feel really good."

CoP_4 I'm not talking about recognition as pats on the back, but that it is a legitimate part of scholarship.

CoP_4 There has to be a way to translating this kind of engagement, mentoring, and experiential learning into scholarship of application or teaching scholarship in terms of faculty recognition.

CoP_5 The same holds true if I can help somebody or if I feel like I'm helping somebody then that's always a good feeling. I think that's why we teach anyway.

CoP_5 ... if I feel like I can provide some sort of value to somebody else around my experiences and it may not be the exact same subject the area but even if they can pick up on something of some value and use it, then hopefully it will be a good session for them also. That's the way I look at it.

CoP_5 ...we're discussing how we're working with students and we're trying to do the best we can, so how can we reach them? How can we do better?

CoP_5 I try to touch base with a number of my colleagues pretty regularly, kind of like this quick stop by...I generally will walk away thinking about other things.

CoP_6 I wanted it to work better so if I feel better about it and it seems to be working then it just reinforces that feeling good.

CoP_6 I feel better professionally and I feel even more confident...

CoP_6 I feel good that I can share a positive experience

CoP_7 It really allowed me to make a better connection with the students. I could see students getting it faster, understanding it better and it was like, "Yeah, a breakthrough." It made me feel good.

CoP_8 I like my job better. I look forward to doing more. I think I'm better at it and I find that I have a little bit of creative and entrepreneurial side.

CoP_8 I think some of that attitude at least for me, some of that carries over into more job satisfaction and I'm happier in the job. I like the people I work with.

Identity

Improving Practice

CoP_1 And it challenged me to take it more seriously, so in other words sometimes you think, "I don't have time to be better, to get better at what I'm doing."

CoP_1 We could come up with ways to do it better and that whole excitement or that recharge or that yeah, you know, I really do want... I don't want to just skate.

CoP_1 I want to go with these groups, and listen to what they have to say so they can help me and I do need to be better at what I do there's always room for that.

CoP_2 ...faculty here looking at my students and thinking maybe I'll give that a try even though it's a little uncomfortable

CoP_2 ... it's like what I'm doing is actually nothing new... it's really nothing new. It's just making the information available to all faculty members.

CoP_3 ...also a sense of preaching to the choir maybe because we were there because we have some interest in what's going on.

CoP_3 To some extent I think it was a genuinely good, and valuable is a better word, exchange experience. Maybe the willingness to think a little bit more about allowing a little more air into the classroom.

CoP_3 But what I did take away was a willingness to, you know, to not feel bound to the text...

CoP_5 I think that has helped me think about again, continue to think about the practice of teaching and that I can always improve and that I need to improve and that's what I strive to do.

CoP_5 that started five or six years ago so past and present I continue to try to improve.

CoP_5 It's a combination of seeing changes that you want to make and trying to implement them but then also being authentic too.

CoP_5 ...it's really implementing and looking at how it works... the hardest part is did you implement it? Did you change your behavior?

CoP_6 Mostly, I try to go just because the more information I get, the more I can learn the better

CoP_6 To me it's less about the topic and more about what other people are doing and how they are handling it and what I can do with that in my own classroom.

CoP_6 that is something I might be able to work into something into my classes somehow...

CoP_6 ...maybe it's a change in my attitude maybe it's the way I word something with a student...

CoP_6 ...it's just a simple change and I can make, just a conscious choice...

CoP_6 ...when it's something that has been tried and other people have been successful at doing it I think I have more confidence when I'm doing it.

CoP_6 I don't always think I'm doing things wrong by instinct, but there are certain times that I think something doesn't feel quite a hundred percent right so what can I do to make it better for me and the students?

CoP_6 ...we are all probably roughly in what I would call older age-wise group ...we still are all looking at being our best

CoP_6 ...I would like to think that there will always be opportunities to try new things...

CoP_6 I've seen many of us grow and change (professionally)

CoP_7 I always learn something and sometimes it's just interesting to listen to what other people are talking about

CoP_7 I wanted to make sure that I was doing the absolute best that I could... I want to make sure that I was meeting my best potential

CoP_8 For me it was a good learning experience; hearing others perspectives, maybe getting another way of looking at some of the experiences I was having in the classroom... It was a good eye opening experience from that perspective.

CoP_8 ...now I understand the theory that goes along with it so it was a nice gain from that perspective.

CoP_8 With these communities of practice...it's giving us new ways of looking at the problems.

What collaborative professional practices evolving from CoP experiences are
perceived by faculty?

Collaboration

Problem-Solving within CoP

CoP_1 When you're talking about teaching in a community of practice, the group is a playing field.

CoP_2 How can we work better together with each other?

CoP_2 And so for this year, now that we have gone through the norming stage and the forming stage, I really feel that we are at that stage where we can begin to see some outcomes that we are trying to get towards.

CoP_2 I feel that if we have outcomes that are clearly identified, and as a community each of us know what we're striving for, that there's a goal.

CoP_2 So, I do feel like my motivation for this year is more based on I can see that progress has been made

CoP_2 ...this year it's like okay I created this new course and these were some of the outcomes and challenges any ideas and suggestions?

CoP_2 ...it's become more collaborative...

CoP_2 [collaboration as a CoP is] part of the culture in a way that all community members are all a part of our teaching and teaching philosophy

CoP_2 ...we do have this come and go, this sharing frustrations together, we're thinking about challenges and the best strategy to move forward.

CoP_2 I would hope that there's more of an interchange, a sharing of the best practices and...[they] are as invested as I am.

CoP_2 That they're willing to come to the meetings and share their experiences and their frustrations and they're willing to come to the meeting to share their videos of their classes

CoP_2 ...we are just seeing what's working, what's not working and moving forward.

CoP_2 When I'm trying to teach the courses the topics that we cover [are] all the questions that I've been having, but I haven't been able to figure out who to ask

CoP_2 ...the community of practice has been able to take those ideas and thinking about, okay these are some questions and considerations you need to think about in relation to these crazy ideas...

CoP_2 ...in the community of practice, we're able to get around the table and able to ask questions of other faculty members...

CoP_2 So, by being able to ask those questions of the community you're able to get different opinions and different viewpoints and share the experiences across the table...

CoP_2 Even if other members around the table don't know the answers, they'll say okay we need to figure this out.

CoP_3 ...working together as faculty maybe to rethink assumptions about our students in classroom behaviors

CoP_4 I feel if I'm reflecting and questioning something I've done; I can go readily ask somebody who is going to give me really good advice because he's been there before.

CoP_4 So, that's the nice part about this, we can now bounce ideas off of many more people doing similar things.

CoP_4 One anecdotal conversation led to the 'aha' moment...

CoP_4 Or there will be like a technical question... some of that stuff too.

CoP_4 So, we're kind of always just helping each other

CoP_5 The kids learn and we discuss how we might help each other with each other's different subject matters areas.

CoP_5 ...we would discuss them and the leader would take the role and ask him more questions to kind of delve deeper into what he was trying to accomplish.

CoP_5 it made it interesting to work with each other.

CoP_5 It was good because we would end up talking about that we could do it this way or that way to try to help other people see ways in which they could use it in their subject matter.

CoP_5 Then the conversations would to go, "I don't know how I can use this with my course," and then you would discuss it.

CoP_5 I guess that is where I can get ideas from other people and assistance from other people around different things, classroom management and exercises and so forth

CoP_5 If I can provide somebody with something that's going to help them to become more effective or maybe a different way to be effective

CoP_5 ...if they want to try something new so if I can help them in any way and again the same holds true for folks help me out all the time

CoP_5 ...we will from time-to-time bring up kind of general types of classroom management issues and how they might handle different issues.

CoP_5 I end up talking with some of my colleagues whether it's through that community of practice or through my department or the Teachers Talking about Teaching group

CoP_5 ...I was talking to an instructor who was going to be a new instructor for that class...

I have been teaching it for...since the beginning. We were talking about some of the different things that we do...

CoP_5 I think that collaboration is important. It checks to see if we are in alignment or not, but it is important to discuss different perspectives. Collaboration is good for that.

CoP_6 it's always nice when someone has gone through it and they can share what worked and what hasn't ...be on the lookout for pitfalls and have a little more confidence and higher expectations about what will happen.

CoP_8 it was a nice way for us to... brainstorming... around some of those actual problems that we're experiencing... listening to solutions that other people had implemented

Collaboration

Practices Outside of CoP

CoP_2 [Some of the faculty] have been very open to inviting me to share their experiences which brings a community closer together

CoP_2 ...come with us to ... experience what we do with our students.

CoP_2 I would bring the videotapes to our department meetings and say I just want to share this with you, what I did in my classroom

CoP_2 ...let me just give you an example of how I taught the content that we're all teaching.

CoP_2 I share the video with them and that would lead to questions like how would you do that? How could you come up with those ideas?

CoP_2 Even if we're not physically at the table I feel very comfortable picking up the phone or shooting an email and saying hey has anyone experienced this? I'm in this

particular situation. Who do you recommend I contact? What should I do? Does anyone have any experience?

CoP_2 So, there's always that going back and forth among the members of the community, and if you have any resources or opinions you just type your email and you keep it moving.

CoP_2 ...share our conversation with members of your department when you go back to your school

CoP_3 ...if you want to get going here is who you can talk to you and these are the steps you need to take.

CoP_4 ...other faculty come in and see what I'm doing and we get to talking

CoP_4 So, we can give and take like that...we're sometimes having to think on our feet and we remind each other how to be consistent and how to remember to keep our pace and do the things that you need to do.

CoP_4 It's a running conversation and it's taking on a life of its own and that's what's fun about it.

CoP_4 Now when we grab a cup of coffee, there's a learning conversation about what do you got going next?

CoP_4 ...presenting on field-based projects which actually both of us participated in and organized a conference on campus...

CoP_4 But that the intent is to have that carry over into less formal, small teams and pairs that go about communities of practice with students in their own ways.

CoP_4 A community of practice by definition would extend outside of those boundaries (meetings). A community of practice is not about breaking boundaries but about flexible and permeable boundaries.

CoP_5 Where we went back and forth... we're tweaking within the course.

CoP_6 I have the director come into one of my classes and actually do an evaluation. She gave me such valuable feedback.

CoP_8 I'm in the School of Arts and Sciences and now I've got some partnerships with folks in the School of Business so it was getting to know some of my colleagues and sort of either finding a common ground or finding areas we could agree to disagree.

CoP_8 Right now we're trying to put together special topics for spring of 2017...co-taught between myself and one of the professors in the School of Business.

CoP_9 I would say the newcomers have always been there but just never allowed to share. People have been doing phenomenal things just not together.

CoP_9 I would liken it [doing things together] to being able to share experiences, to be appreciated and appreciate, a lot lighter, easier. Not easy, but easier.

**What statements made by CoP participants illustrate perceived transformation of
professional practice within the classroom?**

Perceived Transformation

(Time) (Comfort Level)

CoP_2 It becomes a challenge because there may be some faculty members that are really just more comfortable kind of doing the traditional PowerPoint slides and asking them to step outside their comfort zone may take a little time.

CoP_3 So, I definitely made much more time in my classes for that kind of activity over straight lecture.

CoP_3 ...in some form or another in applying to my classroom and I do talk about instances and examples of things that work for me or don't...

CoP_3 My classes are a combination of lectures and discussions based on readings and it has very little to do with community of practice beyond the fact that I've been inspired to include perhaps more discussion than I have in the past. That's it.

CoP_3 I'm someone who started as a traditional lecturer; you do your reading and come to class ready to talk about it that's not happening frankly anymore.

CoP_3 It reinforced some things that I think were already under way and trending, and definitely it helped change my mind a little bit about how to operate the classroom.

CoP_4 I guess it's become more than two colleagues working together. It's extended from our departments from our collegial, to really being involved in outside of the classroom as well.

CoP_4 ...one of them began as I begin to look at the difference between the students' enthusiasm in my experiential learning classes and travel classes and my more traditional classes...

CoP_4 ...I slowly begin trying to change many projects and stuff like that in my other classes...

CoP_4 ...I started to replace objective test with project-based tests and now I don't give any objective tests.

CoP_4 ...they do it almost as much on a felt-level of lived-experience than just a textbook level and so I'm told and I get the feeling that they're learning at that level which is good.

CoP_4 But I feel like I've evolved into a much more, I wouldn't call it personalized learning but more experiential hands-on learning...

CoP_4 So, I that I feel that they're being genuine so my evolution as a teacher has gone from formal-traditional...

CoP_5 ... we were brainstorming about it... So, we're actually trying it right now, which hopefully will allow the students to then use it or at least use parts of it in their final reflections paper

CoP_5 Thinking about our conversation and taking it further....as it relates to doing something in the future or...course work or getting ready and working with students outside of coursework...

CoP_6 Some of the ideas people share certainly need to be vetted more thoroughly with respect to the courses I teach

CoP_6 I know it myself that confidence then translates to the action...

CoP_7 I picked up on some things that I've been able to use in the classroom. It's all about taking what works for them and trying to apply it in my class

CoP_7 ...it was fun for them and it was effective and on the other hand at the end of class I had students tell me it was too stressful...

CoP_8 ...I like to think that I become a better instructor as a result of that. I think I'm a little more clear in my instructions to the students I'm a little bit clearer in explaining to them what my expectations are