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# How Expert Teachers in Community Colleges Describe the Process of Becoming Master Teachers

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# How Expert Teachers in Community Colleges Describe the Process of Becoming Master Teachers

**Abstract**

This research study is an examination of the process of how community college instructors describe the process of becoming master teachers. Master teachers are those recognized by the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching award of the State University of New York. The purpose of the proposed study was to identify the habits, attitudes, and behaviors of these professionals. Using a quantitative research design, a sample of 9 community college instructors were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Directed content analysis using the theoretical framework of reflective practice informed the audience. The findings suggest that the instructors at community college welcome change in their teaching by seeking mentors, attending professional development events, engaging students, possessing passion, and self-regulating so that teaching excellence occurs for all students.

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How Expert Teachers in Community Colleges Describe  
the Process of Becoming Master Teachers

By

Gloria A. Morgan

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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St. John Fisher College

May 2013

## **Dedication**

This dissertation journey is dedicated in the memory of my maternal great grandfather, Joshua McCray, who desired that all of his children would value education and excel in the greater community of the world. Because of her positive influence on others and her prayers, I dedicate this to my maternal grandmother, Rosa L. McCray (Lewis) Weatherspoon. This work is also dedicated to my mother, Annie R. Morgan, a woman who exemplifies strength, sacrifice, and commitment to her children in the face of great challenges. The completion of this dissertation was made possible by her love, prayers, support, and encouragement. She has shown me that anything is possible when you trust God. Finally, to my daughters, Anitra, Cheria, and Quiana, who encouraged me throughout the process and reminded me that they believed in me. To others who regularly prayed for my success in spite of the obstacles. This experience would not have been completed without faith in God.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Gloria A. Morgan is currently employed as Director of Academic Affairs at SUNY Brockport's Rochester Educational Opportunity Center. Ms. Morgan attended Genesee Community College and graduated with an Associate of Applied Science degree in 1978. She attended Nazareth College from 1978 to 1981 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1981 in Business/Economics with a concentration in Business Education. She earned a Master of Science in Education degree in 1992 from Nazareth College. Ms. Morgan came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2010 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. She pursued her research in Master Teachers at Community Colleges under the direction of Dr. Dianne Cooney Miner and Dr. Timothy Franz and received the Ed.D. degree in 2013.

## **Abstract**

This research study is an examination of the process of how community college instructors describe the process of becoming master teachers. Master teachers are those recognized by the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching award of the State University of New York. The purpose of the proposed study was to identify the habits, attitudes, and behaviors of these professionals. Using a quantitative research design, a sample of 9 community college instructors were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Directed content analysis using the theoretical framework of reflective practice informed the audience. The findings suggest that the instructors at community college welcome change in their teaching by seeking mentors, attending professional development events, engaging students, possessing passion, and self-regulating so that teaching excellence occurs for all students.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, community colleges in the United States have seen an increase in enrollment due to the current economic climate. These colleges are beginning to observe an increase in accountability. The national accountability initiative has resulted in key stakeholders asking questions about, but not limited to, retention rates, graduation rates, faculty credentials, and relevant curricula. These stakeholders include national, state, and local legislative bodies, taxpayers, parents, and students.

Master teachers have a role to play in the positive student-classroom experiences, which result in a desire to build upon these experiences. Students want to continue studying and ultimately complete as a result of being in a safe environment, having a sense of belonging, and having confidence in their ability to succeed (Pintrich, 2003). The classroom instructor has the ability to affect the student's overall college experience. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2011) is encouraging embedding relationships, relevance, and rigor into the fabric of all community colleges (McPhail, 2011). Positive and strong relationships are essential between teachers and students (Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003). One recommendation of the AACC is to enhance the engagement of college instructors, both full and part time. Thus, the instructors must accept the digital world and get to know who is in their classrooms by engaging in a variety of strategies for instruction (McPhail, 2011).

Community colleges have a long-standing history of being teaching institutions (Bain, 2004). Student success and completion have been in question most recently, which has resulted in a completion initiative launched by the AACC (McPhail, 2011). Accountability related to retention and completion rates have now become issues when determining the performance of community colleges. In 2005, research indicates that there is a relationship between a state's systems for college accountability and the two criteria. New York has a middle-to-low strength performance accountability system compared to Florida, which has a strong system. Graduation rates in New York have shown a loss, while Florida has realized an increase (Dougherty & Hong, 2005). The retention rate (continuation to the next fall among first-time, full-time enrollees from 1989-99 to 2001-02) for Florida was increased by 9.5%, while for New York, there was a decrease of 3.2%. Graduation rates (the number of associate degrees and certificates awarded) were not supplied by New York; however, Florida's was 19%. These two states were among six chosen for the research, and each represented the most-to-least accountable community colleges (Dougherty & Hong, 2005).

In November 2010, the AACC's commission and board of directors, along with other key organizations related to community colleges, met and addressed four issues of concern to student completion: (a) how to secure commitment, (b) accountability for outcomes, (c) develop a toolkit, and (d) how to overcome obstacles. An instructor who is a master teacher would provide insight and guidance to students, as well as to colleagues with less experience, about the merit of these concerns.

One item included in the toolkit is to develop strategies to improve teaching pedagogy. Those who are masters in their teaching performance are well-equipped to

guide the process of a college culture that embraces improved teaching pedagogy. A focus on the characteristics of adult learners is key, as there will be a decline in high school graduates from 2011 to 2021 (Report Projects Drop in High School Graduates, 2011). Therefore, professional development opportunities must be developed that will guide instructors in knowing who makes up their audience in the classroom.

Long-term measures of student success are difficult to identify. According to Joanne Jacobs (2011), graduation rates based upon first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students are the minority at community colleges. Community colleges are being judged by criteria based on these includes this population of students, who may struggle to have success in college. New measures of success are being developed by the U. S. Department of Education that relates to academic and employment outcomes for those who are part time, returning, and plan to transfer (Jacobs, 2011).

Waller and Tietjen-Smith (2011) found that the retention rates between full-time and part-time students were related to the students' enrollment objectives. Part-time student demographics include those who tend to be older, married, Hispanic, financially independent, and are from families with less education. Frequent contact with faculty, staff, and other students are important predictors of student perseverance. Waller and Tietjen-Smith (2011) found that students faced difficulty in connecting with, and feeling a part of, the college community. First-year and second-year experience programs provide resources for students to connect and succeed. Because these initiatives are relatively new, it is difficult to determine the impact of the efforts. The retention rate for full-time students at public community colleges is 56.36%, while the rate for part-time

students is 39.30%. The researchers asserted that total spending by higher education institutions positively affects completion rates (Waller & Tietjen-Smith, 2011).

This research study will contribute to the effort to determine the areas of greatest need for faculty professional development and seek the knowledge and behavior of master teachers to facilitate this effort.

## **Background**

**Enrollment trends.** Enrollment in community colleges has increased, due to the economic climate, as families seek lower costs for a four-year college education. Once two years are completed, many students transfer to complete their bachelor's degree. The cost of tuition is lower at community colleges and often there is no cost for housing because the student is attending a community college that is near home. Additionally, high school graduates realize that employers seek employees who have completed at least two years of college. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Economic News Release, 2009), occupations requiring a post-secondary degree or award account for nearly half of all new jobs from 2008 to 2018 and one-third of the total job openings. The fastest growth will be among occupations requiring an associate degree.

**National initiative – The American Graduation Initiative (AGI).** The American Graduation Initiative is about completion. Students are enrolled in community colleges, but there must be an aggressive attempt to increase completion. President Barack Obama has challenged community colleges to grant some kind of credentialing to five million students by 2020 (The White House, 2009). The AACC seeks to respond to this challenge by leading the way. A formal listening tour throughout the country sought information from key stakeholders that address (a) student success, (b) voluntary



framework of accountability, (c) strategies for dealing with budget constraints, (d) big ideas for the future of communities, and (e) what AACC can do for members. Only two states, California and Texas, addressed the need for improved training for teaching during the listening tour (McPhail, 2011). As veteran teachers retire and novice teachers become a part of the teaching faculty at community colleges, administrators must recognize the importance of ensuring that there is quality and excellence in teaching.

**Student preparedness.** Preparing future teachers and developing current teachers is very important due to student under preparedness for college-level instruction after high school graduation/completion (Kirst & Venezia, 2001). One initiative that is driving reform and accountability for both high schools and colleges is linking courses so that students experience a better transition from courses at the high school level to those that are college level. Many high school graduates take remedial or developmental courses in their first year of college. Kirst and Venezia (2001) encouraged collaboration that should begin at the elementary level with cooperation and collaboration among teachers and the institutions in which students attend—primary school to college.

**Funding challenges and accountability.** Funding for community colleges is generally from three areas: (a) student tuition, (b) local or county funding, and (c) state funding based upon FTEs (full-time equivalents). In a survey conducted by the Education Commission for the States (2000), 26 states have community college systems that depend on local tax funds, while 24 report funding from state legislature. Funding formulas are used annually, which are often changed, by the legislative body. Among the 24 are Alabama, California, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Michigan, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington (Appendix A). Full-time

enrollment (FTE) is defined differently among states; therefore, calculations vary. Thirty-seven report that FTE equals 30 annualized credit hours (Appendix B); New York is among these. The other 13 use variations of this definition.

In New York State, for example, funding is entirely based upon enrollment and the formula used is determined by the legislative body. Even though other states take into consideration additional factors, such as space utilization, instructional and student support needs, and comparison to peer institutions, New York State does not consider these factors. (State Funding for Community Colleges: A 50-State Survey, 2000) The New York State legislature does provide base funding to all community colleges that is driven by the FTEs. Uncertainty exists within community colleges because the state's funding level can be increased or decreased annually; the latter has been the case in recent years. New York faces a \$10 billion budget gap for fiscal year 2012 along with other states. Part of the decline in revenue is due to a decline in federal assistance and a reduced tax base among businesses. Therefore, government has had to make deep cuts to state agencies, including higher education.

Prior to 2000, most states did not have criteria for performance-based funding. Now many states, as well as local communities, are seeking ways to measure performance and ensure that community colleges are accountable for what they do. Even though legislation for accountability has not been enacted, the American Association of Community Colleges and state-level organizations, such as the State University of New York (SUNY), seek to shape policy (Dougherty & Hong, 2005; Historical Information, 2011; Outreach & Engagement).

Locally, in most states, the budget process is controlled by the county legislature (or legislatures for colleges representing multiple counties) who determines the local budget share (“sponsor share”) for the community college. The community college’s local budget share is included in the county budget, just as the same as other county agencies (Outreach & Engagement, 2011). Competing for funding can be a contentious process, requiring lobbying by college administration.

The presence of master teachers in community college classrooms involves a commitment from administration as well as mindful and purposeful efforts among those impacted. Enrollment trends and retention data will affect funding by federal, state, county, and local government. The American Graduation Initiative will provide funding for teacher preparedness and professional development.

### **Problem Statement**

Effective teaching is what every student expects when enrolled in courses—especially at the community college level. On many occasions, these students are recent high school graduates who wish to pursue a specific career, may be uncertain about what is the best career choice, or wish to determine if college is really for them. Some of these are adults who want to change careers, build upon their resume, or attend college for the first time. There is an expectation from parents of the traditional college-age students that their child is receiving a quality education; at the core of this expectation is quality teaching. Administrators—from department heads to deans to vice presidents—hire teaching professionals who have degrees in the subject matters and have provided support of their ability to teach in a classroom environment. Credentials attest to the experience and knowledge of the prospective teacher. The decision to hire, or even retain, faculty

members is tedious and has far-reaching implications. What factors determine whether teaching at community colleges is quality? Currently, performance of teaching professionals in state higher education institutions is based upon student evaluations, peer evaluations, and supervisor evaluations. The peers and supervisors assess five areas that carry equal weight. They include: teaching effectiveness; professional growth and activity; service to students; service to department, division, and college; and service to community. This is consistent with most higher education institutions nationally.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

**Theory definition.** Schön (1987) stated that reflective practice is a dialogue of thinking and doing through which one becomes more skillful. Reflective Practice is a term often used in education pedagogy. It is a continuous process from a personal perspective that considers critical incidents within one's life experiences. Reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying theory to practice. Schön developed the concept of reflection on action (involving trying to convey tacit and spontaneous intelligence through language—usually by journaling) and reflection *in* action (about questioning the assumptions of knowing—thinking on your feet). The goal is to move from reflection *in* action to reflection *on* action. Through experiences, learning, and practice, one can constantly improve his work; thus, become a reflective practitioner.

**The learning society.** Schön (1973) believed that change is a significant part of modern life and that social systems must be developed to learn about and adapt to change. Learning systems and the importance of learning in societal changes was first developed by Donald Schön during his work on organizational learning. He pointed to

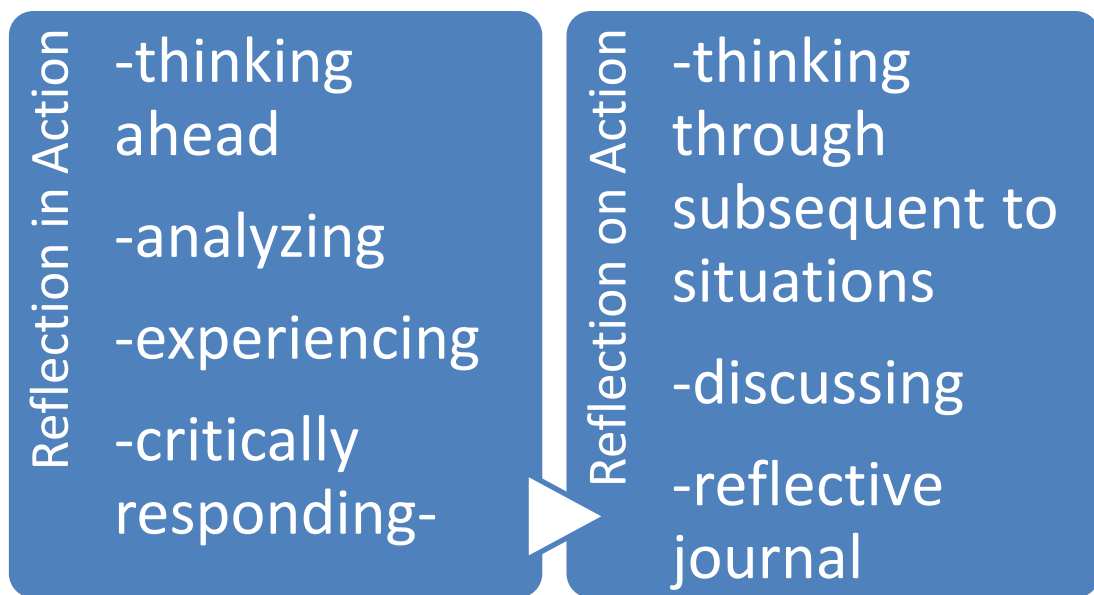
the loss of the stable state. It means that society and its institutions are continuously in the process of transformation. No one can expect new, stable states to last during a lifetime. He sought to help us learn to understand, guide, influence, and manage any transformations that occur. Understanding them is vital to the individual as well as to the institution. Proficient or expertise in learning is necessary to transform an institution as responses to changing situations, requirements, and policies occur. Learning systems must be created and developed that will result in an institution's continuing transformation. Thus the loss of a stable state requires the task of people, institutions, and society as a whole to learn about learning (Schön, 1973).

Schön (1973) contended that in public learning, government should take a continuing and purposeful inquiry into the nature, causes, and solution of problems. His assertion was that learning is not just an individual experience. A social system is also learning when it acquires a new capacity for behavior and learning.

**Theories in use.** Schön's concept of learning systems led to the development of professional effectiveness and organizational learning in collaboration with Chris Argyris (Argyris & Schön, 1974). People have mental maps that guide how they act in different situations. These maps impact how they plan, carry out, and review their actions beyond what they have learned, which is theory. This can be seen as a divergence from what has been taught in the classroom relating to theory or concepts and the actions that are taken. Theories in action means theories that are implicit in what action we take as practitioners (theories in use) and those theories we refer to when speaking of our actions to others (espoused theories). Theory in use involves the process of using three factors. Governing variables is a factor in which people try to keep within adequate limits. Triggering

mechanisms may happen that cause a stepping outside of the limits. The second factor is action strategies—predetermined actions and plans to keep governing variables within the limits set. Consequences occur as a result of an action—whether intended or unintended. Schön and Argyris see learning as identifying and correcting any errors. When something goes wrong, people tend to change strategies and work within the governing variables. However, what should have happened was questioning the events that led to the error (Argyris & Schön , 1974).

**Emergence of Reflective Practice.** Reflection has evolved into being at the center of understanding of what professionals do and how they behave (Schön, 1983).



*Figure 1.1.* Schön's model.

In teacher education, reflective practice refers to the process of trainees studying their known teaching methods and determining what works best for the students. The educators need to reflect on their experiences in the classroom and adapt their strategies accordingly (Duckworth, Wood, Dickinson, & Bostock, 2010). Reflective practice has

been recognized in many teaching and learning environments; blogging has emerged as a form or tool of reflecting in our age of technology. The relationship between the reflective-practice theory and the research problem is evidenced by an educators' need to share experiences in the classroom with those are new to the teaching profession. The loss of such rich knowledge would be detrimental to the profession.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine what master teachers at community colleges, who are considered experts, do to become master teachers. This study seeks to gain knowledge about their behaviors, attitudes, experiences, and methods related to their teaching experiences in order to answer the following research question.

### **Research Question**

How do community college teachers who are identified as experts describe the process of becoming a master teacher?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study adds to the limited literature about the importance of quality teaching at the community college level (Murray, 2001) and other initiatives presented. Veteran teachers retire with a wealth of knowledge related to their teaching scholarship (Carnell, *Conceptions of effective teaching in higher education: Extending the boundaries*, 2007). Community colleges have experienced success with achievement; however, due to the initiative for accountability, systems should be in place to address mediocre teaching. One factor of concern is not only the cost of attendance at the community colleges but also the expense of delivering education and the funding. For example, in the State of New York, the average cost of tuition is \$2,354 per year. However, the annual

expenditure per student is \$9,383 (in the top five schools among the 50 states) with New York State only contributing \$2,050 (only five other colleges are lower) yearly to support public community colleges (State Funding for Community Colleges: A 50-State Survey, 2000).

The phenomenon addressed in this study will provide administration, especially hiring managers and those responsible for professional development, the factors, skills, and knowledge that will result in faculty members becoming master teachers. Students seek to learn and complete their studies in the least amount of time as possible with minimal cost. Teachers that perform at their best will provide that opportunity. Research (Waller & Tietjen-Smith, 2011) shows a relationship between college completion rates and variables in state funding of higher education. These variables include five factors. The factor of significance to this study is instruction. Because community colleges tend to serve those who are underprepared and in need of positive support and relationships, the need for master teachers is vital. Annually, 44% (McPhail, 2011) of those who are pursuing undergraduate studies are attending community college with an enrollment of over 7 million (Enrollment Staff and Degrees, 2010).

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, expert teachers are defined as those who are eligible for the SUNY Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award. These criteria are not meant to infer that only those teaching at SUNY institutions are the only experts. The criteria for eligibility that will be used for this study are the same used by SUNY and include teachers who:

- regularly carry a full-time teaching load,



- are in tenure-track positions,
- teach at least 50% of the time,
- have full-time faculty rank as defined by the SUNY Board of Trustees,
- have sound scholarship,
- receive positive student evaluations,
- receive positive peer and administrative reviews,
- show evidence of superb performance in the classroom,
- demonstrate mastery of teaching techniques,
- use a variety of techniques, and
- teach a variety of courses.

Master teachers in this study are those community college teachers who have received the State of New York Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award.

The State University of New York uses criteria for the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award (State University of New York, 2009):

There must be positive evidence that the candidate performs superbly in the classroom. The nominee must maintain a flexible instructional policy that adapts readily to student needs, interests, and problems. Mastery of teaching techniques must be demonstrated and substantiated. Consideration is to be given to the number of substantially different courses taught, the number of students per course, and the different teaching techniques employed in the various courses.

When available, student evaluations (in the form of student questionnaires administered and compiled by persons other than the nominee) presented for several

different courses over a period of several recent years may provide a clear idea of the nominee's impact on students. (p. 9)

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides a framework for determining the significance of how a community college teaching professional evolves into becoming a master teacher. As a result of accountability, community colleges must address the quality of teaching in the classroom. This teaching affects retention, completion, and ultimately funding.

The remaining chapters in this dissertation are divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 is a summary of empirical literature about this phenomenon of interest. Chapter 3 addresses the research design methodology, participants, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 is detailed with research findings. This dissertation concludes with Chapter 5—discussion.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Background**

Quality instruction at community colleges is expected because these higher education institutions are considered to be learning focused as opposed to research focused (Bain, 2004). Reflective practice is a process by which college professors can evaluate their own work and performance in the classroom. Using this theoretical framework, this study will research how the professors describe the process of becoming masters in their teaching.

As a result of searching the empirical literature of published peer-reviewed articles related to college faculty development and becoming masters in the field of teaching, research regarding faculty use of reflective practice to develop their teaching skills is discussed. The chapter begins with a summary of theoretical and empirical findings related to teaching practices in the development of higher education faculty. Additional research that relates to various faculty professional-development initiatives is presented. An overview of research on the subject of personal reflection by college teachers is shared. Student perception and responses to the quality of teaching is introduced. A methodological summary, gaps, and recommendations, as a result of the review, are included. The construct of reflective practice is offered. The conclusion of the chapter provides an overview of the directed-content analysis methodology and a summary.

**Faculty view: Teaching practices and related theory.** Carnell (2007) used qualitative methodology research based upon an appreciative inquiry framework to investigate what college faculty view as effective teaching. Eight teachers participated in the small study. Interviews were conducted, and the analysis resulted in themes also found in other research (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005; Meixner, Kruck, & Madden, 2010) embracing the following concepts viewed as vital in enhancing student learning: learning through dialogue, community of learners, and meta-learning. The participants engaged in the educational development program were faculty members who taught at least one undergraduate course in biology, mathematics, earth and atmospheric sciences, chemistry, physics, psychology, or computer science. No significant difference was apparent among the disciplines. Based upon the 24 patterns that emerged, it is evident that the college faculty members engaged in reflective or self-regulated learning. The conclusions indicate that the faculty does engage in self-regulated learning processes. As a result of these findings, college teachers are developing techniques to transform their teaching in order to transform students' learning. There is a shift to view teachers and students as co-learners—working together to gain knowledge. Dialogue and collegiality are seen as important when viewing the theoretical factors of informing pedagogy, knowledge construction, relationships between teaching and research, and professional learning/development. Improving teaching is viewed as enriching learning.

Kreber, Castleden, Erfani, and Wright (2005) completed an exploratory, qualitative study to determine if college teachers engage in self-regulatory processes when they learn about teaching. Thirty-one science instructors were participants in semi-structured interviews. The questions were based on two theoretical frameworks:

Zimmerman's self-regulated learning cycle and Kreber and Cranton's scholarship of reading. Findings using cluster analyses found 13 distinct patterns of responses for the diverse subgroups; therefore, 13 questions were developed based upon the variables. The patterns included the following and addressed whether there is a difference among academic staff to the extent that they self-regulate their learning in the domains of instructional, pedagogical, and curricular knowledge.

Forethought Phase:

- setting specific hierarchical learning goals
- setting less-specific, non-hierarchical goals
- holding a learning-goal orientation
- having high self-efficacy
- being intrinsically interested

Performance/Volitional Control Phase:

- managing to focus on their performance
- using self-instructional techniques
- self-monitoring the learning process
- self-monitoring the learning outcome

Self-Reflection Phase:

- seeking self-evaluation
- attributing success or failure to strategies
- having positive self-reactions
- showing a high level of adaptivity

A second round of patterns emerged as a result of a combination of reviewing transcripts of second interviews held earlier in the study and reviewing the information from participants, showing similar responses. The 11 additional patterns are:

1. reading practical articles on teaching
2. participating in peer consultation programs
3. discussing teaching with colleagues
4. reading pedagogical articles in discipline-specific journals
5. having a mentor
6. taking workshops on teaching
7. actively soliciting feedback from students
8. experimenting with alternative teaching approaches
9. reading theoretical articles on teaching
10. doing research on teaching
11. attending conferences on teaching

Second was to determine if these differences could possibly be explained based upon certain demographics, such as discipline affiliation, level of experience, or involvement in certain educational development activities (Kreber, Castleden, Erfani, & Wright, 2005).

Findings of the Kreber et al. (2005) study compared the two groups' engagement in the 13 initial and 11 additional domains. The first group tended to have learning goals and increased self-efficacy, used self-instructional techniques, self-monitored the learning process and learning outcome, sought self-evaluation, attributed failure and success to

strategies, had positive self-reactions, and showed a high level of adaptivity. There was no significant relationship to demography or experience.

Those involved in staff development and educational psychology sought to know how college teachers with little or no formal pedagogical training learned about teaching. Little is presented in educational development literature about how instructors apply information about the process of learning about teaching—even though there are many suggestions on how to teach and the types of programs staff developers should offer. Reflection plays an important role in the process of teachers learning how to teach (Schön, 1987). Several researchers in the fields of philosophy, adult education, and educational psychology have a variety of definitions of reflection (Kreber, Castleden, Erfani, & Wright, 2005). Kreber et al.'s (2005) study addressed specific reflective processes (meta-cognitive and affective) that are observed in those engaged in self-regulated learning. The researchers wanted it to be understood that there is a distinct difference between expertise in teaching and (a) teaching experience, (b) the scholarship of teaching, and (c) excellence in teaching. Other studies have not explored the actions that result from self-regulated learning but have focused on the thinking of teaching (Sperling, 2003; Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005; Law et al., 2007).

A master in teaching is seen as one who has content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (one who knows how to teach the subject matter that enhances student learning and understanding). “The expert teacher, one might suggest, would need to be able to combine the knowledge of the subject with knowledge of pedagogy” (p. 78) (Kreber, Castleden, Erfani, & Wright, 2005).

The qualitative study of Law et al. (2001) explored the teaching practices of faculty in the department of education at a four-year institution. Law et al. (2001) were interested in the pedagogical stories in which these faculty members discussed their everyday practices in the classroom. A three-stage model was designed for the study. First, the transcript of one interview was immediately produced to analyze its usefulness and how to improve upon the interview methods. Next, four members of the research team of five (the chair was excluded) were interviewed. Based upon the findings of these interviews, modifications were made. Finally, teacher educators in the department were given information about the project and were given an opportunity to be interviewed. Nineteen of 31 teachers voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. Nine were male and 10 were female. Worth noting is the scope of experience: from less than five years to more than 10 years. The ranks were as follows: 10 were lecturers, five were professors, and four were instructors. All interviews were audio taped and lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. Verbatim transcription was completed to elicit descriptions of the participants' actual teaching regimen along with any beliefs related to that regimen. The participants were asked to describe their normal practice before, during, and after each class taught. Reasons for their actions were sought. A research assistant with no direct association to the department conducted the interviews. Interviews were carried out in either English or Cantonese. An inductive approach was used to interpret and analyze the data. Four members of the team were paired to work on subsets of the interview data; the chair worked independently on the transcripts of all 19 participants in order to differentiate between the themes that were identified overall and those identified from the two pairs. Each member of the pairs worked independently to seek a pattern of themes that appeared



from the participants' teaching practice before, during, and after class. Once completed, the pairs discussed their findings in order to come to a consensus. Regular meetings were conducted to discuss the patterns seen and the themes that emerged. There was debate about how themes should be categorized as they delved into what makes for "good teaching" (Law et al., 2005).

Five themes were developed to categorize the interview data—these were not developed from any theoretical framework about teaching in higher education. The themes were: (a) eclectic teaching and learning strategies, (b) sensitivity toward student needs, (c) theory-based instruction, (d) using student feedback as a pedagogical instrument, and (e) showing professional commitment and passion.

For the purpose of this chapter, focus is on the third item—theory-based instruction. Because the department trains students for further teaching, it makes sense that the educators are particularly using the different schools of thoughts related to teaching. Specific theories mentioned include: (a) experiential learning, (b) constructivism, and (c) reflective and critical thinking. The results of the study coincide with past studies (Shim & Roth, 2009) of what is considered good or quality teaching in higher education. This study focused more on what the participants do versus how they think. Law et al. (2007) believe that the findings parallel the theoretical models of master teaching supported by Ramsden, Biggs, and Trigwell (Law et al., 2007).

Meixner, Kruck, and Madden (2010) conducted a qualitative study to determine the experiences of part-time faculty at a mid-sized university. There were 85 completed surveys with open-ended questions. This number represented 31% of the part-time faculty members. The data was analyzed using open-ended coding to develop grounded

themes. The findings were drawn from content analyses augmented by statistical data; several far-reaching themes were shared by the 85 participants. The researchers found three core themes when analyzing the content of the text. They include: (1) receiving outreach (mentoring), (2) navigating challenges (student engagement and learning, quality of work-life balance), and (3) developing skills. The researchers recommended that faculty embrace what they encourage their students to do—expand their knowledge and seek to expand their use of ideas and theories that are different and new.

**Professional development activities for faculty.** Hubball, Collins, and Pratt (2005) investigated how the principles of reflective practice were applied in the deployment of an eight-month Faculty Certificate Program on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (FCP) at the University of British Columbia (UBC). This qualitative research used two cohorts participating in the FCP. Forty-four participants attended the eight-month program in two consecutive school years. The Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) (Pratt & Collins, 2000) was administered before and after the program. The TPI is a structured instrument with 45 questions, and it has five perspectives: (a) transmission, (b) apprenticeship, (c) developmental, (d) nurturing, and (d) social reform. Each of these perspectives has its own actions, intentions, and beliefs to help teachers with thinking of adults as learners, understanding the process of learning, knowing the content to be learned, and understanding the context within which learning and teaching occur. The TPI is a tool to help capture reflectivity in teaching and provides a way of determining change in the ways that educators reflect on their teaching (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt 2005).

The six questions related to the experiences in the program were:

1. What is the distribution of teaching perspectives for cohort members in a faculty certificate program?
2. How do cohort members in this particular FCP compare with professors elsewhere?
3. Do cohort members' TPI scores change measurably as a result of the FCP?
4. Do cohort members' TPI scores converge or become diverse across perspectives as a result of the FCP?
5. To what FCP experiences do cohort members' attribute any changes that occurred in their pre-post TPI scores?
6. What are the barriers to facilitating reflection for a cross-disciplinary faculty cohort?

Findings of the Hubball et al. (2005) study indicated that teachers became more reflective of their teaching at the conclusion of the program than they had at the start of the program. Forty-four participants from two cohorts in consecutive years had no major differences in their perspectives. Faculty in a variety of disciplines displayed multiple teaching perspectives—not just a singular perspective. Results favor the positive result of faculty development programs that, in turn, change teachers' views of what should be part of their classroom instruction.

A semi-structured questionnaire was completed at the end of the training, and it contained three questions:

1. What (if anything) do you notice about any changes in your TPI?
2. How might you relate any changes to General Program Experience?
3. Any other comments?

The responses were evaluated using the constant comparative method to determine like and unlike experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data indicated that those college faculty participating in the faculty development program displayed many perspectives of teaching rather than one singular belief. Increases were seen in their perspectives in the concepts of teaching such as: (a) transmission, (b) apprenticeship, (c) developmental, (d) nurturing, and (e) social reform. The results of the questionnaire suggested that such programs as learning-centered education (LCE) can result in positive change in a teacher's view on teaching. TPI scores at the end of the program indicated that the teachers used reflection more intensely in pedagogical beliefs, intentions, and actions than at the onset of the program (Hubball, Pratt, & Collins, 2005).

Two years earlier, Hubball and Poole (2003) completed a mixed-study research to review the application of theory to practice in the LCE model for faculty in the University of British Columbia program on teaching and learning in higher education. The program's intent was to "assist faculty with knowledge, abilities, skills, and experiences to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning" (Hubball & Poole, p. 13). The findings addressed underlying assumptions as guiding the pedagogical principles listed below (Hubball & Poole, 2003).

- *Learning requires faculty to be actively engaged in the learning process.* For example, learning experiences are designed that require faculty to think critically and engage in self-directed learning (individually and collaboratively).
- *Faculty members learn in a variety of ways and are at different stages in teacher development, and they progress at different rates in the learning*

*process*. This principle is applied by taking into account prior learning, learning styles, and diverse faculty needs, and by providing a wide range of open-ended learning challenges and multiple-assessment strategies as part of an independent learning plan.

- *Learning is an individual and socially contextualized process*. This principle is applied by conducting needs-assessment surveys that focus on faculty participants' complex circumstances and by designing relevant learning experiences (e.g., on-site teaching practices, case-based and situated-learning modules) that require both independent and collaborative work, integration of subject area knowledge, complex ethical considerations, and problem-solving skills. Given that much of teaching and curriculum development involves teamwork, the program is designed, in part, around a cohort model, whereby emphasis is placed on learning communities, collaboration, and peer feedback as a natural part of continuing professional development. Moreover, this provides a forum to debate, practice, and evaluate philosophies, (as well as) issues, and applications in higher education. For example, participants examine how theories and principles of adult learning interface with the realities of pedagogical practices in various contexts (Hubball & Poole, p. 14).

During a 12-month period, study results indicated that the faculty cohort of 24 displayed diverse learning styles and individual teachers were at various levels in their development of a scholarship approach to teaching. Guided study and facilitator-directed intervention were two of the highest learning preferences among the faculty.

The varied preferences of learning sheds light on the fact that a certificate program should embrace diversity of learning strategies for the benefit of the multi-disciplinary faculty. The dominant choice was for balance of facilitator-directed and collaborative methods of learning as opposed to individual learner-center methods. It appears that the participants did not want to be entirely responsible for their learning—this may be especially true for complex matters related to teaching. There were individual learning strategies in LCE that were deemed useful. The three highest ranked strategies were: (a) interaction with peers in cohort, (b) team-teaching workshop projects and presentations, and (c) development of a learning-centered syllabus (Hubball & Poole, 2003).

Participating in the LCE certificate program helped faculty to develop course-learning outcomes. One aspect of the program was to assess the relationship between theory and practice in the use of LCE in the eight-month program established to development faculty—full time or part time, tenured or non-tenured. Qualitative and quantitative research measures included needs assessment, program evaluation questionnaires, focus group, semi-structured interviews with the participating faculty members, review of faculty teaching dossiers and program portfolios, video recordings of the participants' teaching performances, and field notes (Hubball & Poole, 2003).

Preparation to teach effectively is a challenge for teaching faculty in higher education; even though the resources have been ample, prior research shows few positive results' (Murray, 2001). Murray shared the results of a quantitative study in which a survey was completed by 130 community colleges to determine their efforts in faculty-

development activities. An analysis of the study results were also used to profile accountability efforts and availability of the activities to teachers.

The 65-item survey was developed based upon the review of significant literature and was mailed to the chief academic officers (CAO) at community colleges in the United States. About 1,000 publicly supported colleges were potential participants; however, 250 were selected using a random-numbers table. The CAO was asked to give the survey to those in charge of faculty development. After review, only 130 of the 137 surveys returned were usable. The survey had four sections that: (a) related to demographics of the college, the person accountable for development, and the scope of the person's job duties; (b) included specific activities for development and to what degree; (c) noted any relationship between the professional development and any reward system; and, finally, (d) asked what is the belief of the responsible person about the relevance and results of the development activities.

Once titles were analyzed of the persons responsible for faculty development, 120 (92.3%) had administrative positions. Overall review of the titles revealed: 89 (68.5%) had titles related to the chief academic officer, 20 (15.4%) had other administrative titles and 20 (15.4%) had non-administrative titles. One institution shared that no one was responsible for faculty development. Interesting to note is the time dedicated to development activities. Three schools (2.3%) had individuals in full-time positions; 18 (13.8%) had a person on staff at least on a half-time basis; 53 (40.8%) had a person whose faculty development activities was only 11-49% of his responsibility; and 56 (43.1%) in which the person they employed worked 10% or less of his or her time in faculty development. There was minimal commitment by the college leadership to

professional development at most of the colleges. One hundred and nine (83.8%) of the 130 respondents reveal that the person responsible for development activities spends less than 50% of his time in carrying out related duties.

The colleges shared numerous events to support faculty development. The effort was to help teachers become current in their specific discipline as well as in pedagogy. Responses were grouped into 13 efforts/activities undertaken by the community colleges. Not all (104) provided activities for adjunct faculty, 58 involved both administrators and faculty, and 55 involved staff in some or all events. Murray (2001) saw the list of activities as the same as those employed in the 1960s with no change to improve upon effective instruction at these community colleges. He suggested that clearly defined goals and programs should be administered rather than ad hoc programs.

The results of survey questions addressing the connection between faculty participation in the development activities and the reward structure indicated that student evaluations and administrative evaluations bear considerable weight for promotion; peer review was last. Twenty-three have a merit pay system at their institution. These colleges were asked to rate the same three factors in making decisions about merit pay. Administrative evaluations and students ranked the highest with peer evaluations as third. Again, peer evaluations are in third place when the 60 institutions that have a tenure system ranked the three when making decisions about granting tenure. Administrative and student evaluations were ranked first and second, respectively. In the final analysis of decisions about promotion, merit pay, and tenure, the greatest weight was on the evaluations of administrators as opposed to peer and student evaluations (Murray, 2001).



The last part of the survey asked about attitudes held by those administering the programs about how essential and effective the programs were. Twenty-four statements were rated using a scale range of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The top beliefs of the institutions about faculty development were the belief among the respondents that top-level administration supports their efforts. There was a high level of “confidence in and appreciation for the effectiveness” of the teaching faculty.

Table 2.1

*Beliefs Regarding Faculty Development*

Item	M	SD
My academic dean/vice president cares about the quality of teaching within the college.	4.65	0.62
My president cares about the quality of teaching within the college.	4.42	0.87
The administration strongly supports my efforts at faculty development.	4.38	0.77
My college offers support for those faculty members wishing to develop their teaching techniques.	4.27	0.72
The trustees of the college care about the quality of teaching within the college.	4.11	0.85
Good teaching is an acquired skill.	4.11	0.58
There are educational experts on the faculty who could assist other faculty members to improve their teaching.	4.09	0.77
Most faculty members care about teaching well and periodically evaluate how they might improve.	4.00	0.83
Most chairpersons care about the quality of teaching within their departments.	3.96	0.82
Good teachers are recognized and held in high esteem within the college.	3.88	0.88
Professional development activities are recognized and rewarded.	3.76	0.92
Most academic administrators at the college could agree on a definition of “good teaching.”	3.72	0.83
Doing research and writing papers for either publication in professional journals or presentations at conferences can be valuable means of professional growth for faculty members.	3.66	1.76
Most faculty members at the college could agree on a definition of “good teaching.”	3.61	0.82
Tuition reimbursement to full-time faculty members for graduate coursework is a valuable faculty development tool.	3.61	1.27
The college administration moves quickly to offer assistance to teachers perceived as needing help with their teaching.	3.54	1.01
Publications and presentations at professional conferences are valued within the college.	3.54	0.98
Good teachers eventually will be recognized by peers and/or administrators and rewarded.	3.33	0.72
Individuals whose teaching performances are perceived to be inadequate (by either students and/or peers) are terminated if improvement is not made.	3.23	1.23
Extrinsic rewards motivate faculty members to improve their teaching better than intrinsic rewards.	2.81	1.07
Faculty members will improve their teaching if they are paid more money.	2.49	0.95
Good teachers are born, not made.	2.11	0.88
Faculty members who do research, present at conference, or publish in professional journals are less effective in the classroom than those who only teach.	1.92	0.89

Adams (2009) conducted a qualitative study of college professors that investigated their experiences while participating in an inquiry-based faculty development program. The researcher contended that there are most likely two barriers to change in college classrooms: (a) the range of views about the mission or purpose of a college and (b) a difference of opinions about what is a professor's responsibility—teaching or researching. The intent of the research was to determine the process used by college professors to understand and improve upon their teaching. As participants in a teaching-focused, inquiry-based program, they reviewed the many ways in which they achieved teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the study considered how professional growth and effective faculty development was accomplished. The researcher made the assumption “that professors possess a unique perspective about teaching practice and that inquiry-based faculty development can influence their growth. . .” (p. 9) (Adams, 2009).

The guiding question or problem statement sought to discover to what extent, and how, does a teaching-focused, inquiry-based faculty development program shape the experiences and awareness of college professors' journey toward teaching effectiveness. Nine college faculty members volunteered to participate in the study. The disciplines represented were math, health sciences, education, biological sciences, management, and anthropology. Five males and four females with a range of experience from two to 37 years made up the group. The duration of the development program was for 13 weeks. Baseline individual semi-structured (Wengraf, 2001) interviews were conducted with the professor participants, which were followed by cognitive-to-affective structure (Wengraf, 2001) to facilitate the dialogue that was, at first, externally focused and guided to an internal focus. At the orientation, each shared one or more teaching goal and developed

questions of inquiry addressing each goal; the activities during the program were directed by their mindful input. Three themes resulted from the orientation: (a) multi-strategic teaching (how to increase student engagement, how to improve questioning methods and other teaching strategies); (b) assessment and evaluation (what grading tools to use and alternative ways to assess critical thinking); and (3) planning for instruction (what learning objectives are adequate and how to align them with teaching and assessment). At the conclusion of the program, a final interview was conducted and results were compared to the initial interview (Adams, 2009).

The professors met on a weekly basis and participated in activities based upon the initial inquiry questions shared at the orientation. Classroom observations, literature review for resources, and interaction were the samples of activity used to increase exchange of information and receive feedback. Changes occurred during the course of the program as a result of these activities, in addition to the professors' journals, logbooks, and student evaluations. Alternating weeks, the teachers met to redirect, share their experiences, reflect on areas of difficulty, and redevelop their personal understanding of teaching and learning. Once a month, the group met with the facilitator of the program to analyze progress, share information or knowledge gained, and to reinforce commitment to the process.

Data from the pre- and post-program interviews were organized into two categories in which the professor participants showed an increase in awareness and insight, confidence in using pedagogical language, and the ability to talk convincingly about their teaching practices. Unfortunately, one professor was unable to participate in the post-program interview. An analysis of their perceptions indicated that the process of

faculty development played a role in their professional growth and that the program's diverse activities and processes were very helpful in improving teaching effectiveness. The professors were able to look at and improve their opinions about pedagogy and university teaching. The inquiry-based model incorporated the concept of evidence-based responsibility as opposed to document-based accountability. Interesting to note is that the professors believe in the importance of reciprocal responsibility for professional development programs. Change in classroom instruction should not be the goal; individuals should have sustained programs that are embedded in their jobs that result in learning. Learning new things ultimately results in change in behavior. Reflection was also shared as a benefit of the program. The activities provided opportunities to reflect upon theoretical and practical areas of their teaching. Finally, this type of program was seen as eliminating barriers among departments and promoting interdepartmental and intra-faculty understanding of the value of college teaching and research. A benefit of the program is that there was personal empowerment to change or become better rather than simply complying with institutional policy or directives (Adams, 2009).

In spite of institutional and individual obstacles, it appears that teachers and researchers are working together to learn the best practices to superior teaching effectiveness, and the inquiry-based model is seen as an effort that can improve teaching and help to link the two parties. A high level of trust, as well as goodwill, must be embraced by all participants. Facilitators must be ethical and collaborate in an unusual manner to ensure the goals of the inquiry-based model are met.

Research conducted by Sperling (2003) related to the importance of colleges focuses on teaching as the primary goal of instructors. The lens used for master teaching

informs and improves teaching practices by using a link between research on teaching and learning. Through professional development, the faculty was encouraged to embrace the findings of practice-based research. Reflections, as well as cognition and intellectual development, are terms used to help faculty “talk the talk” (p. 598) (Sperling, 2003).

Theory should drive practice.

**Personal faculty reflection.** Shim and Roth (2009) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to evaluate the way in which award-winning college educators share their teaching expertise. Presidential Teaching Professors (PTPs) were identified from one public, four-year university. They were honored for their teaching expertise as a result of a thorough selection process. Continuous quality in their teaching must be demonstrated at the undergraduate and/or graduate level.

Thirty-four past and present award recipients were contacted, and 13 voluntarily participated. Participants included eight men and five women whose education level was a doctorate degree; all were at least 50 years old, with a minimum of 20 years of teaching experience. The expert teachers were asked to share the names of those individuals they had mentored by sharing their knowledge. Ten of the 13 PTPs made recommendations.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted for one hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The research question was: “How do expert teaching professors share their expertise with mentees?” The data was reduced to common categories using the constant comparison method to form a narrative. Patterns of the categories were developed from the data. Even though this was not a true grounded-theory research method, open coding and axial coding were used to ensure an efficient process for coding. Initial concepts included: “formal ways of sharing,” “informal ways of sharing,”

“initiation by PTPs,” “initiation by mentees,” “physical barriers,” and “cultural barriers” using procedures developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The participants shared a range of methods for sharing information about their teachers to others: (a) co-teaching; (b) observation; (c) modeling; (d) informal conversation; and (e) workshops. Personal and environmental concerns are outlined. Barriers to sharing were seen as a major concern: workshops were limited in time and frequency. Therefore, sharing their expertise in informal settings with mentees, new professors, and graduate students was the most favored method. Intentional sharing was not used by many PTPs because they did not want to be viewed as intruding on other teachers’ personal space or being perceived as egotistical, so sharing was limited to only the three aforementioned groups. Cultural barriers were often encountered; so sharing was only done when an invitation was extended by the other professor. In formal mentoring relationships, this policy was not observed. When contact was initiated, the expert teachers were able to share their competence to teach and confidently shared their knowledge. It was beneficial to have the different populations open to suggestions and ideas relayed by the expert teacher.

**Student perceptions and responses.** Even though student views have not been highly regarded in the past, their experiences help to provide data that stakeholders can use to determine the quality of colleges. Hill et al. (2003) conducted a qualitative study using the grounded-theory research design to determine student views of a quality learning experience at four-year institutions. The inductive approach is described by DePoy and Gitlin (1994) as an integration of quantitative and qualitative methods. Even though qualitative research is the primary approach, the intent is to generate a theory and

use the constant comparative method. This method allows for grouping of concerns into categories and also probes variety and links within the categories.

Participants within six focus groups were asked, “What does quality education mean to you?” Nursing students, management studies students, and students studying learning and teaching at the same university participated in the study. Each group’s data analysis using the grounded theory involves collecting data, analysis, and theory generation until the grounded theory is formally linked to existing knowledge (Hill et al., 2003). The data was analyzed using the constant comparative methods devised by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The data was compared and contrasted among the groups to form a bigger point of view. Patterns emerged from the data; coding was completed based upon categories resulting from refining and reducing the data obtained from the entire sample. Three researchers met at every stage to ensure that information was not overlooked and that categories were appropriate. The responses to the questions were collected and themes were developed. Four themes resulted as student shared what they perceived as quality education.

Quality of the lecturer was the first theme. The students valued teachers who knew their subject matter, were well organized, and caught the students’ attention. Additionally, feedback during class and in assignments was beneficial. Flexibility in class and encouraging student success were also appreciated. Quality was viewed by students as being appreciated by the professor and a willingness to help them learn. Student engagement was the second emerging theme. They wanted curriculum that was relevant to them and also stretched their knowledge. The third theme was social/emotional support systems. A positive atmosphere was important, and they wanted to be surrounded by

those (peers, college support systems, families) who appreciated learning. The final and fourth themes were resources of the library and IT staff. The researcher was surprised by this theme because the college has readily available resources. The responses focused on the quality of their learning environment and the professor.

Appreciation and motivation for achievement were the findings of a qualitative study completed by Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010). The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of interactions between faculty and students—not just frequency but also the level of fostering that takes place as predictors of self-concept, academic motivation, and achievement. The sampling consisted of 242 college students who completed a survey that was administered in small group gatherings. Significant to this study are the three highest sub-scale categories identified of respectful interactions, academic self-concept, and intrinsic motivation. Key to the results and valuable were the student interaction with faculty and exposure to the faculty member's enthusiasm and reflection about what was needed for success and adequate preparation for the job market. Students felt respected and experienced increased motivation to pursue their career goals. The opposite was the case when students did not feel respected. The researchers strongly recommend that faculty participate in training programs that will sensitize college instructors to the why interaction and connection with all students—especially ethnic minorities.

### **Methodological Summary**

Researchers used qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology. A variety of data collection methods were used in the articles reviewed including: (a) interviews; (b) questionnaires; (c) focus groups; (d) surveys; and (e) observation.



Qualitative research tends to be subjective and interpreted by individuals based upon events. The data are rich and take time to collect. A researcher tends to have passion for the subject, and objectivity is reduced. Quantitative research, on the other hand, is objective and has precise measurement and analysis. Data are valid and reliable (generally) and test a hypothesis. The research is objective and is not closely tied to the subject matter. Mixed-method research is a combination of the two—qualitative and quantitative research.

Learning-centered education (LCE) methods are part of research related to pedagogy and have been successful in improving skills of teachers in the following ways: enhancement of critical thinking, communication, and problem solving. The program attempted to provide teachers with “knowledge, abilities, skills, and experiences to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning.” Assessment of faculty efficacy was the goal (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005).

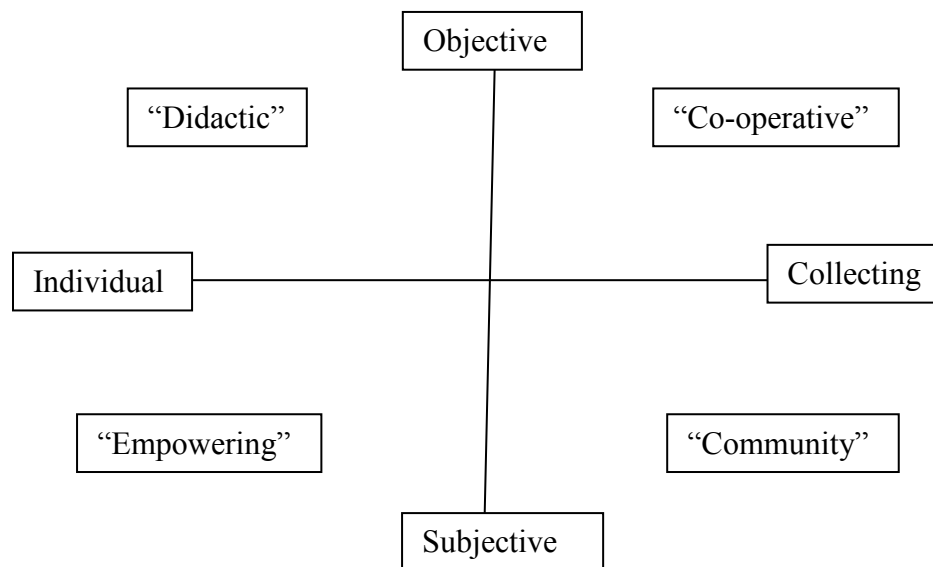
Reflective-practice theory is a common theory addressed in the studies reviewed. Reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance—an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993).

### **Conceptual Summary**

**Gaps and recommendations.** In Law et al.’s research study, peer and student observations were not included to determine quality or excellence in teaching. When analysis of the data was conducted, there were several individuals involved. Even though

the intent was to ensure reliability of interpretation, the process can become time consuming.

It is worth noting that, of the empirical research conducted in the articles, only two were conducted at institutions of higher learning in the United States. Other studies were conducted in the United Kingdom, Japan, and Canada. According to Hubball and Poole (2003), reflection strategies are also critical skills for lifelong learning and should be encouraged as critical features within faculty members' own courses with student learners. Thus, if faculty expect critical reflection from their students, it can be argued that they should practice and experience it too. In essence, practice what you teach.



*Figure 2.2.* A two-way continuum of teaching.

Literature does not address teaching concepts in the way that it addresses ideas and theories of teaching. The model in Figure 2.1 gives a framework to address how teachers in higher education should approach issues rather than to have a strict set of ways to handle a specific situation—whether positive or negative. There is no point to

settle and stake a claim with this model. All actions and decisions should be fluid and cyclical. Subjectivity is needed as well as objectivity; others should be consulted and/or be involved with an activity in concert with individual input. The results are being empowered, but also being part of a community (common unity) and cooperation as well as individuality are empowering. This model should be investigated further.

One gap in empirical research worth noting is little or none is conducted on the subject of teaching and learning at the community colleges. There is a general acceptance that community colleges are “learning institutions.” However, this is not always the case. Many faculty members have left industry to become teachers. Research in pedagogical instruction and topics related to theory has not occurred at the community college level.

Teaching expertise is applicable to elementary and secondary education; however, higher education research on teaching expertise is limited but emerging. In North America, few studies have engaged in the topic of teaching expertise. These studies are exploratory, qualitative, and have small samplings (Kreber et al., 2005).

There are limited studies that focus on how faculty can engage in self-regulated learning even though there are plenty of studies that address what teachers do to encourage students to engage in self-regulated learning (Kreber et al., 2005). The issue is how these same teachers engage in their own process of self-regulated learning. The researchers seek to make a small contribution to the body of knowledge related to expert college teaching. A limitation of the Kreber et al. (2005) study is that the years of experience in teaching and academic area were the only demographic data obtained about the participants.

The TPI administered by Hubball et al. was completed by a small sample of 44, and data collection was qualitative in nature. Quantitative research would have provided specificity in the context of the complicated process of teaching and learning.

**Directed-content analysis.** Qualitative inquiry intends to understand the meaning of the phenomenon of lived experiences by research participants (Creswell, 2003). The phenomenon that drives this research study is how expert teachers at community colleges describe or explain the process of becoming master teachers. Content analysis is a methodology primarily used in qualitative rather than quantitative research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed-content analysis will be used to explain the phenomenon of a master teacher's reflection of how he or she developed expert teaching abilities. Reflective-practice theory helps to shape and predict the relationships among the variables of interests. These variables or concepts help to develop coding and relationship among the variables; thus, deductive-category application is the result (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature shares the many aspects of teaching in higher education institutions. The significance of these studies is their contribution to the field of teaching using a variety of professional development activities, mentoring, and evaluation. The body of knowledge seeks to address how effective student learning occurs. However, the phenomenon of interest of this qualitative study, using the reflective-practice theoretical framework, seeks to research how college teachers at community colleges describe the process of becoming master teachers.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter summarizes the directed-content analysis research design investigating how community college professors become master teachers. Topics include the statement of the problem, general perspective, the research context, the research participants, the instrument used for collection, and data analysis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Student success and degree completion are the goals of any institution of higher education. Community colleges are considered to be teaching institutions. Scholarship is not based upon research and publication. Faculty at these colleges are generally practitioners and have not completed coursework in education. Their knowledge of pedagogy is limited and/or deficient. Studies have been conducted in other countries about this phenomenon and at four-year colleges. However there is limited empirical research related to the topic.

### **Research Question**

How do master teachers at community colleges describe the process of becoming expert teachers?

### **The General Perspective: Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, p. 232).

Therefore, qualitative research entails emerging questions and procedures; collecting data

in the setting of the participants; analyzing data inductively; building from specific information to general themes; and making interpretation of the meaning of the data.

### **Directed-Content Analysis**

Content analysis is used extensively in health-related studies. For this study, the method was used because it is flexible for analyzing text data and has a “family of analytic approaches that ranges from impressionistic, intuitive, and interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is the researcher’s intent to understand lived experiences. For this research, this methodology validated the concepts espoused in the theoretical perspective of reflective practice. Content analysis was used to explain the phenomenon of a master teacher’s reflection of how he or she developed expert teaching ability. Reflective-practice theory helps to shape and predict the relationships among the variables of interest. These variables or concepts helped to develop coding and relationships among the variables and, thus, create deductive-category application results (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Five key concepts from reflective-practice theory informed the interview questions. The concepts include (a) changing while doing—flexibility, (b) thinking while doing— immediate adjustment, (b) thinking after doing—reflection, (d) looking at other ways of doing—adaptability, and (e) doing based upon what was done in the past—retrospection.

Participants answered open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. Probing questions elicited expanded responses that were directed to the theoretical framework. An example was, “What more can you tell my about that?”

## **The Research Context**

The context for the study included four community colleges in the western New York area in Ontario, Monroe, Erie, and Niagara counties. Two of the colleges are located in suburban/rural areas while two are located in predominantly urban areas. All have multiple campuses or branch locations. Enrollment of students during the academic year ranges from 7,300 to 20,000. In many ways, the differences are also the same as the similarities in regard to students, programs, and faculty demography. Faculty numbered over 913,000 at the public community colleges in the United States in the 2008-09 school year (Enrollment Staff and Degrees, 2010). Among the counties in this research, there are approximately 1,200 faculty members who have earned a masters degree or higher. Forty to sixty percent of these educators are in positions that are deemed full-time tenure track.

### **Research Participants: Master Teachers**

Directed-content analysis involves choosing the sample populations who are involved in the social process that is to be studied (LoBiondo & Haber, 1998). Purposeful sampling was used to invite recipients of the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award at the four community colleges for the 2005-2011 academic school years. Purposeful sampling that is stratified was used for this research. Stratified, purposeful sampling, a sample size that is small for generalization, guided the selections of participants. The criteria for the award recipients limited the sampling significantly. This approach increased credibility of the research study, because information about the recipients is known that will guide the investigation of the problem and answer the research question of how master teachers become experts in their field (Creswell, 2009).

Recipients of the State University of New York (SUNY) Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award from four area community colleges were invited to participate: Monroe Community College, Niagara County Community College, Finger Lakes Community College, and Erie Community College. Qualitative methodology was used because of the desire to have an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of becoming expert teachers (Creswell, 2009).

Names of the awardees for the past five years appear on the SUNY administration's website. The sampling members were informed about the researcher's position as an administrator and a doctoral candidate seeking their input to help enhance and improve teaching at the community college level. This targeted sampling from public records eliminated the requirement of approval from each college's Institutional Research Board (IRB). A homogeneous sampling of teachers with shared experiences was used that purposefully informed the study (Creswell, 2009). A homogeneous sample refers to a population that has low variability; they are, in general, the same or have similar characteristics (State University of New York, 2009). The participants have all received the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award.

### **Data Collection**

Approval from the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board was necessary. The IRB reviews proposals for research to ensure that there are guaranteed protection of human subjects through confidentiality, informed consent, and safety. This is a requirement for all research studies. Because the names are publicly listed, IRB approval from the individual colleges was not necessary. Travel occurred to convenient locations



to conduct semi-structured interviews. The duration of the interviews was 45 to 60 minutes.

Next, an invitation letter was mailed to each award recipient from the 2005-06 to 2010-11 school years detailing the study and its purpose and requesting the return of the opt-in form to the researcher. A follow-up letter and/or email were sent within a three-week period if no response occurred. Finally, a gift card was given to those who participate in all steps of the study. This gift information was only shared once the opt-in form was received.

The participants have achieved a high honor in their profession and believe that excellent teaching should be the goal of all college professors. In an attempt to persuade the teachers to participate, they were informed about the impact they have in contributing to the effort of improving the teaching profession at community colleges. Thus, a link to a questionnaire seeking their contact information was included in the email.

### **Instruments in Data Collection**

A variety of data collection instruments can be used in qualitative methodology. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are the most commonly used (Creswell, 2009). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted. The interviews were no more than an hour in length. Appendix C lists questions that were included.

Field notes were taken as well as memo writing. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The text of the interviews was reviewed by the participants (as needed) for accuracy to ensure that the intent of the responses was transcribed correctly.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The process of data analysis in content analysis begins with reading and re-reading of the interview text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The text is read several times in order for the researcher to be immersed and to have a full understanding of the content. Once this was accomplished, the data was reviewed in order to create codes—exactness is necessary to encapsulate the main thoughts of the participants. The researcher’s initial thoughts and impressions about the text were noted. Codes emerge from the text and are ultimately the first phase in the coding process. The codes were then sorted into categories based upon how they were related or linked. Finally, the emergent categories were used to arrange and group codes into significant clusters—about 10 to 15 in total.

Test piloting was conducted in order to test procedures and determine if there were problems that need to be addressed before the actual study began. Corrections and adjustments will be made as necessary to the instrument and any other items related to the study (Vogt, 2005).

**Memo writing.** This technique began early in the research study and remained a constant part of the process. Data collection, analysis, and writing were all supported by memo writing that helps to convey thinking. A record of codes, relationships, and assumptions helped with identifying any relationship in the theory. The notes from the memos helped to develop categories or subcategories as analysis is completed.

**Field notes.** Field notes describe the experience and the events and mannerisms observed while interacting with the participants. Emotional responses, body language, and voice inflection were examples of behaviors that were included in field notes. Indigenous meanings were documented to give meaning to the context of responses and

answers to questions during the interview process. In order to have a broader interpretation of responses of the participants, contemporaneously written field notes were necessary. Finally, field notes should detail social and interaction processes with the participants (Cooney-Miner, 2011).

Because the research purposed to capture all possible occurrences of the phenomenon, coding began immediately using the categories established by the conceptual framework. Subcategories were needed to continue analysis. The intent was to support or not support the reflective-practitioner theory.

### **Summary**

Research offers a wealth of knowledge related to teaching. However, there is limited empirical research related to two-year college teaching. It was my intention to help shape the field for those entering the profession. The research questions will guide current and future decisions of administrators in implementing and guiding professional development for those teachers who may not perform at an adequate level that ensures rehire and/or promotion.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine how master teachers at community colleges describe the process of becoming expert teachers.

This study was directed by reflective practice theory. Five key concepts from reflective practice theory informed the interview questions. The concepts include (a) changing while doing—flexibility, (b) thinking while doing—adjustment, (c) thinking after doing—reflection, (d) looking at other ways of doing—adaptability, and (e) doing based upon what was done in the past—retrospection. Reflective Practice was used as the theoretical framework because it is used in education pedagogy. Reflective practice is a continuous process from a personal perspective that considers critical incidents within one's life experiences and thoughtful consideration of those experiences. The theory provided a framework for analysis and the identification of patterns and themes. Testing of the theory was accomplished because it has withstood the test of time and is widely accepted today. Theories provide a scientific model that helps to understanding human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; they are not hunches or guesses.

For this research, directed content analysis began with using the reflective practitioner theory to develop questions relevant to the research question. In data analysis, I became immersed in the data which resulted in the emergence of themes and patterns which were guided by the theory. This approach is used to validate the conceptual framework or theory.

Student success and ultimate completion are the goals of any institution of higher education. Community colleges are teaching institutions. Scholarship is not judged upon research and publication but on the scholarship of teaching. Yet faculty at these colleges are generally practitioners who have not completed coursework in education. Because of this, their knowledge of pedagogy may be limited. Very few Ph.D. academics take course in teaching. Yet within community colleges there is a history of excellence in teaching recognized by the SUNY Chancellor's Award. This study seeks to elicit tacit knowledge from recent recipients of this award and to add to the limited literature about the importance of quality teaching at the community college level. Additionally a contribution to the body of knowledge related to the behavior of master teachers will facilitate faculty professional development and higher education institutions who offer teacher education programs.

Studies have been conducted in other countries about this phenomenon and at many American four-year colleges (Adams, 2009; Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005; Law, Joughin, Kennedy, Tse, & Yu, 2007). However, there is limited empirical research related to mastery of teaching at community colleges. Veteran teachers retire with a wealth of knowledge related to their teaching scholarship.

### **Research Participants**

A total of thirty-nine emails were sent to recipients of the SUNY Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching award in the school years 2006-07 through 2010-11. Ten responded positively to the request to be interviewed. Nine interviews were conducted and audio recorded. Transcription was completed and the text was coded and categorized based upon the five concepts. Themes and patterns emerged using an inductive analysis

process that was directed to the five concepts of Reflective Practitioner theory. Once the similar responses resulted from the interview process, saturation was reached. Therefore after the ninth interview, no further interviews were conducted.

The participants averaged 28 years in teaching with a range of 15 to 37. Sixty-seven percent were female and 33% were male. Eighty-nine percent were White and 11% were Black. Appendices D, E, F, and G detail other demographic information including age, department, years of service, and degree attainment.

To guide the data analysis, the responses to the questions were coded and categorized into one of the five concepts or themes,

### **Flexibility- Immediately Changing While Doing**

Flexibility allows for fluid instruction and a willingness to make changes while ‘in the moment.’ Even though an instructor had a purposeful plan for the day, they were open to change. The participants reported several instances of changing while teaching. This category determined the cues that the teachers used to be flexible while in the classroom. The change would occur based upon body language of the students which would result in slowing down and asking if they understood what was said. The look in their faces and total silence were also an indicator of necessary changes. Participant One reflects upon changing. “Patiently slow down and stop to see. That is how I can tell if the students are actually learning or not.” (Lines 35-36)

Another takes time to not only watch the students but asks probing questions.

I can sometimes tell by body language and by observing their demeanor whether I think they understand it. Frequently they indicate they understood but I don't necessarily know whether they have until I ask them to demonstrate. Again even

in a class like that I do have the opportunity to spend some time with me lecturing and explaining. And then breaking into small groups and saying, ‘let’s solve some of these problems.’ When you do that then the questions start coming; then I can determine whether their understanding (it) or not. (P2, Lines 70-76)

Active engagement was encouraged and embraced. Students were often probed to ensure understanding. Behaviors such as ‘hiding’ or putting their heads down or looking the other way caused the teachers to review the material recently introduced or relate the material to something that the students have experienced.

Often flexibility was referred to “winging it,” “teaching on the fly,” or “flying by the seats of the pants.” Even though a lesson was well planned by all participants, critiquing their instruction was frequent and using a different approach when necessary was not considered a problem. The importance of making the student experience fun, interesting, and clear was shared as they were routinely thinking about what was their next “move.” Listening to what they (student) were not saying provided valuable feedback to “pull out something” that works to help their understanding. Immediate review and a change of approach/technique were welcomed by these teachers. One shares what happens when technology is not as cooperative as it should be.

I may have one plan in my mind and 90% of the time I stick with that plan, but I try to be flexible and adjust. When I see that plan is not going to work. If I walk into a computer class and my Internet is down, I have to punt, so I have to be flexible. (P2, Lines 34-36)

When asked about how she determined if she taught a class well, one participant shared her experience.

If an environment is not necessarily based upon grades but it is an environment where they (the students) are engaged. They care about and help each other. You just sense learning is going on because people are engaged and they are talking about what you are talking about. They may ring up something we did a few weeks ago. To me that is a class that is clicking. (P9, Lines 79-82)

Another participant uses her students as a barometer while doing her instruction. Students will share whether or not they understood material and on some occasions comments would make a difference in the student's career choice. Student feedback in non-verbal mannerisms was used to determine the quality of instructor resulting in a change of what was planned.

I use my students as a barometer. If they come up to me and say, 'Wow, I really got that or thank you so much. You have made a difference in my life.' Many of them have come to me and said, I was an accounting virgin and you changed me and now I'm going to major in accounting. So that's when I know I've gotten across to them. When they tell me I've made a difference in their choice, when they tell me that they've really learned something. I only get it from their feedback, student feedback. (P8, Lines 52-57)

When participants were asked how they determined if they had taught well, several factors were shared. Active participation was viewed as very important as well as watching for non-verbal or body language. *(There were responses from this question that also resulted in the category of changing after teaching a lesson.)*



Several examples of flexibility were reflected upon by the teachers. “You can tell by the students’ body language. They start to nod or their face straightens up. Then you can tell if they actually got it. (P4, Lines 33-34)

Another participant shared with deep emotion her response to the question about determining if a class/less was taught well.

I look at their eyes and their faces and if they have this ‘deer in the headlights’ look, like ‘oh my God, what did we just do?’ I know I did not do it right. I can pretty much tell by their facial expressions. I can tell by their conversation when they are going out. If they walk out and they don’t say a word (overwhelmed) versus they go out talking about what they did in class or about having a good weekend, then that means I didn’t overwhelm them. (P3, Lines 60-64)

One participant listens to the student’s responses by asking direct questions at the beginning of the class.

Although typically I tend to do my review at the *beginning* of class, so it’s, ‘Okay, what did we talk about last night? What is ‘autonomy’ again? Let’s just run through this. So that’s another way I tell is in the next class period. (P6, Lines 78-80)

Participant 4 also seeks feedback through written responses. The information shared was used to direct and adjust any instruction during the next class. “I want to walk out and they’ve done a bit of reflective writing at the end where I ask what did you get out of the day?” (P6, Lines 76-77)

## **Adjusting - Thinking While Doing**

To think about what you are thinking about (meta cognition) is not a common task. The participants responded to questions that provided insight into their thinking, even though they did not realize it at the time of their lived experiences. Organization and methodical completion of lesson plans ensured quality in their instruction and increased student learning. Constant critiquing and self-analysis were occurring while in the classroom. Sometimes what is said or done is based upon what is spoken by the students.

They'll bring up 'did you hear about this or did you hear about that.' So you can pull it in so that you determine if it is right or if that's not right, but even in the negatives it's how you spend the experience and you learn something. Learning to do something—meaning when you are thinking on your feet and moving or adjusting, that's what we do. (P7, Lines 55-58)

The instructors embraced self-analysis and shared the regular and frequent task of adjusting what they do in the classroom.

I'm probably my own worst critic. And so I'm probably thinking or critiquing about what I'm doing every day. I think about what I'm doing and how am I doing it, and how is it reaching, or if it's working and if it isn't. What do I have to do? How do I move? And I think that's something that's you have to think about constantly. (P7, Lines 166-169)

Another was concurred with this statement.

I think every day and I critique my work. I do it every day. Whether it's critiquing how I'm presenting it or how I put a test together or um did I go off track, did we stay on topic. I mean that's a constant, on-going. Yeah, I get a token teacher

evaluation when they come in and you know. But that doesn't mean anything.

That just means that administration came down and did the paperwork, but you have to do it all time. (P3, Lines 134-138)

Participants stressed the importance of touching the spirit of students to engage them. They tend to constantly think about the students' self-esteem when lecturing which resulted in improved participation and communication. The participants were concerned not only about cognitive learning of their students but also affective learning that occurs by communicating and connecting to their heart and spirit.

Okay. So, the other thing I want my students to always get from me is I want to take them up another notch in their self-esteem, because most people have poor self-esteem. So, as far as I'm concerned, I want to lift that a notch anyway I can. So I always give them this exercise that they can do as often as they want to. I suggest usually doing it a certain period of my diversity class that they do it for that week. As they get up in the morning, before they do their constitutional, before they brush their teeth, they look in the mirror and they say, 'I'm doing the best I can given what I know about myself today. Now, if you say that over and over again, even if you just say it twice a week because you have class twice a week because you want to tell your teacher you did it, okay. Even if you do it twice a week, twice a week for fifteen weeks, it changes you. It changes what you say. It also changes how you see other people. (P5, Lines 61-70)

Another factor shared by participants is not allowing fear to impede their desire to try something new. Group projects, use of technology, and allowing students to make decisions about their assignments are examples of new techniques used. New approaches

and change in plans were embraced when responses were judged to indicate student confusion. The temporary loss of technology resulted in ‘shifting gears’ and ‘winging it.’ When I see that a plan is not going to work. If I walk into a computer class and my Internet is down I have to punt so I have to be flexible (P2, Lines 35-36). Self-analysis and evaluation of the results often were struggles of the instructors.

But I’m always going back and saying like, “could I have done this problem a little differently or maybe I want to approach this problem this way instead of another way.” And you’re basing those things all on how the students did or how you felt they were comprehending a particular unit. Like if there was something that really seemed like a struggle for them to grasp, then I would go back and say, “could I have presented this exact same material in a different way.” You know, or maybe it could be clearer for them. Is there something else I could do? Yeah, I’m doing that all the time. I mean you know even from semester to semester for sure. (P4, Lines 87-93)

### **Reflection - Thinking After Doing**

The content of the transcribed text revealed several practices achieved by the participants in order to improve upon their teaching. Their reflection informed steps to follow for future teaching.

Participants understood that being unorganized was counterproductive and thus, vowed to change plans and or delivery in future classes. Even though a activity did not result as planned, it was used as a teachable moment for students. One example is when an instructor became engrossed in the content of the student interaction and conversation

to the extent that she totally forgot about her role as the counselor (being neutral). Even though she erred, she used it as an example of what not to do.

So the class is about religion, right? And so I did not realize that there were so many fervent and I mean (and I don't ask people about that) fervent born again Christians and there were about 2 or 3 people in there that ascribed AA to be their salvation. . . The class then got engaged with this debate about religion. Why did it happen? (It was) probably because I was so intrigued with the conversation. (laugh). . . I was intrigued with the conversation so that's why it continued as long as it did. I started to realize that people were not listening anymore. They were just pontificating, you know, and that's when I rolled it back and gave them an example of well see this is what happens. Let's say someone starts telling a story and you are counseling somebody and you start listening to the story and forget why you are there. I said that's what I just did. I forgot why I'm here. I am not here to debate with you about religion. (P5, Lines 133-143)

Repetition was viewed as necessary to increase learning. Additionally, participants did not see this as an evil but as a tool that benefited students. The repetition was not always in a lecture format. Questions and/or cases were embedded in homework, reflective writing was used at the end of class to illicit information, and group interaction or projects provided ample opportunities for repetition.

I certainly most days I want to walk out of the classroom feeling good about my instruction. I want them to walk out after they've done a bit of reflective writing at the end where I ask what did you get out of the day. (P6, Lines 75-77)

The same thoughts resonated with another participant as she reflected upon her classroom experience.

I believe in repetition. Um, I have a reputation of being one of the hardest teachers. If you want me to do the job, if you want me to tell you the sky is blue and then ask you on a test question what color is the sky, it's not gonna happen. I'll give you A and B and then teach you how to get to C. But then I expect you to start being able to take this fact and that fact together. (P3, Lines 5-9)

The “wow factor” is used to amaze students so that they leave the classroom thinking about the subject matter. Participants believed in the importance of “showing connections” when teaching. Students understand better when there is a relationship drawn from what they know to the unknown. Therefore, hand-on practice and activities were a normal occurrence. One example was an instructor visiting slaughter houses to obtain organs of animals.

I go to slaughter houses and I bring in parts of lungs. I don't do many preserve specimens in my class. With science, it takes nothing to get them to go “wow.” . . . I mean, that's what I look for, that's what I'm known for, I think is bringing in stuff like that. (P3, Lines 26-29)

A variety of teaching methodologies due to different student learning styles was important. Purposeful, strategic instruction was the norm. Participants invited creativity by allowing students to have “a license to do whatever” for some activities. This meant a transformation in behaviors because in most instances the students were told what to do with finite instructions. This technique was a paradigm shift in their thinking.

I try to give them extra practice problems or extra work—maybe I might come up with like a little brain teaser like just little things that might not be directly related to the material, but yet something to get them just kind of focused on that. Brain teasers are probably the best thing I would say. Just to spike the creative, the intuitive of thinking. I'm getting back to analyzing and that type of analysis that you might not do if you are not in the field. (P4, Lines 105-109)

Participants reported that service learning and community service were valuable tools in applying learning and validating the importance of the learning. Lived experiences resonated better than anything read in textbooks did.

So I'm constantly talking about here's how you can use this, here or there. Then here's how this can apply in other places. See how this would serve you elsewhere, so that we can build extensively on that classroom always. And I often take students on field trips and also do some service learning. (P6, Lines 18-21)

Not only did a participant develop service learning in her instruction, she shared the concepts with others.

I was the faculty mentor for service learning. And so I did some presentations at different conferences around the country—presented on service learning. I also was very active in learning communities. . . . So we shared a lot with the people in the community that we partnered with. They had a great insight into what was going on in our classrooms and how our students could benefit their role in the community. (P8, Lines 63-68)

Making connections with students and understanding the generational mix were given as examples of how to make the classroom environment safe for students.

Paramount in the teaching experience among the participants was a positive atmosphere and students learning in a non-threatening environment. To refer to *Mr. Ed* in a classroom of millennials would not be effective as it would be with baby boomers. Comments like connect to what they know and understanding that no two students are alike reinforced the need to know who they are being student centered.

Not making them feel threatened, making them feel that you can participate and it's okay—what you're saying. Even if you're going off on a different tangent (my job) is to make sure that what you're doing isn't trampling or upsetting people. It's being sensitive to what's going in the room and sensitive to what they're doing. And still pulling them (in) and it works a lot. But it doesn't always. Some people don't want to be pulled along. They get mad; they'll fight you. (P7, Lines 27-31)

Participant 7 shared an lively exchange he experienced with a traditional-aged student.

Having some knowledge of who, you know, 50 cent is. And I actually had a kid in class in the class who trained me in saying it right. . . . You can't say 'fifty' cents; you say 'fi-ty'. (Laughs) So it's having that rapport that opens the door to students. And you can open that rapport; just recognizing the reality of their lives. When you find that out, like paying attention to what's going on in their world; you have to pay attention. You have to communicate with who your audience is. (P7, Lines 146-149)

The participants believed in using a variety of ways to measure competency in addition to teaching students organizational skills, even though it may have been taught



by someone else. A variety of teaching methods was the end result of reflecting on what works best for students ‘getting it.’ Nothing was assumed in attempts to enhance their learning.

Well because I'm at a community college, I know my classroom is full of every conceivable learning style and different ages and different goals from each student. I know that no two students in a classroom are alike, so I try to use a variety of methods to try and capture all of them. So I'm not like just a lecture teacher or just all hands on. I try to keep a visual or have approaches, hands on approaches. I always incorporate stories always allow them to interact so I guess I try to use a number of different methods. (P9, Lines 6-11)

All participants understood the importance of being approachable in addition to treating the students with respect—no matter their background and ability. An open atmosphere void of judgment and embarrassment were important factors to encourage learning.

The instructors wanted students to want to be in the classroom even though they were pushed and were not allowed to hide in the classroom. Participants believed that students must be accountable for completion of required assignments and activities. That being said, students were provided intervention and support from other college resources. In an effort to determine “how is it going,” participants probed students about their classroom experience. This question not only addressed learning but the comfort level in the general classroom as well as with groups.

I'm constantly looking for where people miss certain things. If I'm seeing a lot of people miss certain things, (I ask) is it because they did not read the chapter.

I'll go back and look at what was my question. Was it something they were supposed to read in the chapter and they just did not read (it)? So I hold them accountable for that (P9, Lines 34-36)

Participants reported having difficult students who often interrupted the flow of instruction. They determined that setting boundaries and seeking advice should be done early rather than later. Avoidance or ignoring the situation was not an option. Participants connected with students outside of the classroom and saw this as a positive way to develop relationships. Co-curricular activities, competitions, office visits, and chance meetings in public places were examples of outside contact with their students.

In many cases, the participants stressed the importance of loving what they do and having a passion for teaching. Along these same lines, they stressed the importance of sharing their experiences with others. This sharing would be accomplished as a mentor, as a presenter at workshops and conferences, and as a trainer. Most participants believed that they were “their own worst enemies” because of constant critiquing of work and performance in the classroom. Updating instructional materials and their own knowledge of the subject matter was celebrated. Improvement was seen as necessary—especially as it related to technology. “Could I have done a better job,” “Did I make them mad,” and “Did I get into their business” are questions asked after instruction. Participants believed in the importance of letting students know their expectations early in the student-teacher relationship.

When asked to describe their approach to teaching there were many opportunities for reflection by the participants. One participant shared:

I always try to build a lot of group activities during the course of a lecture. I try to elicit a lot of responses. Really try to keep the students engaged. Like if I'm teaching upper level classes, you have to know that they are focused on what you are saying. You've got to keep them actively engaged. (P4, Lines 5-7)

Another shared two experiences:

I try to engage them during conversation and I try to bring up controversial issues, which sometimes I would take and argue both sides of the issue just to draw them out. (P7, Lines 7-9)

I break them into groups and then go over an example problem and give them a problem to do. And I'll have them working in groups with each other in the class, and I will try to get to each group and see how they are progressing through the problem. (P7, Lines 13-15)

Instructor participants believed that when students gave responses, it is important to let them know that what they say is important. Respect for students, being student-centered, and having a safe environment were factors several participants viewed as important to their teaching approach.

Participants were asked to share experiences relevant to their teaching and memorable teaching experiences. Paramount among them was the importance of respect for students and centering all activity in the classroom on them. One participant shared her approach to encouraging and ensuring active participation.

There's always the 'hail' where I touch base with every single person in the room. So that's another way I tell is when the next class period. So there's always the hail where I touch bases with every single person in the room. So I have a real

clear layout in my head of what every class period is like. It's always the hail . . . and then the goal of the day and I say very clearly "this is what you should get out of the day." I definitely try to establish vocabulary and there's always the "*word of the day!*" We read it on the board so that by the time they are into their third or fourth week, and I say something that somebody doesn't know and a hand shoots up and somebody else yells "*word of the day!*" (P6, Lines 82-87)

Critiquing and self-analysis was a practice of the participants. Ego, subject matter mastery, and years of teaching were not factors in their ability to judge their work.

Anytime I teach a class I sit back and say oh dear and even after I leave a class sometimes I go that went really Well I'm going to put a note to myself to do that again or that was a disaster why was it a disaster was it just this class was it me maybe I was into this time. (P#9, Lines 164-167)

### **Adaptable - Looking at Other Ways of Doing**

Once a person has a lived experience and reflects upon that experience, there may be a need to adapt or change in order to achieve better results. The participants shared a variety of experiences that gave them pause in pursuing alternative ways of delivering instruction, managing student behavior, and other teaching-related activities.

Participants made a concerted effort to change course content and assessments after review of student evaluations. When a majority of comments pointed to the same issue, the teachers recognized the importance of embracing a change. As a result of attending workshops and conferences, new ideas were learned; thus, the participants brought those ideas back to the classroom for implementation. "The holy grail" (P. 1) was an example that involved attempts to bring all students into class discussions. Questions

are asked that relate to the subject matter for the day. Each student is recognized and invited to respond. It's like attending church and kneeling and going through the gauntlet or reverence experience. All are valued and so is their participation. Another change reported by participants was how student work would be evaluated. Again, new techniques as a result of attending workshops caused a change in practice by the participants.

Even though attempts were made to handle student behavior in the classroom without involving others, the participants recognized that this was counterproductive. Therefore, they would handle difficult students differently by immediately referring them to a department chair, dean of students, or counselor. The misbehavior took away from the dynamics of the class and caused other students to become disengaged. At times, arguments resulted in loss of instructional time. Team development and assignments were seen as challenges in the classroom. However, the participants view this activity as valuable for student learning because the experiences students will face in the real world. They reported that teaching group dynamics before formation of groups would be the best practice.

Participants shared the importance of collaborating with others, formally or informally, as adding value to their teaching. Information gained was beneficial and left the participants with "I'm not alone" or "I'm not the only one with this problem." (P. 1 and P. 7) It was valuable to know that others could relate to their various situations. Best practices learned at conferences gave the participants confidence about their craft—teaching. Errors or missteps were reported by the participants. In order to redeem themselves, they vowed to never do the activity again or change some aspects. Most

reported the assessment tools or exams as the biggest culprit involving errors. One word or phrase could stump students and there would be major fall out. Therefore, participants believed that admitting to mistakes earlier rather than later proved invaluable to their relationship with students. Participants maintained journals to reflect upon what changes needed to be made for the future.

### **Retrospect - Doing Based Upon Past Experiences**

Family and previous job experiences impacted decisions of participants to become teachers. Attitudes and people along the way made a difference in what they did in the classroom. Even before the classroom experience, most had “teaching” experiences long before the choice to become a professional teacher. Bad teachers in their own learning experiences or those of others caused them to decide that they would avoid repeating that practice. A decision to be better and give students their best was made early in their careers. Participants have had colleagues who were not stellar instructors. Emotions had to be avoided when addressing any negative behavior. Self-evaluation and evaluation of others were required, but respect and dealing with reality was necessary. Confidence and competency were traits participants believed to be important for effective teaching.

Participants provided several insights about their past experiences when asked about the ways and how often do they critique their work as well as any challenged they may have encountered in doing so. Common among them were ways in which improvements that can be made and changing their approach to teaching.

Every time I walk out of a class, I mentally think about if that when well. If it did not go well, I am thinking of ways I can improve it. It is sort of the engineer’s mindset that is always looking at how can I do things better. I do think about

improvement and what things can change, and I try to necessarily always implement those changes, but I do at least think about (it). (P2, Lines 132-135)

Participant 9 shared:

I really sit back and say what I have learned this year and sometimes the things that don't go well are the best lessons. Here is one great example. It seemed like such a great idea and I learned it at this conference I attended. It was a sales and marketing simulator. In the sales and marketing class each student develops their own business and we were going to require them (because is all hospitality class) to be a travel industry 'something' that supports the industry: a hotel or bed and breakfast. They had to sell products; it just seemed like a great thing. It was so computer complex that they were so frustrated with the computer part of it. The learning that should have taken place was kind of overshadowed, and I can see such frustration but I just said, 'okay nice try—that didn't work.' Maybe in five years, I will look at it again . . . I had one student—and this was a lesson learned—who was a traditional student who was terrible in the class. He was 'on fire' with the simulation every day. He got it and was having fun with it. It was a great example of how a student who is getting lost in the traditional education but is brilliant in this type educational experience. Unfortunately, the simulation cannot be used because of its complexity, but it just reminds me that different approaches work for different students. (P#9, Lines 148-157)

### **Summary**

The concepts of flexibility, adjusting, adaptability, reflection, and introspection were developed using the theoretical framework of reflective theory. These concepts and

the questions developed were used to direct the analysis of the texts of the participants' interviews. The results help to inform the public about the how community college teachers describe the process of becoming master teachers. These findings provide a contribution to the body of knowledge or those seeking to improve upon their pedagogical. The ability to change while in the moment and not allow for gaps in instruction or student concerns was exhibited by the participants--flexibility. Immediate adjustment—thinking while teaching—points more to the action that results from the thoughts undertaken as opposed to the thought process. Adaptability allows for viewing the instruction from several vantage points. The question is asked, “how could I have done things differently?” Reflection is not a linear occurrence; it is cyclical. During the classroom instruction reflection allowed for routinely and purposely analyzing what happened, what is happening, and what will happen.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine how expert teachers at community colleges, describe the process of becoming master teachers. This study sought to gain knowledge about their behaviors, attitudes, experiences, and methods related to their teaching performance. This study added to the limited literature about the importance of quality teaching at the community college level and assists higher education administrators, especially those at community colleges, in recognizing potential needs for professional development for their faculty. Novice teaching professionals and those seeking to improve upon their instruction and will add research-based best practices to their toolkit.

This chapter summarizes and discusses major aspects of the research and its findings with discussion concerning the application of the theoretical framework of reflective practice theory... Implications for community college faculty and administrators (executive leaders) are presented. Additionally, implications for further study are explored. This chapter concludes with limitations of the study and recommendations for further study.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this directed content analysis qualitative study five constitutive concepts were identified that guide the process of effective community college teachers becoming master teachers. The concepts include (a) changing while doing—flexibility, (b) thinking

while doing— immediate adjustment, (c) thinking after doing—reflection, (d) looking at other ways of doing—adaptability, and (e) doing based upon what was done in the past—retrospection.

### **Changing While Doing - Flexibility**

The instructor participants in this study regularly faced situations in which what was planned did not necessary become a reality. Students' facial expressions and body language provided feedback during the class session which caused them to realize that flexibility was necessary. They made a conscious decision to not abandon the activity, assignment, or lecture. The ability to change and be flexible by using the feedback of students is one of the five themes developed by Law et al. (2005). In their qualitative study, the researchers were interested in the pedagogical stories in which faculty member at a four-year institution discussed their everyday practices in the classroom. The focus was on what the instructors actually did rather than what they believed they would do. Schön and Argyris (1974) refer to this as the difference between two different theories of action: espoused theory (what is said) and theory-in-use (what is done). Reflection and critical thinking were viewed as tools that helped them discover the divergence of the two. The research conducted by Hill et al. (2003) found four emergent themes using grounded theory data analysis. Student participants were asked to share what they considered as 'quality instruction.' One theme that is consistent with my research was their desire for quality of the teacher and specifically the importance of flexibility in the classroom.

### **Thinking While Doing – Immediate Adjustment**

The study participants valued the ability to think about what was occurring in the moment. This was accomplished by their own self-critique and ability to regulate how much to teach or even what not to teach. When students appeared to ‘not get it’ and had the ‘glazed over look, the instructors immediately halted the lecture and probed students to find the point of divergence in understanding the topic. Reflective practice theory points to the need for adjustment (Schön, 1983). An example is the decision made by an emergency room resident when a patient’s reaction to medication or a procedure causes a reaction that could be fatal. He must respond with immediate action. Kreber et al. (2005) viewed pedagogical knowledge and understanding of equal importance to subject matter mastery. In their study the participants approached their craft with vigor and valued the advice of veteran teachers who stressed the importance of making adjustments to their teaching. This concept of immediate adjustment is the result of critical incidents (Schön, 1987) and consideration of these incidents or experience result in a need to adjust the practice of the professional to the planned response or reaction not happening.

### **Thinking After Doing – Reflection**

Reflection involves more than one thought. The process is continuous and requires thinking that is cyclical and purposeful that is supported by talking, journaling, and activity. Hubball et al. (2005) concluded that participants in a faculty certificate program were appreciative of an opportunity to capture reflectivity in their teaching. The reflection provided a way to determine performance and transformed the way in which the teachers viewed their teaching ability. Multiple perspective about their teaching caused continuous thought about the value of professional development and the value of

improvement. They used the various tactics to reflect upon their pedagogical beliefs, intentions, and actions after the completion of the professional development program. Several strategies were used by the participants in this study as a result of reflective methods. They saw the need to be student centered in all instructional activities. The instructors saw the value in ensuring that their students were able to make connections to why a topic was introduced. Constant self-regulation and self-direction allowed for analyzing and critiquing their action and the impact of the action on student learning.

### **Looking at Other Ways of Doing – Adaptability**

A safe environment was a common goal among the participants in this study. Even in this safe environment they also wanted to ‘haunt’ students and ‘wow’ them with memorable experiences. The concept of adaptability gives instructors the ability to seek alternative approaches to teaching. Rather than show pictures and talk about organs in a biology class, an instructor in this study visited a slaughter house to gather a variety of organs to bring to her class. With the advance of technology several also embraced multimedia approaches to their instruction. A high level of adaptivity was viewed as a key element of teaching in a study conducted by Kreber et al. (2005). Their study investigated the benefits of self-regulated processes. Findings in other studies (Meixner, 2010; Hubball & Poole, 2003) also pointed to the importance of expanding knowledge for teaching effectiveness and student engagement. One finding in Hubball’s study contradicted this study’s result in that faculty *did* want to be entirely responsible for their learning. They wanted to learn from peers and attend training to help with matters related to student behavior and use computer technology; a willingness to change was the norm

which supports Schön's (1983) observation that professionals are constantly seeking to adapt when developing things or people.

### **Doing Based Upon What was Done in the Past – Retrospection**

Noteworthy to this concept is that learning is not just from a person's own experiences but also from those experiences of others. A significant finding of this study is that several participants were mentors and shared their knowledge and skills with others. Formal presentations and informal conversations were routine events. In other research (Kreber et al, 2005); Meixner et al. 2010) participants appreciated mentors and sought them out in order to the best job possible. Self-analysis and self-critique are habits of those embrace a retrospective mindset. The ability to laugh at yourself when there is a misstep and not be ashamed to share the experience is valuable. One participant deviated from the plan of action for an activity and realized that she had not fulfilled the purpose of the activity. In retrospect, she understood that the focus of an activity must not be forgotten and was able to recover in the moment by using the unintended action as a 'teachable moment.' Constant improvement of one's work happens through experiences, learning, and practice; this constant improvement is a major concept of reflective practice theory (Schön, 1987).

Noteworthy is Law (2007) and his colleagues' study focused on what participants do versus how they think.

A safe environment was a common goal among the participants. Another strategy that was embraced was to haunt or wow students with memorable experiences. One instructor provided students with the organs of animals from a slaughter house when teaching biology. Another engaged students by allow them to determine the manner in

which the individual groups would present their work. She also believed that it was important for the students to be free to do whatever. This mindset guided her willingness to change if necessary. Professionals are constantly seeking to adapt when involved in developing things or people (Schön, 1983) which is evident in this study. Participants in the study recognized the importance of student feedback provided during the semester and at the end of the semester. Whether formal (in writing) or informal (through dialogue), there was a willingness to listen. Several shared the frustration of engaging students in group projects. Among the issues was the computer software being too advanced, poor group dynamics, and the need for better instructions for the task at hand. Several participants pointed to the need to think on their feet when adjustments were made during these situations.

One significant finding of this study is that several participants were mentors and shared their knowledge and skills with others. Formal presentations for discipline-specific faculty as well as for cross disciplines were one way of delivery. Informal conversations were embraced as part of the instructors' routine. In other research (Kreber et al., 2005; Meixner et al., 2010), participants appreciated mentors and sought them out in order to do the best job possible. Reflective practice theory points to 'reflection on action' that points to the actions of the instructor being grounded in tacit knowledge that is spontaneous resulting in journaling or reflecting upon what has happened after doing. Schön (1987) calls this thinking and doing by which a person ultimately becomes skillful in their profession. Even though all were not engaged in formal journal writing as discussed in Adams' (2009), the participants made mental notes of activity that should be repeated and those that should be avoided. Self-analysis and self-critiquing were regular

habits among the participants. One indicated that she would laugh at herself when something went wrong. She deviated from the plan of action for an instructional activity and became caught up in the dynamics and interaction of the group as opposed to the purpose of the activity. She erred and used the experience as a teachable moment to inform the class of what not to do as a social worker or therapist—do not lose your focus by becoming emotionally involved. Constantly improvement of one's works is happening through experiences, learning, and practice is a major concept of reflective practice theory.

Self-regulated or reflective learning was studied in (Carnell, 2007; Kreber et al., 2005) research about what college teachers viewed as effective teaching. The teachers embraced team teaching and learned as they transformed their teaching techniques. Additionally, Kreber et al. (2005) found that self-reflection and self-regulation were constantly accepted by college faculty. In this study the instructors took personal responsibility for their growth and development. There was no indication from any of them that deficiencies experienced were the responsibility of others. As with this study Carnell and Kreber et al. (2005) found that mentorship, attending workshops, and reading about pedagogical matters related to their subject matter were strategies that improved teaching. When encountering a difficult student, at no time did the participants indicate that the student did not belong in their classroom. Instead they would reflect upon what worked in the past or seek advice from others or even research the situation in professional journals for guidance. Argyris and Schön (1974) refer to this activity as a concept of reflective practice theory, the development of mental maps that impact how a professional plans, carries out, and reviews his actions beyond what has been learned.

Reflective practice is a continuous process—cyclical and always evolving—that considers critical incidents within one’s life’s experiences (Schön, 1987). Thoughtful consideration of these incidents or experiences results in applying theory to practice. The participants regularly faced situations in which things did not go as planned. They make a conscious decision to not abandon the activity, assignment, or lecture. One described it as hitting a brick wall when she taught an introduction course for the first time. She became confused when mathematics was involved for a module in the course. She recognized that she as well as the students was confused. She decided to stop and told the class that she would seek the answer and come back instead of causing more confusion. Even though that situation bothered her, she recognized that she did not know everything and even voiced that sentiment with the class. Other researchers call this continuous process as self-directed learning (Hubball & Poole, 2003; Adams, 2009). Reflection about theory and the actual practice of teaching were findings of research conducted by Adams (2009). As with the aforementioned research and this study, participants had a sense of personal empowerment to change or become better at their teaching which can be viewed as self-mentoring and self-regulated learning.

The findings of this qualitative inquiry are far reaching. Being better and doing better is the goal of community college instructors. Faculty at these higher education institutions are constantly involved in reflection. Even though they do not articulate what they do in terminology used by pedagogical professionals or theorists in the fields of psychology or education, the process of the learning speaks to the relationship between their experiences and being award recipients. Schön’s (1983) definition resonates. While in action (or teaching), the instructor participants were thinking ahead while analyzing



each experience, thus ultimately critically while this process was cyclical in nature. After their action (teaching) the participants were engaged in immediately thinking about each of their class sessions and would relive the experience to determine if anything could have been done differently. Even though all were not engaged in formal journal writing as discussed in Adams' (2009) study, the participants made mental notes of activity that should be repeated. This points to the need to allow for faculty time and opportunity to use the tool of reflection.

### **Implications for Community College Faculty**

Many community college instructors are highly knowledgeable in their content but may have limited formal training in the field of teaching and learning (McKeachie W., 1997). Different strategies are used to enhance the performance of teachers. Some researchers point to reflection as having a direct impact on teaching in higher education (Kreber et al., 2005; Law et al., 2007). Faculty mentoring and support are important to ensure adequate acclimation of new faculty. Essential to the success of a new hire is the ability to model behavior of veteran faculty members who have achieved excellence in their classroom instruction. As veteran faculty age and eventually retire, there is a loss of value for the department/discipline. The ability to capture and use the knowledge proves invaluable for success and ultimate retention of students. First-generation and adult students are challenged in their learning experience (Katsinas, D'Amico, & Friedel, 2011). These same student populations tend to come from low income families and may attend a community college with plans of ultimately transferring to a four-year institution so that costs are lower. Academic preparation for either employment or continued study

must be superior. The classroom instructor will make a difference in the student's experience.

Confidence and job satisfaction result when instructors possess the tools that will assist them in performing their job duties. Faculty have enough pressures and hindrances from classroom management to being tenured. Their ability to perform at their highest potential is of importance. Unlike many professions, teachers' misdeed and inadequacy cannot be immediately recognized. It is not until student complaints and/or student performance is unacceptable based upon learning objectives not being met. The findings in this study will reduce faculty turnover and increase chances for tenure appointment, resulting in departmental continuity.

Even though an instructor may have well-planned lectures and or demonstrations, there must be a willingness to change if necessary. The instructors in this study were quick to adjust their instruction or presentation to fit the needs of the students. The students' needs were more important than the written plans. What was paramount was that the students 'got it.'

My thinking about the profession of teaching has not changed as a result of the findings. Some might view my thinking about teaching as influencing my findings. However, the text of the interviews can be reviewed for content and others would have the same results. No one should be complacent in their career—especially teachers. The world is evolving and change is an everyday experience. Those who are unwilling to change will damage the reputation of the profession. They will be ultimately left behind.

## **Implications for Community College Administration—the Executive Leader**

Because all of the participants in this study did not have formal teacher training in pedagogy, professional development programs should be embraced.

Community colleges have experienced reduced state funding and several lack the funds to manage increases in enrollment from those who seek to stretch their money. Even though the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) launched by the Obama Administration and the Completion Agenda, developed by the AACCC (American Association of Community Colleges), the task may be difficult (Katsinas et al., 2011). The executive leaders “assume and shares responsibility and accountability for achievement of organizational goals and outcomes. The executive leader clearly defines organizational roles and objectively measures employee performance in the context of the organization’s mission and goals.” (NYSED # 7; ELCC # 3) This standard makes the role of the college administrator complex. Even though there is shared responsibility and accountability, the hiring process must be strategic to ensure that the best qualified enter the classroom. Also of paramount importance is to have valid and reliable measures in place to determine the quality of the performance of the teachers—whether new or veterans. The tenure process must not only include the usual processes but also seek to provide professional development that addresses the needs of the faculty. Participant 6 commented about how the tenure process is linear and not cyclical. She viewed her process of becoming better as a continuous process; otherwise, complacency would result. Administrators should understand that they are producing a tangible product that must be inspected for quality control. What is produced in the classroom is intangible.

The result can be a student eager to continue to learn or one who has a damaged spirit. Both results have implications—negative and positive.

All participants valued opportunities to do better and attended workshops and seminars to be improve. In his study, Murray (2001) concluded that not only should college administrators require professional development participation but also support the programming with a ‘point person.’ This sends a message that the initiative is valued. Two of the institutions have formal professional development programming and only one has a full-time person who manages the efforts. Policy must align with practice. If there is an expectation to provide quality instruction, then the tools to make this happens must be provided to college instructors. Time and effort for formal professional development as well as informal interaction are essential for improvement of the faculty. As threaded throughout this study and used as the theoretical framework, reflection opportunities and activities provide for growth, improvement, and self-regulation.

Classroom observations, student performance, and student retention are factors used to measure quality. Leaders must not only be driven by data, but also be people informed as decisions are made related to hires, budgets, and allocation of funds. Recent and on-going budgetary issues continue to point to the relevancy of this study (Fain, 2011).

A far-reaching implication of the importance quality teaching is that of students learning the objectives a course that is the pre-requisite for the next course in a sequence. Failure may result in waiting a full year for a course or even the student’s removal from a program. The long-term implication is student retention and completion.

Executive leaders are tasked with ensuring that organization goals are met in a variety of ways. Even though resources may be limited when hiring, the human capital should be valued. Passion for teaching should be seen as adding value to any institution. The participants were consistently showing their passion for the profession. The amount of pay was not the driving force but the ability to help students learn and improve was common among them.

### **Implications for Further Study**

The population of interest is small; however the findings are consistent with other research related to this topic. Over 200 recipients were honored by the Chancellor of the State University of New York as recipients of the Excellence in Teaching award for community college faculty since its inception. Research of teaching award recipients in other states would add to the body of knowledge.

To what extent do faculty members actually critique their work? This question was often reflected upon by the participants. Questioning themselves and probing students for improvement is a tool that master teachers use. Changing as a result of self-evaluation and self-analysis or the critique of others is not necessarily bad, but means that the teacher is not afraid to try something new. Research related to the ability to embrace critiquing of classroom instruction would provide valuable data for self-reflection of novice faculty members. It is detrimental to think that only one way of doing something—teaching works for all. Some studies (Law et al., 2007; Adams, 2009) as well as this study investigated the process in which professors understand and improve upon their teaching. It would be beneficial to now take it a step further and determine what happens after the critiquing process.

## **Limitations of the Study**

As with any study, this study has limitations. Weaknesses that may have affected the results of this study include the human factor of subjectivity in determining the emerging patterns that resulted in the themes. The text of each participant was reviewed several times; however, misinterpretation of the participant's intent may have affected the category of theme chosen.

One surprise that resulted in conducting the interviews was that only two of the participants used education language/vernacular when describing what they did in the classroom. No specific theories were mentioned by any of the instructors. My conjecture is that even though the instructors knew what to do, they may not have known the professional terminology. They were very much aware of teaching strategies and techniques. It tells me that knowing the proper terminology may not be inherently known by teaching professionals. These same professionals may not be able to articulate in a manner accepted by the teaching and learning experts, but have the ability *to do* what is accepted. Licensure exams use language that may be foreign to these teaching professionals.

The demographics of the participants may or may not be an adequate reflection of the population of the 39 recipients or even the total population over 3,000 full-time teaching faculty members at community colleges in New York State. Demographic data is not available because it is not requested as part of the nomination process. Each campus would have to be contacted and asked for the specific information about each instructor related to race, gender, age, etc. This would be a major task to complete given the implications of privacy laws.

My views and thoughts about this master teacher development have not changed since completing this research. Personally, I have experienced being in a classroom with master teachers as my teachers and as colleagues. Even though credibility of the findings is the goal, these experiences may have influenced the data analysis and interpretation.

### **Recommendations**

Because the criteria for nomination of faculty are different at each of the 30 campuses, it would be beneficial to study their internal processes. I discovered that based on FTEs (full time equivalents) a campus has the ability to nominate up to four faculty members but may choose to nominate only one. The logic is that the college believes that only one person should be honored. Other colleges will nominate their maximum allowance.

A teaching inventory similar to the TPI (Teaching Perspectives Inventory) used at the University of British Columbia (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005) would add to the body of knowledge about teacher practices and beliefs about their teaching. A tool that measures reflection would guide the task of determining the quality of the instructor's ability to teach. Executive leaders would be better prepared to make decisions related to tenure, promotion, and retention. However, this tool should be one aspect of the evaluation process and not the total process.

### **Implications for Structural Support and Classroom Practices**

Reflective practice theory provided insight into the actions and thoughts of the participants. However, there were findings that were not influenced from any of the five concepts espoused from the theory. The instructor participants shared aspects of their

development as master teachers that are valuable and noteworthy. The two dominant areas are (a) structural support and (b) classroom practices.

All participants pointed to retrospection. They realized that this was not just from their own experiences but also from the experiences of others. Thus, mentoring resulted. Mentorship was valued and welcomed. The participants were mentored and shared that also they mentored others.

Another factor shared among the participants was the importance of having time and opportunity to engage in mentoring activities—whether formal or informal. Administrative support and engagement were not always the norm. Even though teaching and learning centers were available with planned sessions and workshop, little or no time was routinely built into (a) having contact with others in a non-threatening manner; (b) time to reflect upon any aspect of their teaching by journaling; and (c) opportunity to interact with non-department faculty members.

Participants provided time for their students to reflect. The students are given time to write (journal) about their learning. Generally, this strategy was used at the beginning of class and allowed for review as well as provided a segway into the topic for the day. Not only did it increase engagement but provided the insight for the teachers into how to improve or change their instruction. This activity is consistent with Carnell (200&) and his findings stressing the importance of teachers and students being co-learners by engaging in dialogue.

Recognizing and affirming each student in class is another practice reported by the participants. Increased student engagement resulted. The ‘holy grail’ is one example



of affirmation events. Each students was required to make a statement or pose a question about their learning. This strategy was used in both traditional and online classes.

The ‘wow factor’ was used to gain the attention of students. This was accomplished by providing actual body parts of animals in a biology class to making controversial statements in a law calls. Students became engaged and would walk away talking about the experience and the dialogue and new learning.

Changing from the routine forced the teachers to be risk-takers. When difficulty students were encountered, they were forced to be accountable for their action or inaction. Often teamwork and group projects were used so that students would be prepared for the workplace. The instructors threaded collaborative learning strategies and the value of being a member of team throughout the course.

### **Summary of Research Process**

Qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, p. 232).

Reflective practice theory helps to shape and predict the relationships among the variable of interest. These variables or concepts helped to develop coding and relationship among the variables; thus, deductive category application resulted. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Directed-content analysis based upon the theoretical framework of reflective practice was undertaken. Directed-content analysis was used because it is flexible for analyzing text data and has a “family of analytic approaches that ranges from impressionistic, intuitive, and interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The intent of this qualitative research is to understand lived experiences of community college instructors and how they become master teachers.

The review of literature devoted to this topic provides several factors that impact the effectiveness of instructors in higher education. Most point to four-year colleges; however, a correlation can be made for the merits of the same research for two-year or community colleges.

The significance of this study is to inform the public about the behaviors and actions experienced by teaching professionals who exhibit excellence in their teaching. There are challenges among college administrators to ensure that their funding streams continue and for legislatures at all levels to ensure that the mission of community colleges is sustainable.

This study utilized qualitative methods to answer the following research question: “How expert teachers in community colleges describe the process of becoming expert teachers.”

Study participants were intentionally selected to inform the inquiry. Initially thirty-nine recipients of the SUNY Chancellor’s Excellence in Teaching award were contacted as a result of being identified from the SUNY webpage. The invitation to participate resulted in nine positive responses. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lasting forty-five to sixty minutes.

Eight questions were developed to acquire information directed to the five concepts of reflective practice theory. The data analysis was directed toward these concepts espoused from the theory: (a) changing while doing—flexibility, (b) thinking while doing—adjusting, (c) thinking after doing—reflection, (d) looking at other ways of doing, and (e) doing based upon past experiences—retrospect. The concepts were

expanded into categories or themes that were deductively and inductively directed from the transcript text.

Ethical practices were embraced during this research. Principles of confidentiality have been maintained in data collection and interpretation framed objectively in truth. Participant confidentiality has been preserved throughout the study.

## **Conclusion**

Success of students and their degree completion are the goals of any higher education institution. Community colleges are considered to be teaching institutions.

This research shines much needed light on the complexity of instruction at the community college level. Students attending two-year colleges tend to require remedial courses and support services to complete their studies and obtain a degree. The intent of this research is to point to the need to view the essential function of the instructor in the classroom—teaching. He or she can make a difference in the overall experience of students and their ultimate success. The instructor’s knowledge of pedagogy may be limited and/or deficient. Studies have been conducted in other countries and at American four-year colleges about this phenomenon. However there is limited empirical research related to the topic specifically addressing community college teachers’ emergence to master teachers. The purpose of this study is to determine how expert teachers at community colleges describe the process of becoming master teachers.

There is a need for this study because of the varying demands and many concerns that community colleges face. Community colleges are public institutions that are not only funded by student tuition but also by local and county governments. Funding is one concern. A multitude of formulas is used to determine what each state contributes. Often

there is a reduction in the states' contributions resulting in the local and county governments sharing more of the burden. Another concern is the graduation rate at the community college level. Completion rates factors into a college's value when parents seek what is the best academic choice for their children. The AACC is purposely involved in shaping any policy related to financial and academic accountability among community colleges (Outreach & Engagement, 2011).

This qualitative study was conducted using directed-content analysis and the framework of reflective practice theory to explain the phenomenon. Reflective practice is a theory often used in education pedagogy. It is a continuous process from a personal perspective that considers critical incidents within one's life's experiences. Reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying theory to practice, thus becoming a reflective practitioner. Proficient and expertise in learning is necessary to transform an individual because of the unstable state of a person's surroundings (Schön, 1973). Because of this unstable state, change is essential. One (in this case, the instructor) must self-regulate by reflecting on his own experiences and determining what works best for the student. This study addressed both what the instructor participants think as well as what they do. When the interviews were held and questions asked, the instructors had 'ah-ha' moments and did not even realize that what they did was what they did without too much thought or effort. It was only after being asked specific questions did the importance or impact of their action resonate.

A total of nine participants from four community colleges in upstate New York responded to an email sent to a sampling of thirty-nine. The sample population consisted of recipients of the State of New York (SUNY) Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching

award. After explanation of the study and completion of consent forms, semi-structured interviews were scheduled and held at a location convenient to each participant.

Findings of this study indicate that the instructors are their own worst critic. Critiquing and analyzing their teaching effectiveness is constantly occurring. As a result of self-regulation, they welcome trying new things and openly admit to when something does not go as planned. The strategies that the participants used to become master teachers should be embraced by all teaching professionals. A summary of the tools and strategies is given in Table 5.1. This research using reflective practice theory with directed-content analysis provides a framework for improving the training for teaching professionals and provides those who are new to the profession the tools to better transition into the field.

Table 5 1

*Tools to Improve Classroom Instruction*

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Watch body language/non verbal of students
Be willing to change plans
Relate to students
Be open to critique and self-analysis
Engage in relevant and current teaching (know what interests students)
Change is necessary
Connect to students' heart and spirit
Be student centered; have respect for them
Create/provide safe a environment
Encourage active engagement
Haunt them/ have memorable experience
Have passion for teaching
Use varied learning experiences
Be prepared and organized
Refer students to tutoring or intervention early
Be approachable
Show connection to why topic is taught—relatable

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## Appendix A

### States With Single Appropriation

Alabama

Alaska

California

Colorado

Connecticut

Hawaii

Idaho

Illinois

Kentucky

Maryland

Michigan

Mississippi

Missouri

Montana

Nebraska

New Jersey

New York

North Carolina

Oregon

Pennsylvania

South Carolina

Virginia

Washington

Wisconsin

## Appendix B

### States Without Single Appropriation

Arizona	Arkansas
Colorado	Connecticut
Delaware	Florida
Georgia	Hawaii
Idaho	Illinois
Indiana	Kansas
Louisiana	Maine
Maryland	Massachusetts
Minnesota	Missouri
Montana	Nebraska
Nevada	New Jersey
New Mexico	New York
Ohio	Oklahoma
Rhode Island	South Carolina
Tennessee	Texas
Utah	Vermont
Virginia	Wisconsin
West Virginia	

## Appendix C

### Research Questions

Theory synopsis: Reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one’s own experiences in applying theory to practice.

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Link to Concept</b>
a) changing while doing—flexibility	Describe your approach to teaching?	c
b) thinking while doing—adjusting	What comes to mind as you think of what has worked in your teaching?	c, e
c) thinking after doing—reflection	What is your most memorable teaching experience?	c
d) looking at other ways of doing—adaptable	Tell me about how you determine if you have taught well.	a, c
e) doing based upon past experiences—retrospect	In what ways have you shared your teaching experiences?	c, d
	Can you describe specific experiences you deem relevant to your teaching?	a, b, c
	In what ways do you critique your work? What challenges have you encountered?	c, e
	Name a time when things did not go as planned in the classroom. Why did it happen? What did you do specifically related to your teaching?	c

More questions specifically about times they spent thinking/reflecting about teaching.

Follow up questions are necessary and may include, “Can you tell me more about that?”

Most questions are about actions undertaken while teaching, not about the thinking about the teaching.



## Appendix D

### Sample Age

<b>Under 25</b>	<b>26-35</b>	<b>36-45</b>	<b>46-55</b>	<b>56-65</b>	<b>Over 65</b>
<b>0</b>	0	0	3	5	1

## Appendix E

### Sample Departments

	Biology	Business Admin & Econ	Business Admin.	Computer Info. Svcs	Computing Sciences	English	English & Philosophy	Envi. Cons. & Hort	ESOL	Health, Physical Ed	Hospitality	Human Services	Mathematics	Nursing	Science & Technology	Science/Technology	Social Sciences	Visual & Performing Arts
<b>Population</b>	3	3	1	1	1	9	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	3	3	1	1	1
<b>Sample</b>	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0

## Appendix F

### Education Degree

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>M.S.</b>	3
<b>Ph.D.</b>	3
<b>M.A.</b>	1
<b>B.A.</b>	1
<b>J.D.</b>	1

## Appendix G

### Academic Rank

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample</b>
<b>Professor</b>	15	5
<b>Associate Professor</b>	13	3
<b>Assistant Professor</b>	10	1
<b>Instructor</b>	1	0