

9-2016

## The Impact Of Faculty Development On Community College Adjunct Faculty

Stefanie Forster Bourque  
*University of New England*

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THE IMPACT OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT  
ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADJUNCT FACULTY

By  
Stefanie Forster Bourque

B.A. in Liberal Arts (Eugene Lang College) 2000  
M.A. in English Literature (University of New Hampshire) 2004

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of  
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine  
August, 2016

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Stefanie Forster Bourque  
August 2016  
Educational Leadership

## THE IMPACT OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADJUNCT FACULTY

### Abstract

Facing a host of challenges posed by economic constraints and increased accountability, higher education is rapidly changing. All institutions are expected to meet changing student needs, implement learning-centered pedagogies, and utilize evolving technologies regardless of their size or access to resources. Rural community colleges face the same challenges as all other higher education institutions; however, small, rural colleges have added difficulties due to their size and location. Recruiting qualified faculty is one challenge due to the small number of local residents, and the salary and isolation of a rural college makes it difficult to attract instructors from other areas. Retention is a concern, and high turnover due to academic loneliness or low workplace satisfaction can be detrimental. Therefore, it is imperative for rural community colleges to retain highly qualified instructors, and professional development may be one method for increasing faculty retention. However, little is known about adjunct faculty perceptions of faculty development and its impact on their personal and professional growth. This study adds to the existing literature on faculty development programs in rural community colleges and documents the experiences of the adjunct faculty members who participate in them. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to guide an examination of the impact of professional development on the personal and professional growth of five volunteers. Findings indicate that adjunct faculty members are grateful for the opportunity to participate in professional development activities, and they find value in the experience. Community building,

an increased sense of connection to others, and greater familiarity with the college are all cited as benefits of participation. Further, the greatest impact of a faculty development program is on community building and helping adjunct faculty feel as if they are a part of the college community.

Keywords: *Faculty Development, Rural-Serving Community Colleges, Adjunct Faculty*

University of New England  
Doctor of Education  
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented by

Stefanie Forster Bourque

It was presented on  
June 20, 2016

and approved by:

Michael Patrick, Lead Committee Member  
University of New England

Brianna Parsons, Secondary Committee Member  
University of New England

Doreen Rogan, Affiliated Committee Member  
York County Community College

## DEDICATION

To my husband, Eric Bourque:  
For your unwavering support and complete faith in my ability to succeed.  
Thank you for taking this journey with me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Journeys such as these are never taken alone. Over the past three years, I have cried and laughed and ranted and raved, and there were moments when I felt that I couldn't write another word. Without the support of my family and friends, I may have given up; but, your love and encouragement sustained me. For each and every person who helped me walk this path, you have my deepest gratitude.

To my husband, Eric—thank you for listening, for talking, for supplying tissues or a sleeve, and for your willingness to bail me out. I never could have done this without you.

To my parents, Mary Ann and William Forster—thank you for supporting me and always believing in me (and for telling me to “do my homework”).

To my colleague, Doreen Rogan—thank you for listening, for brainstorming, for your constant encouragement, and for your insight into this process. I am both honored and privileged to have you as a mentor and a friend.

To the five adjunct faculty members at “Northern Community College” who so generously donated your personal time. You are the reason that I was able to complete this study, and I am grateful for your kindness and willingness to share your stories. I am humbled by your generous spirit, and I am lucky to have you all as colleagues.

To my colleagues at the University of New England who have walked this path with me: Andrea, Bobbie, Cassandra, Christina, Cristina, Henri, Jenn, Mary Colleen, Terri, and Victoria. Thank you all for sharing this experience with me.

To the instructors and advisors at UNE and “NCC” who have provided assistance over the past three years, I extend my warmest thanks.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions .....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Limitations and Assumptions .....	9
Significance.....	10
Definitions.....	11
Summary .....	13
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	16
The Community College Context .....	19
Rural community colleges. ....	23
Adjunct Faculty.....	25
Adjunct faculty in community colleges. ....	29
Faculty Development in the United States.....	30
Faculty development from 2006 to present. ....	33
Expanding into organizational development. ....	35
Faculty development in community colleges. ....	37
Conceptual Framework.....	39
Summary .....	41
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	42

Setting .....	44
Participants.....	46
Data.....	47
Analysis.....	48
Participant Rights.....	49
Potential Limitations and Biases.....	50
Summary.....	52
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	53
Method of Analysis.....	54
Adjunct Faculty Perceptions of Faculty Development .....	56
A passion and a choice.....	57
Value added. ....	60
Gratitude for inclusion. ....	66
Adult Learning Principles.....	70
Create a climate of respect.....	71
Encourage active participation.....	71
Build on experience. ....	72
Employ collaborative inquiry. ....	73
Learn for action.....	74
Empower the participants. ....	75
Summary.....	76
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	77
Interpretation of Findings .....	79

Implications.....	82
Recommendations for Action .....	85
Recommendations for Further Research.....	88
Conclusion .....	90
REFERENCES .....	92

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 ..... 56

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“I am just an adjunct.”

This is a common phrase heard throughout the halls of colleges and universities where adjunct faculty make up the majority of teaching faculty, but often refer to themselves in the language of the minority. “I am *just* an adjunct,” is a phrase often said with anxiety or nervousness, or it accompanies a question about whether or not “an adjunct” can participate in an event or activity. Adjunct faculty often find themselves in a precarious position—they are not guaranteed a minimum number of classes each semester, low enrollments can lead to their classes being cancelled, or they could have to forfeit one of their scheduled courses to a full-time faculty member. These conditions often leave adjunct faculty feeling as if they are expendable and not an integral piece of the college community (Diegel, 2013; Tarr, 2010).

Every college and university relies on adjunct, or part-time, faculty to teach introductory courses for freshman or specialized courses in niche programs. This is especially true of community colleges that have a mission to serve their local communities through transfer, career and trade programs, developmental courses, continuing education, and community outreach (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010). Not only do community colleges serve their local communities, they must also rely on the expertise of the local workforce to deliver the most up to date knowledge in rapidly changing fields (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Wallin, 2007). The increasingly diverse programming creates a demand for part-time employees, but it also means that many of these instructors are hired to teach one or two classes per semester, and often in the evenings when full time staff are gone (Tarr, 2010). Limited engagement with the institution leads to

isolation that exacerbates the problem of integral employees feeling as though they are unessential to the larger institution (Diegel, 2013; Tarr, 2010).

In recent years, faculty development programs have either emerged or evolved to provide orientation and instructional support for this growing demographic in higher education. Orientation programs, teaching seminars, and other social activities that include adjunct faculty are becoming more common, and community colleges especially are investing their already scant resources into the professional development of this employee group (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010; Eddy, 2007). Despite this trend toward inclusion in professional development activities, adjunct faculty members are not often treated as an integral piece of the college community (Diegel, 2013; Kezar & Sam, 2013). In fact, ten years ago, Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005) noted that adjunct faculty “lack opportunities to grow professionally and to feel part of a collegial community” (p. 35). More recently, Kezar and Sam (2013) note that “many contingent faculty members have absorbed a negative self-image, not believing they deserve better working conditions” (p. 57). As long as adjunct instructors are referring to themselves in the language of the minority, colleges and universities will need to invest time and resources into their cultivation, retention, and professional development.

### **Problem Statement**

Facing a host of challenges posed by economic constraints and increased accountability, the landscape of higher education is rapidly changing (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2005). Decreased funding for public higher education, coupled with demands for higher graduation rates and greater evidence of student learning, is creating a burden for colleges and universities that are struggling to compete in a global, online market (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006). These shifts pose new challenges for all higher education institutions as they seek to respond to

pressure from students, parents and legislators. Research universities, small liberal arts colleges, and community colleges are expected to meet changing student needs, implement learning-centered pedagogies, and utilize ever-evolving technologies regardless of their size or access to resources (Eddy, 2007). As a result of these pressures, changes to the curriculum are appearing in the form of new technologies, specialized programs, and alternative delivery methods (McKee & Tew, 2013). Another notable change is the increasing number of faculty who are hired to teach on a contractual basis. Whether to offset financial difficulties or to fill a niche program, part-time instructors now make up the majority of teaching faculty in higher education, and in community colleges they account for approximately 70% of the faculty workforce (Diegel, 2013; Rich, 2015; Wallin, 2007).

As the number of adjunct faculty increases, this group is receiving more attention from researchers who are investigating their working conditions (e.g. Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2005; Kezar, 2013). Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005) write that adjunct faculty members are often hired by institutions using inequitable hiring practices, and they subsequently work under unfair conditions with little pay and no benefits. Recognizing that faculty members will necessarily hold different types of appointments, the authors outline five different elements that are essential to all academic workers—balance and flexibility, employment equity, professional growth, collegiality and community involvement and academic freedom and autonomy (p. 37). Recommendations that stem from these elements include creating equitable employment policies, providing access to support services, office space, and equipment, and offering on-going professional development opportunities. Similarly, Kezar and Sam (2013) note that few institutions have made progress in developing the practices that that Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005) had outlined as essential practices. The policies and practices that Kezar and Sam (2013)

identify as affecting the work environment are “multiyear contracts, inclusion in orientation or governance, [and] availability of professional development” (pp. 57-58). Their findings indicate that institutionalization of these policies leads to a more supportive work environment for all faculty members, and the focus shifts from issues of rights and roles to responsibilities and obligations to the learning environment. Additional research into working conditions and job satisfaction indicate that adjunct faculty are generally satisfied with their teaching work; however, several recommendations are consistently made to improve support such as recognition from administrators, a designated workspace, orientation, and ongoing professional development (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Gehrke, 2013; Rich, 2015).

Among higher education institutions, community colleges are the most likely to include adjunct faculty in professional development activities and rural community colleges tend to be more inclusive than their larger urban and suburban counterparts (Eddy, 2007; Spaniel & Scott, 2013). Rural-serving community colleges have unique circumstances due to their size and location, and inclusion of adjunct faculty may be attributable to a smaller overall faculty workforce, a greater need for retention, or a heavier workload for fewer adjunct instructors. Rural community colleges face the same challenges as all other higher education institutions including their urban counterparts; however, small, rural colleges have added difficulties (Eddy, 2007). The rural economy is marked by decline, and low-income, poverty and low levels of literacy are common in rural areas (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007; Murray, 2005). Recruiting qualified faculty is a challenge due to the small number of local residents who are qualified to teach specialized classes, while the salary and isolation of a rural college makes it difficult to attract instructors from other areas (Murray, 2005). Retention is also a concern, and a high turnover due to academic loneliness or a lack of cultural opportunity can be detrimental to the



college and the larger community. Therefore, while it is imperative for rural community colleges to retain highly qualified instructors, little is known about adjunct faculty perceptions of faculty development and its impact on their personal and professional growth.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development in a small, rural community college in relation to their personal and professional growth. According to the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (n.d.), small, rural community colleges are public institutions that confer the Associate of Arts or Science as the highest degree, have an unduplicated headcount of fewer than 2,500 students, and are located in areas that have a population of less than 500,000 people. Recruiting and retaining faculty is more challenging in a rural setting, and it is important to understand how services provided through a comprehensive faculty development program impact adjunct faculty members in these institutions (Eddy, 2007). In her research on contingent faculty, Kezar (2013) notes that a fundamental question for researchers is to understand how adjunct faculty perceive their work (p. 3). She urges a scholarship that seeks to understand adjunct faculty experiences from their own perspective and in their own words. However, the voice of the adjunct faculty member is missing from the current literature. This qualitative study fills this gap by recording the experiences of adjunct faculty members who have participated in a faculty development program at a small, rural community college in order to understand how it affects their personal and professional growth.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

How do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth?

How do principles of adult learning influence adjunct instructor perceptions of faculty development?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative study looked at adjunct faculty in a small, rural-serving community college in order to understand their experiences of faculty development. Teaching and learning are central to the community college mission, and adjunct faculty members deliver the majority of instruction in these institutions. Because of their deep impact on the learning environment, adjunct instructors should be provided with support services that include orientation, mentoring, and instructional development opportunities—all facets of a comprehensive faculty development program. Moreover, retention is a concern for small, rural community colleges that often have difficulty in recruiting qualified instructors (Murray, 2007). Since teaching is often deeply satisfying for those who choose to work in community colleges, researchers advocate for the inclusion of adjunct instructors in programs that support teaching and learning (Eddy, 2007; Murray, 2007). Faculty development professionals should view their programs as adult education and the participants as adult learners. Doing so will help to create a comprehensive program that is respectful of adjunct faculty experience and helps instructors to attain their personal and professional goals (Lawler & King, 2000). It is important, therefore, to analyze instructor experiences with faculty development through the lens of adult learning principles.

Within the context of professional development, adjunct faculty members are adult learners and faculty development is adult education. To understand the influences of adult education on adjunct faculty members, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used.

As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain, “access to experience is always dependent on what participants tell us about that experience, and [...] the researcher then needs to interpret that account from the participant in order to understand their experience” (p. 3). Using this interpretative research method, adjunct faculty experiences of faculty development were analyzed using the six adult learning principles developed by Lawler and King (2000). Because, as Merriam (2008) writes, “adult learning is a complex phenomenon that can never be reduced to a single, simple explanation” (p. 94), this study utilizes the professional development framework created by Lawler and King (2000) that draws from the diverse body of literature on adult education. This framework includes the following six principles: 1. Create a climate of respect, 2. Encourage active participation, 3. Build on experience, 4. Employ collaborative inquiry, 5. Learn for action, 6. Empower the participants (Lawler & King, 2000; Lawler, 2003).

Lawler and King’s (2000) six principles of adult learning provide a conceptual foundation for the analysis of a faculty development program that is designed on theories of adult education. Drawing from the work of Apps, Brookfield, Caffarella, Cranton, Merriam, Mezirow, and other well respected authors in the field of adult education, Lawler and King (2000) recognize that faculty are autonomous and self-directed learners who need to feel invested in the discussion, workshop or program (Lawler, 2003). Moreover, the adult learning experience is different from that of children, and their experiences are integral to the learning environment (Lawler and King, 2000). Lawler and King (2000) write that learning in adulthood is “an opportunity to seek understanding of the world around us and the changes inherent in our adult lives” (p. 21). As a result, the six principles developed by Lawler and King (2000) stem from these well-established theories of adult learning. A brief synopsis of each principle follows:

1. Create a climate of respect: adults bring a variety of experiences to their learning, so it is important to take into account their goals, expectations and expertise when planning for professional development.
2. Encourage active participation: adults are active participants in their work and personal lives and regularly engage in decision-making. Therefore, a successful program will actively engage adult learners in decisions about what and how they will be learning.
3. Build on experience: the diversity of experience that adults bring into their learning should be at the core of the learning experience. Adults learn from and through their life experiences and will actively engage with previous learning in order to understand a new construct or concept.
4. Employ collaborative inquiry: building on the academic concept of collegiality, faculty members are often expected to work together on committees and other academic projects. Connecting this to the social aspect of adult learning, faculty development programs should involve faculty as collaborators in deciding what and how they would like to learn.
5. Learn for action: faculty development workshops are most successful when there is a practical aspect built into them. Adult learners want to use new skills or information immediately, so an immediate and practical application of new knowledge is a desirable outcome for professional development sessions.
6. Empower the participants: faculty development programs should value change and growth and provide a safe space for participants to learn and practice new techniques and skills. Lawler and King (2000) write that “when learners are able not only to

comprehend new information but also to place it in their context, make meaning of it, and take action to incorporate it into their daily lives, they become empowered” (p. 24).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

This qualitative study focused on adjunct faculty members who have participated in professional development activities in a small, rural community college setting. In order to fully explore the experiences of participants using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), only a small sample size can be used. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) explain that “IPA studies usually have a small number of participants and the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of those individuals. As part of this, the study may explore in detail the similarities and differences between each case” (p. 3). While the results of this study may not be generalizable in a statistical sense, findings may be used by other small to medium sized rural community colleges that include adjunct faculty in faculty development programs. It is important to note that the unique nature of the rural setting may preclude larger urban or suburban institutions from using these results to develop their own programs. Further, this study is limited to adjunct faculty members who teach from one to three courses per semester with no other benefitted duties assigned to them by the institution. Therefore, this study is not intended to be representative of full time faculty members or academic staff also serving as adjunct faculty members within their own institutions.

In considering the methodology, sample and setting for the proposed study, several assumptions were made. The first assumption is that the sample is representative of the larger adjunct faculty population within the proposed setting. It is also assumed that the individual shared his or her own felt experiences and did not simply provide the answers that are considered

acceptable. Moreover, it is assumed that the adjunct faculty participant reported on his or her thoughts about faculty development programming as it is delivered at the study site and not about experiences from another college or program.

### **Significance**

According to the 2010 data set of the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, there are 137 small, rural community colleges and 570 total rural-serving community colleges in the United States. Although geographically rural community colleges comprise a large portion of community colleges (approximately 57%), many studies focus on large or urban institutions and few consider the needs of small to medium sized community colleges (Eddy & Murray, 2007). While faculty in small, rural community colleges face the same challenges as those in larger institutions, such as rapid changes in instructional technologies, greater accountability, and a focus on the assessment of student learning, instructors in rural colleges must meet these challenges with fewer resources for greater student need (Eddy, 2007; Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). Moreover, recruiting qualified faculty in rural settings is increasingly difficult because of comparatively lower salaries, limited cultural and social amenities, and fewer local residents who are qualified for teaching positions (Cedja, 2010; Murray, 2007). Despite these challenges, research into small, rural community colleges is limited. In 2005, the Carnegie Foundation began to categorize two-year colleges according to geographic location, and several studies have been published since then (Charlier & Williams, 2010). However, because this change in the classification system is relatively recent, there is a need for more research into the experiences of adjunct faculty who choose to work in small, rural settings.

Regardless of location, the literature on faculty development in community colleges boasts of innovative programs that can be replicated in other institutions, and the authors cited all

agree that adjunct faculty participation in professional development is essential for student learning (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010; Faulkner & Gooding, 2010; Wallin, 2007). However, little is known about the impact of these efforts on faculty in general and adjunct faculty in particular. Best practices in the assessment of faculty development programs is being debated in the field, and work is beginning on the outcomes of instructional development (Chism, Holley, & Harris, 2012; Stes, Min-Leliveld, Gijbels, & Van Petegem, 2010). These studies, however, do not specifically address adjunct faculty, and the literature on faculty development in community colleges does not extend well beyond practical applications for faculty development programming. While community colleges are making an effort to include adjunct faculty in professional development activities, the impact of these efforts on their personal and professional growth is not well known.

### **Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, key terms are defined as follows:

*Adjunct faculty* – a term used most often in community colleges, adjunct faculty are contract employees teaching on a per course basis who receive no benefits (Wallin, 2005). The terms “adjunct” and “part-time” are often used synonymously and share the same definition.

*Adult education* – adult learning is comprised of a set of complex processes that researchers are continually trying to evaluate and understand (Chen, 2014). Within the field of adult education, three concepts have proven to be enduring and are currently accepted as foundational: adult learners are self-directed and learn from experience, learning is transformative and personal, and critical reflection leads to deeper learning (Chen, 2014).

*Community Colleges* – regionally accredited, public two-year institutions that award the associates degree as the highest degree conferred (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014; Levinson,

2005). Associates degrees include the associate of arts (A.A.), the associate of science (A.S.) and the associate of applied science (A.A.S.).

*Contingent faculty* – this term is used widely in the literature on research universities and denotes instructors who are not on the tenure track (Kezar & Sam, 2013). The term “contingent” encompasses a broader section of non-tenure track faculty than the more specific and limiting term of “adjunct.” For this study, “contingent faculty” will only be used in chapter two and/or when it is the preferred terminology of the original researcher.

*Educational development* – used most often in international contexts, the term educational development describes the three facets of faculty development programs (Ouellette, 2010).

Ouellette (2010) refers to the term as a “more encompassing” way to describe the “related initiatives for academic development, staff development, and quality enhancement” (p. 8).

Similarly, Shay (2012) asserts that educational development is “most commonly associated with various forms of student, staff, curriculum, and policy development” (p. 311).

*Faculty development* – denotes a comprehensive program that includes elements of instructional, personal, and organizational development (Ouellette, 2010). Additional facets of a faculty development program may include career coaching, orientation and workplace support, instructional technology support and assessment planning. In this study, faculty development and professional development are used interchangeably with the understanding that both phrases refer to the growth of faculty members in higher education.

*Full-time faculty* – within the community college setting, full-time faculty are benefitted employees who teach a contractual number of courses per semester, advise students, and serve on committees in exchange for a regular salary.



*In-service training* – this term is used to describe faculty development programs in the community college setting (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). It is used synonymously with professional development and faculty development; however, it only appears sporadically in the literature. In this study, it will be used only when it is the term given by the researcher being cited.

*Professional development* – a set of formal and informal activities that promote growth in professionalism and encourages the acquisition of new skills related to an employee’s profession or career (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

*Rural Community Colleges* – based on the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (n.d.), rural community colleges are those that confer the associates as the highest degree, are located outside of a Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) or a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), or are in one of these areas with a population of less than 500,000 people. To be classified as a “small,” rural community college, the unduplicated headcount needs to be fewer than 2,500 students.

## **Summary**

This study adds to the existing literature on faculty development programs in rural community colleges. While there are a number of studies that discuss adjunct faculty job satisfaction and how to improve working conditions for this group as a whole, there is a need for increased scholarship that emphasizes their perceptions and experiences (Kezar, 2013). Within the literature on faculty development is a focus on the type of programming that can and should be provided for adjunct faculty. This has provided a much needed practical focus for the field; however, the first-hand experiences of the adjunct faculty members who participate in these programs are missing. Focusing on the individual illuminates the felt experiences of those who

participate in faculty development programming. Moreover, it gives voice to a group whose experiences have not yet been documented.

To explore this further, chapter two provides a review of the literature that addresses the community college context, adjunct faculty, and faculty development, and situates these themes within a conceptual framework of adult education. Because the community college mission and setting, including its high employment rates of part-time faculty, creates specific considerations for faculty development programs, these three themes warrant further examination. When considered as a whole, the literature paints a unique portrait of adjunct faculty participation in faculty development programs within the community college setting.

Chapter three provides a description of the research method that was utilized in this phenomenological study. In order to understand the experiences of adjunct faculty members who participate in faculty development programming, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used. As Smith and Osborn (2008) write, “the aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states holds for participants” (p. 53). As a result, interpretations were derived that contribute to new understandings about the experiences of adjunct faculty members who participate in professional development and how it impacts their personal and professional growth.

Chapters four and five present the study findings and recommendations for action based on the conclusions. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with adjunct faculty members at a small rural community college, and the interview transcripts were analyzed using two research questions as a guide. Three higher order themes and ten sub-themes emerged from the data analysis. After a detailed explanation of the analytic process used, the findings are

presented in chapter four according to each theme. Lastly, chapter five offers an overview of the study and concludes with an interpretation of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well known that the number of part-time, adjunct faculty is increasing within higher education, and especially in community colleges where part-time instructors make up more than half of the faculty membership (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Tarr, 2010; Thirolf, 2013). Numerous studies discuss the lack of support for adjunct faculty, and many make recommendations for improving their working conditions (e.g. Kezar & Gehrke, 2013; Kezar & Sam, 2013; Tarr, 2010). For example, Kezar and Sam (2013) note that few colleges and universities have instituted systematic processes to support the growing numbers of non-tenure track faculty. They cite a lack of orientation, exclusion from professional development, and a lack of administrative support as common problems. Tarr (2010) also reports that a lack of office space and a failure to include them in activities and events continue to be problematic for many part-time instructors. In fact, researchers consistently cite a lack of professional development as a difficulty for adjunct faculty, and argue that it is a necessary condition for workplace satisfaction and student success (Kezar & Gehrke, 2013; Rich, 2015; Tarr, 2010).

Within the literature about community college faculty, adjunct instructors are often described as experts in career fields who have little experience or education in teaching methods (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Wallin, 2005). Because of this, researchers recommend that part-time faculty receive instructional support in pedagogical techniques as well as classroom management (e.g. Lyons, 2007; Wallin, 2005). Looking at this issue through the lens of faculty development, community colleges are unique from other higher education institutions because of their multifaceted mission, open access policies, and heavy reliance on adjunct faculty (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010). A dual charge of providing career and transfer programs creates a diverse

faculty who come to teaching from academic, career, and trade backgrounds. Their knowledge of pedagogy may be little to none, or they may be experts in educational theory and practice. Approaches to teaching are highly variable as well, and an instructional technique that works well for an English instructor may not work in an automotive classroom. Because of increased pressure for community colleges to demonstrate student learning through the assessment of measurable learning outcomes while simultaneously serving an influx of underprepared students, all instructors are in need of comprehensive faculty development programs that offer support and guidance in meeting these expectations (Oullette, 2010).

Though community colleges are more likely than research universities to include adjunct faculty in professional development activities, the type of opportunity offered varies widely (Eddy, 2007; Oullette, 2010). Professional development activities in community colleges range from orientation and an annual adjunct faculty meeting, to mentoring, instructional support, and comprehensive centers that provide an array of services and funding for conferences. Location also plays a role in the level of opportunity offered to adjunct faculty. For example, both Eddy (2007) and Spaniel and Scott (2013) found that rural community colleges are more likely than those in urban locations to provide comprehensive support services that focus on larger institutional goals. Eddy (2007) attributes this to fewer regional resources and writes that “in rural areas, the community college is often the only provider of training for faculty” (p. 75). Spaniel and Scott (2013) add that rural-serving adjunct instructors carry a heavier teaching load than those in urban areas, and suggest that they are more likely to be included in events because of increased social presence. Significantly, Eddy’s (2007) findings also reveal that faculty development in rural community colleges is more critical due to the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified instructors in isolated areas. Both of these studies show the importance of

providing faculty development programming in community colleges, and through their use of quantitative methods they provide a foundation for further studies about adjunct faculty participation in professional development activities. While there is a growing body of research that describes faculty development programs at specific colleges, there is little qualitative research that discusses adjunct faculty perceptions of these programs within a community college setting (Eddy, 2007; Latz & Mulvihill, 2010).

The following literature review addresses three broad themes—the community college setting, adjunct faculty, and faculty development. Because the community college context, including its high employment rates of part-time faculty, creates specific considerations for faculty development programs, the existing research on these three themes is examined. When considered as a whole, the literature paints a unique portrait of adjunct faculty participation in faculty development programs within the community college setting. Common issues also emerge and center on the changing landscape of higher education. Economic issues and social pressures, including “fiscal constraints and accountability demands” (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2005, p. 34) are having an impact on all higher education institutions including community colleges. Rural community colleges, in particular, are challenged to serve their communities with fewer financial and human resources. Because rural community colleges rely heavily on fewer employees to serve a disparate population, comprehensive faculty development programs provide essential support services to faculty and staff members who are expected to fill a variety of roles (Eddy, 2007). The purpose of the following literature review is to examine the research on the community college setting, adjunct faculty, and the field of faculty development in order to determine the impact of faculty development programs on the personal and professional growth of adjunct instructors in rural-serving community colleges.

## **The Community College Context**

The community college mission serves as an important backdrop and guide for faculty development programs in two-year colleges. Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) define the community college as “any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (p. 5). Naming conventions for two-year colleges are either “community” or “technical” college depending on region and curricular focus. However, the definition provided by Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) is explicit in its focus on the type of public colleges that were envisioned by the Truman Commission in 1947. Both community and technical colleges are local, publically funded, and have a dual mission of providing career and transfer programs at a low cost to students with a high school diploma or GED who choose to enroll in a single course or an academic program (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014; Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Despite the rapid evolution and growing complexity of these institutions, to date there is little research that examines the mission and organization of community colleges (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). The growing body of research on community colleges is most often conducted by investigators associated with universities or government agencies who are largely concerned with student performance, persistence and graduation rates (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014). Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) see this as a limitation because of increasing government demands for accountability. They write that “state officials demand to know how policy and funding relate to accountability” (p. 360). With this in mind, researchers “waver between attempts to present scientifically verifiable evidence and that which a lay audience can understand, even while relying on mushy definitions and data” (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014, p. 360). Because of the need to demonstrate institutional effectiveness

and improved student learning, studies on the student population dominate community college research, while less attention is given to the faculty and issues related to their professional development (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014).

When situated within the long history of higher education in America, the community college is a relative newcomer as a field of research. Established at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as junior colleges, the first two-year colleges served as transfer institutions with open access policies operating as their core mission (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). These junior colleges served exclusively as the first two years of the general education program and were often built as extensions of universities or as the culminating grades of secondary schools (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Stumpf, 2013). For example, Joliet Junior College, widely accepted as the first community college, was founded in 1901 to serve a growing population of high school graduates (Levinson, 2005; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Courses offered through these junior college general education programs were mostly in the liberal arts and were meant to prepare students for further university study.

The history of the junior college, which was later to become the community college, is one of flexibility and adaption to a changing social landscape. While the original junior colleges were designed to be the first two years of university study, the Great Depression provided an impetus for offering terminal education (Townsend, 2001). Terminal education, or vocational education, was meant to prepare students for available jobs. Also described as the semi-professions, junior colleges were expected to provide further training for fields such as teaching and nursing (Bragg, 2001; Townsend, 2001). Later, in the 1970s, the terms career and occupational education became more prevalent, while *technical* and *technological* came into vogue during the 1990s (Bragg, 2001). Sydow and Alfred (2013) explain that vocational



education had always been present to some degree in junior colleges; however, these programs developed slowly and “in response to economic, social, and political circumstances of the time” (p.14). Early community college students enrolled in transfer programs, and the colleges were responsive to this demand. Similarly, as the Great Depression and World War II changed the landscape of work and opportunity, more terminal programs were offered as demand for vocational training increased (Sydow & Alfred, 2013).

Even with the growing demand for terminal programs, transfer programs were still dominant in these evolving institutions through the 1950’s (Townsend, 2001). Junior colleges were quickly becoming community colleges, spurred by the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education report titled *Higher Education for American Democracy*. This report expanded the scope of junior colleges and provided a vision for the creation of the contemporary community college (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). The open access mission did not diminish under the Commission’s recommendations, in fact, the Commission envisioned the Community College as central to serving a larger segment of the American public (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Because they were adaptable to the changing needs of society, the existing junior colleges had already grown into their dual mission of transfer and career programs. The 1947 recommendations then added workforce development and adult education to their growing cadre of specialties, contributing to what we now know as the comprehensive community college (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Moreover, the Truman Commission recommended that two-year colleges serve their own communities at a low cost to the student (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). In fact, the Commission envisioned free education with the cost of tuition funded by the states (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Though many of the Commission’s recommendations were controversial, Gilbert and Heller (2013) write that “there was general enthusiasm within

academia for the expansion of community colleges as a means of increasing educational attainment in the country” (p. 433).

The evolution of the new comprehensive mission for community colleges led to a dramatic and steady increase in enrollments over the next 30 years. The colleges themselves rapidly expanded with unprecedented growth during the period from 1961 to 1970 (Levinson, 2005). Gilbert and Heller (2013) report that approximately one Community College opened each week between 1965 and 1972 (p. 434). Enrollments more than tripled during this time period, beginning at 431,000 in 1960 and expanding to 1,630,000 in 1970 (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Ever responsive to the changing economic climate, community colleges continued to enroll larger numbers of students as the economy ebbed and flowed; Sydow and Alfred (2013) report that approximately six million students were enrolled in community colleges by the year 2000 (p. 25). Today, community colleges account for almost half of the country’s undergraduate student population (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Moreover, minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students enroll in higher numbers than those found in four-year colleges (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Historically, this population tends to have higher attrition rates, contributing to the low completion rates of community college students (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015; Sydow & Alfred, 2013). The discrepancy between high enrollment and low completion rates are what have led Schudde and Goldrick-Rab (2015) to describe community colleges as contested sites that address social inequalities related to access but exacerbate socioeconomic disparities by widening the achievement gap through a failure in completion. The authors describe community college students as “more likely” to be low-income, first generation college students who are employed while trying to earn a degree

(Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015 p. 39). They further identify these students as less likely to earn a degree or transfer to a four-year college.

**Rural community colleges.** The 2010 data set of the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* lists 1,006 publically controlled two-year colleges offering the associate degree in the United States. Among these institutions, 570 are rural-serving with 137 classified as small, rural community colleges. Prior to 2005, community college research was limited by the Carnegie classification system that aggregated all two-year colleges into one category (Charlier & Williams, 2011; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). According to Hardy and Katsinas (2007), the “inability to disaggregate community colleges by institutional type served to paper over differences among two-year colleges” (p. 5). Significant differences exist across the spectrum of two-year colleges related to funding, governance, and administrative structures and these variations are often due to geographic location and size (Charlier & Williams, 2011; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). In 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching corrected this limitation through the introduction of a new schema that allows researchers to compare institutions by disaggregating two-year colleges based on level of control, location, and size (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Hardy and Katsinas (2007) and Charlier and Williams (2011) both highlight the addition of the word “serving” to the rural, urban, and suburban categories. Hardy and Katsinas (2007) state that this reflects “the reality that nearly all public community colleges are place-based institutions, with geographic service delivery areas defined by state statute, regulation, or custom” (p. 6). Charlier and Williams (2011) echo this statement regarding the addition of the suffix as recognition that “community colleges are ultimately defined by the populations they serve” (p. 161).

The *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (n.d.) currently classifies small, rural community colleges as public institutions that confer the Associate of Arts or Science as the highest degree, have an unduplicated headcount of fewer than 2,500 students, and are located in areas that have a population of less than 500,000 people. This is an expanded and updated version of the working definition developed by the Task Force on Rural Community Colleges in the 1970s (Pennington, Williams & Karvonen, 2006). At that time, the Task Force defined rural community colleges as those serving a large geographic area of under 100,000 people with a programmatic goal of comprehensiveness (p. 642). This classification was used to study the unique challenges inherent in the geographical and economic contexts of rural areas. More specifically, throughout the 1970s and 1980s researchers identified several difficulties associated with the rural setting. Pennington, Williams and Karvonen (2006) placed these challenges into three categories that include geographic and economic context, programmatic concerns, and systemic challenges. Using these categories, Pennington, Williams and Karvonen (2006) conducted a qualitative study to compare the problems of rural community colleges today to those identified as challenges 30 years ago. Their findings indicate that rural community colleges still face the same problems that they did in the 1970s. Then and now, rural institutions are tasked with providing comprehensive programs to a small population located in a wide geographical area with few financial resources. The implications of this challenge are especially pronounced in the areas of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty. Pennington, Williams and Karvonen (2006) note that finding qualified instructors in rural areas is problematic due to the small population, low salary, and currency of skills related to instructional technology.

The rural environment poses several problems for recruiting and retaining qualified faculty. Cejda (2010) reports that, in addition to low salary and geographical hurdles, rural community colleges have economy-of-scale problems associated with delivering comprehensive programs to a small population that places a heavier burden on teaching faculty. Cedja (2010) writes that “faculty are often the only individual teaching in their respective fields and thus have sole responsibility for the curriculum” (p. 34). While this requires instructors to teach a variety of classes that are not within their area of specialization, it also creates a scholarly isolation where they are not able to discuss advancements in their field with other interested faculty (Murray, 2007). A heavier workload and underprepared students are a source of disappointment and frustration for rural faculty who find themselves unable to pursue scholarly interests (Cedja, 2006; Murray, 2007). These problems coupled with a lack of fit or proper socialization lead to retention issues and a high turnover rate, exacerbating the problem associated with recruitment (Murray, 2007). In their study on institutional demand for adjunct faculty, Charlier and Williams (2011) found that rural community colleges relied less on adjunct instructors, and that they had a higher unmet demand for qualified faculty than their urban and suburban counterparts. They attribute this finding to a limited labor pool associated with geographical access to education, and an inability to attract qualified faculty to live and work in a rural setting (Charlier & Williams, 2011). As a result, Charlier and Williams (2011) conclude that “the lower reliance on adjunct faculty members may be a necessary consequence of limited employment pools, rather than a deliberate institutional strategy” (p. 175).

### **Adjunct Faculty**

Part-time, or adjunct, faculty members exist in all higher education institutions throughout the United States, and are considered to be a permanent part of colleges and

universities (Jolley, Cross & Bryant, 2014; Wallin, 2007). In 2007, Lyons placed the number of part-time instructors teaching in North American institutions at approximately 600,000 (p.1), and that number continues to grow as the student body changes and budgets shrink. Some notable efforts have been made to understand this group and their needs (e.g. Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Leslie & Gappa, 2002), and while many commonalities exist across institutional type, it is important to distinguish between per course contract faculty, and those who are working full-time but not on the tenure track. The terms used to classify adjunct faculty members are influenced by institutional type and location (Lyons, 2007). The labels “adjunct” and “part-time” are often used synonymously, and both of these terms are used to describe non-permanent employees who do not receive benefits (Wallin, 2005). The use of the term *adjunct* occurs most often in community colleges, though other institutions refer to part-time instructors as adjuncts as well. Other terminology used includes contingent and sessional, though these terms are more common in four-year colleges and universities. To complicate matters, *contingent* and *sessional* also refer to contract-based instructors who receive payment per course and are not eligible for benefits, though the label *contingent* is often used to describe full-time faculty members in universities who receive benefits but are not on the tenure track (Kezar & Sam, 2013). Kezar and Sam (2010) note a high level of confusion in how the terminology is used, and they attribute confusion to the excessive number of terms that are applied to this highly diverse group of employees. In 2010, the authors had identified over 50 different terms used to describe non-tenure track faculty, and acknowledged the difficulty in coming up with standardized terminology that fits all institutions and terms for employment (p. 5).

As higher education responds to a changing social landscape, adjunct faculty are being hired in greater numbers to teach classes offered outside of the traditional work schedule (Lyons,

2007; Rich 2015). Charlier and Williams (2011) place this increase at “more than 100% during the past three decades” (p. 161) for all higher education institutions. The growth of adjunct faculty in community colleges has been slower with Leslie and Gappa (2002) reporting that 65% of faculty were part-time in 1995; 67% were part-time in 2007 according to Charlier and Williams (2011); and more than 70% were employed part-time in 2011 according to Jolley, Cross, and Bryant (2014). In a ground-breaking study that is now more than 20 years old but still referenced repeatedly in the literature, Gappa and Leslie (1993) found that institutions employed adjunct faculty for a variety of reasons, and that there was no common practice for supporting them. The authors described their findings as “a wildly random collection of institutional and departmental practices” (Gappa & Leslie, 1993, p. xiii). Additionally, the adjunct faculty themselves came from various backgrounds, and had a myriad of reasons for wanting to teach part-time. Based on interviews of 240 part-time faculty members (p. 10), Gappa and Leslie developed four categories that describe their motivations for choosing part-time work. Their now well-known taxonomy categorizes adjuncts as “career-enders; specialists, experts, and professionals; aspiring academics; and freelancers” (p. 47). To summarize, career-enders are retired from full-time employment and continue to teach for personal fulfillment or additional income; specialists, experts, and professionals work full-time and teach specialized courses in their area of expertise; aspiring academics are those who are seeking full-time employment in higher education; and freelancers create their careers through multiple contracts or part-time work both in higher education and other fields. Lyons (2007) describes these categories as “long-standing,” (p. 3), and they can still be observed in higher education institutions today.

The research published by Gappa and Leslie (1993) is often cited in current research about adjunct faculty (e.g. Kezar & Sam, 2013; Lyons, 2007; Rogers, 2015), but little has changed in the recommendations for improving their working conditions over the past 20 years. In addition to creating the typology of part-time faculty that is still used as a mechanism for understanding career goals and motivations, Gappa and Leslie (1993) made over 40 recommendations for the support of adjunct faculty. Included in these recommendations are ongoing professional development, orientation, mentoring, recognition of work or achievements, participation in the assessment of student learning, and invitations to informal gatherings and social events. Twelve years later, in 2005, Gappa, Austin, and Trice made this statement in an article about faculty work: “part-time and adjunct faculty members, who are often hired under poorly defined and inequitable employment policies and practices, do not participate in decisions about their work and receive very little support” (p. 35). They also acknowledge a lack of opportunity for professional development and little opportunity for networking and community building within institutions. In 2013, Kezar and Sam published a study on policies and practices for contingent faculty, and began their article with the statement that “few institutions have developed new policies or processes that meet the needs of this group” (p. 56). Human resources issues, orientation, socialization and professional development activities fall into their working definition of policies and processes.

Even as the numbers of adjunct faculty are growing and recommendations for improved working conditions appear repeatedly in the literature, current research characterizes this group of professionals as isolated and existing outside of the mainstream (e.g. Lyons, 2007; Rich, 2015). As a group, they have been described as “roads scholars,” and “freeway fliers,” in addition to other deprecating nicknames that refer to their travel between institutions (Cohen,



Brawer & Kisker, 2014; Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2014). However, as the taxonomy described by Gappa and Leslie (1993) demonstrates, adjunct instructors are a diverse group that have different career goals and may or may not be teaching for more than one institution. In fact, later research by Leslie and Gappa (2002) shows that adjunct faculty working in community colleges tend to be employed full-time in professional occupations, and those who piece together a career from several post-secondary teaching positions are a minority. In their 2002 study, Leslie and Gappa also found that more than half of adjunct faculty members employed by community colleges tend to be stable employees who have taught at the same institution for five years or more, and that they are generally satisfied with their jobs.

**Adjunct faculty in community colleges.** Adjunct faculty make up the majority of teaching faculty in higher education, and in community colleges they account for approximately 70% of the faculty workforce (Rich, 2015; Wallin, 2007). Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) attribute the large numbers of adjunct employees to their willingness to teach night and weekend classes, low pay, and minimal benefits. For institutions, adjunct faculty remain a low-cost solution to the growing fiscal crisis in higher education. In fact, the authors go so far as to say that “part-time instructors are to the community colleges what migrant workers are to the farms” (p. 92). While this is a scathing indictment of the overuse of adjunct faculty, Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) also acknowledge that some part-time instructors work in their respective professions and bring business and career knowledge to their teaching. They further recognize that “they may have special capabilities not available among the full-time instructors” (p. 92). This is particularly true of the group who choose to teach for personal fulfillment, and accept the low pay as a supplement to their income.

The myth of the poor and distressed adjunct faculty member is accepted as fact by most community college professionals and many researchers. Contrary to this belief, however, is a growing body of research that describes part-time instructors as mostly satisfied with their jobs. Despite the low pay and lack of benefits, current research indicates that adjunct faculty experience varying levels of workplace satisfaction and most are satisfied with their work (Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2014). In what Kramer, Gloeckner, and Jacoby (2014) describe as a paradox, their research reveals that adjunct faculty members in the Colorado Community College System are satisfied with the work that they do despite their dissatisfaction with salaries, benefits and job security. Findings of this study indicate that a predictor of satisfaction is whether or not adjunct faculty members feel that they are being treated fairly. Similar results were found by Rich (2015) who also showed that adjunct faculty members were generally satisfied with their work, and it stemmed from having a positive impact on student learning and the support that they received from their peers. Both of these studies revealed a lack of satisfaction with institutional support and recognition, while still finding a sense of accomplishment and purpose from their work in the classroom.

### **Faculty Development in the United States**

Increased accountability and a stronger focus on teaching and learning has led to the creation of comprehensive programs that are intended to support faculty members in their various work roles within colleges and universities. As faculty work changes over time, the programs designed to support them also evolve. Accordingly, faculty development is a rapidly expanding and changing field that is becoming increasingly professionalized (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Little, 2014; Ouellett, 2010). While faculty development itself is not a new concept—Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy and Beach (2006) point to the sabbatical leave as the oldest

form of academic professional development—the field is evolving to meet the shifting institutional landscape of higher education. Originally an individual arrangement based solely on funding for conferences, university-level coursework, and sabbaticals; comprehensive faculty development programs began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s with the establishment of Centers for Teaching and Learning (Lewis, 2010; Little, 2014; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006). These centers were created in response to a growing student body that demanded high quality teaching and an economic decline that prevented movement of faculty between institutions. Over the past 40 years, faculty development has grown to include comprehensive programs that encompass three dimensions of personal, instructional and organizational development (Ouellett, 2010). As faculty development programs expand, a growing body of faculty developers from administrative and instructional backgrounds is becoming more responsible for the work of the organization as they step into newly emerging leadership roles as change agents (Schroeder, 2011).

At the same time that they are taking on more responsibilities, faculty development professionals are conducting research, creating definitions, and building a shared language through scholarly work and conversation about the field itself (Austin and Sorcinelli, 2013; Little, 2014; Ouellette, 2010). Multiple definitions of faculty development work are being written and revised, while scholars and practitioners are questioning whether faculty development is an appropriate label for the field (Little, 2014; Ouellette, 2010). While the phrase “faculty development” is still used to describe comprehensive professional development programs for faculty in the United States, “educational development” is being used more often by international developers who are growing their programs into multifaceted organizational endeavors. Ouellette (2010) acknowledges the confusion that is beginning to arise from the use of multiple labels, but

attributes the changing language to rapid growth and multifaceted programs. Similarly, Little (2014) describes the use of “educational development” as an inclusive phrase that takes into account the range of titles, tasks, activities, and backgrounds of the developers and the range of programming and duties for which they are responsible. Building on the definitions of others, she describes educational development as a field of practice that seeks to support the work of faculty and institutions in meeting their goals for teaching and learning. The definition provided by McKee and Tew (2013) also focused on the faculty member as a whole person who contributes to the work of the larger institution. They define faculty development as “an intentional set of educational activities designed to equip faculty to grow in their professionalism with the result of being partners in advancing all segments of the institution” (p. 13). As these authors demonstrate, the language of faculty development is evolving and working definitions are being clarified by developers who are questioning who they are and how they fit into the larger work of the organization.

As the field of faculty development evolves, more researchers and practitioners are calling for increased scholarship on all dimensions of development work. Eddy (2007) finds that faculty developers are guided by the same literature regardless of institutional category or location, and concluded that “the literature on teaching and learning and faculty development helps shape the ways that leaders of faculty development create programming on their campuses” (p. 72). Similarly, Ouellette (2010) promotes a broader knowledge base and increased research into all development-related topics because, as he says, “. . .not all issues carry the same salience for every faculty developer or in every institutional context” (p. 14). Finally, Little (2014) describes the debate over whether research projects should be scholarly or practical and concluded that “we need to continue to seek ways to make our scholarly projects more useful and

our useful projects more scholarly” (“scholarship” section, para. 1). Increased scholarship that is practical, theoretical and empirical has the potential to provide a clear vision and direction for a still growing and changing discipline.

**Faculty development from 2006 to present.** Though faculty development has responded to changes in higher education since its beginning, the year 2006 provided a turning point for faculty development research in the form of a book titled *Creating the Future of Faculty Development* by Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy and Beach (2006). In this volume, the authors review the history of the field, provide the results of their research about current practice, and create a vision for the future of faculty development. The catalyst for their research is the complex changes occurring within higher education, specifically in the areas of accountability and fiscal responsibility. As students, parents, and legislators call for greater evidence of learning, improved graduation rates, and financial transparency in terms of gainful employment, competition between traditional and online institutions is increasing while funding for public higher education is decreasing (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006). In light of these challenges, more pressure is being placed on faculty members to generate revenue and demonstrate student learning through measurable outcomes. As a result of their research, Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy and Beach (2006) believe that faculty development programs are an essential component in the support and engagement of faculty, and they recommend that comprehensive faculty development services be expanded to provide both instructional support and organizational leadership. As one of the first major studies on the state of the field of faculty development, this book proved to be highly influential and is consistently referenced and used as a foundation for further research.

Since the publication of *Creating the Future of Faculty Development*, researchers have continued to explore the types of professional development that occurs in colleges and universities, and findings indicate that faculty development programs vary widely between institutions (e.g. Eddy, 2007; Lewis, 2010; Schroeder, 2011). Institutional type and location play a role in the extent to which it is a centralized unit, run by a director or administrator, or coordinated by a faculty member with a course release (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006). While this diversity in programming, purpose, and role of both the unit and the development leader is characterized as a strength by Little (2014), she also acknowledges it as a source of tension for continued scholarship in the field. Practitioners of faculty development come from a wide variety of academic backgrounds bringing their content expertise as well as their knowledge of teaching to their work (Green & Little, 2013). Green and Little (2013) describe developers as “migrants”— individuals who have moved into faculty development work from another discipline and who do not share the same language or philosophy within this new specialization (p. 524). Moving into faculty development work from other disciplines also places developers in a peripheral position that is not considered academic, nor is it fully considered administrative. This tension surfaces in the literature as what Green and Little (2013) describe as a “preoccupation with claiming status and legitimacy,” prompted by marginalizing behaviors from faculty and administrators (p. 524). Faculty developers must negotiate the space between instruction and administration that is not clearly defined and often misunderstood. As a result, articles on the state of the field, the future of faculty development, and titles with variations on the word “margin” have proliferated over the past ten years (e.g. Gravett & Bernhagen, 2015; Green & Little, 2013; Schroeder, 2011).

While faculty development itself is changing and evolving, faculty developers continue to respond to changes occurring in higher education. McKee and Tew (2013) describe four shifts that impact both teaching and learning and faculty development programs. Advancing technologies, specialized career-focused programs, community-based student development, and the corporatization of higher education all have an impact on the curriculum and how it is delivered. In order to meet these challenges, McKee and Tew (2013) argue that the faculty must be prepared to serve their institutions through the development of personal and instructional skills and techniques. Similarly, Austin and Sorcinelli (2013) identify five shifts that will impact faculty work, and to which faculty developers need to respond. The factors they discuss mirror the shifts that McKee and Tew (2013) describe and include a changing economic climate, increased accountability, a more diverse student body, rapid advancements in technology, and increasing numbers of part-time faculty. Austin and Sorcinelli (2013) describe these factors as having implications for the future of faculty development, and their recommendations for the field include a greater emphasis on organizational development, increasing the body of scholarship on faculty development to professionalize the field, and creating organizational structures for faculty development that match the vision and goals of the field itself.

**Expanding into organizational development.** A common theme running through the literature on faculty development is the need for an increased focus on organizational development. Though their research focuses on faculty developers as leaders of change, Dawson, Mighty and Britnell (2010) highlight the importance of organizational development when they state that faculty developers “must be aware of and apply models of organizational change to their work if they are to be successful in their new role as change leaders” (p. 70). They see the shift from a faculty-focused culture to a student-centered culture as a change process that affects

the entire institution, and they recognize that faculty developers are in a central position to support and manage that fundamental change. Similarly, Schroeder (2011) identifies faculty developers as change agents on several levels including individual, departmental, and institutional. She argues that institutional change will influence teaching and learning, whereby an improvement in student learning will necessarily involve a corresponding change in teaching. For this reason, she advocates for the merging of instructional and organizational development into a leadership structure that supports change processes across the institution.

An unwavering advocate for the expansion of the organizational development role, Schroeder (2011) reveals that many developers are already engaged in the work of the organization, but fail to recognize themselves as organizational leaders or as leaders of change. However, she acknowledges the resistance or the inability of developers to move beyond the margins of their institutions, but insists that if faculty development is to remain a viable field then developers must embrace this new role. Specifically, she writes that “academic developers cannot get stuck with the misperception that their role is merely to serve, program, and provide resources apart from the critical initiatives the institution has outlined” (p. 7). By contrast, Gravett and Bernhagen (2015) argue that not all staff involved in faculty development has the autonomy to become organizational developers, and that their role is specifically to serve as a resource within a Center for Teaching and Learning. They point out that Schroeder’s (2011) argument applies to the center directors, and in challenging them to embrace the role of change agent she leaves center staff on the margins. Interestingly, because faculty development programs are diverse in nature, not all directors and staff are associated with centers. With these diverse settings in mind, understanding the needs and outcomes for faculty development within a specific institutional context becomes an important research task.



**Faculty development in community colleges.** Studies on faculty development in higher education institutions largely focus on research universities, four-year colleges or academic departments (Eddy, 2007; Pifer, Baker, & Lunsford, 2015). Few studies are devoted to faculty development in community colleges, and little research has been conducted on faculty perceptions of these initiatives (Eddy, 2007; Latz & Mulvihill, 2010). The existing research either describes the type of programming offered at community colleges across the country (Murray, 2001; Eddy, 2007), or practitioners describe specific programs as case studies and models for replication (Bendickson & Griffin, 2010; Burnstad & Hoss, 2010; Faulkner & Gooding, 2010). While community colleges traditionally offered some form of “in-service” training to faculty, Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) trace the rise of faculty development programs to the expansion of the community college mission. Initially, collective bargaining agreements assured some funding for conferences or additional coursework for full-time faculty members. However, as the student population changed and instructors faced new challenges in meeting the needs of underprepared students, more comprehensive programs began to emerge. Cohen, Brawer and Kisker (2014) describe specific programs at several community colleges that have developed as a result of changing student demographics, and list two states as receiving professional development funding in the 1970s and 1980s (p. 88). Given the relatively short history of comprehensive faculty development programs in community colleges, there are few studies that attempt to close the widening gap in the literature.

Citing the need for updated scholarship on faculty development in the community college, the 2002 volume of *New Directions for Community Colleges* was devoted to the topic (Watts, 2002). Prior to this special focus issue, only one book-length publication was devoted to faculty development in community colleges—the 1984 volume titled *Community Colleges, the Future*

and *SPOD: Staff, Program, and Organizational Development* (Watts, 2002, p. 1). Similar to more recent scholarship on community college faculty development, the chapters in the 2002 issue of *New Directions for Community Colleges* are devoted to detailed descriptions of workshops and programs at individual institutions. The issues addressed in this volume extend beyond instructional development of faculty members to include more comprehensive activities such as orientations, programs for classified or non-instructional staff, newly emerging centers for teaching and learning, and the professional development of presidents. Watts and Hammons (2002) argue that comprehensive programs should not only focus on instructional improvement for individual faculty members, but they should serve all college employees in an effort to reduce compartmentalization. Additionally, the authors contend that community colleges need to place a higher value on comprehensive programs that serve both individuals and the organization, and these programs should be held accountable through more rigorous program evaluation (Watts & Hammons, 2002).

The range of published research on faculty development in community colleges is small and consists of case studies of programs (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010; Faulkner & Gooding, 2010; Wallin, 2007), surveys of state and national trends in faculty development (Eddy, 2007; Murray, 2000, 2001), and an exploration of a conceptual model for faculty engagement in professional development (Latz & Mulvihill, 2011). These studies are grounded in the belief that faculty development matters, and that comprehensive programs are essential to the development of a student-centered organization. Murray (2000, 2001) and later Latz and Mulvihill (2011) attribute the need for quality faculty development to the teaching mission of the community college, the changing student demographic, and the need for discipline-trained instructors to become more adept in pedagogy. Murray (2001) also cites a need for intentional programming that is informed

by and contributes to the mission of the institution. Interestingly, in her later study of rural community colleges, Eddy (2007) found that programs in rural colleges were more likely to serve institutional goals, but attributed this focus to the multiple roles that faculty developers play in these small institutions. Both Eddy (2007) and Latz and Mulvihill (2011) conclude that adjunct faculty require support in teaching, and that all instructors would be served by a focus on new technology and assessment. Whether the authors conclude that professional development should provide pedagogical support or that programs should serve institutional goals, each of these studies emphasizes the need for faculty development programs that support organizational efforts to become high-quality teaching institutions. Common findings include the need for institutions to create structured programs with designated and qualified staff, administrative support, and an institutional emphasis on quality teaching and professional development (Faulkner & Gooding, 2010; Murray, 2000).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Within the context of professional development, adjunct faculty members are adult learners. Yet, as Lawler and King (2000) report, professionals in the field of faculty development rarely see themselves as adult educators. For this reason, Lawler and King (2000) call for a new understanding of professional development that is firmly situated within a framework of adult education. Faculty development programs based on theories of adult learning are more collaborative, integrated into the culture and priorities of the institution, and promote a climate of continuous learning and growth (Lawler & King, 2000). Moreover, by treating faculty members as adult learners and applying principles of adult learning to professional development activities and workshops, more effective programming can be implemented with a higher degree of transfer of learning (Lawler, 2003). To this end, the six principles of adult learning developed by

Lawler and King (2000) provide a foundation for effective faculty development programming that is based on research and practice in adult education. These principles are: 1. Create a climate of respect, 2. Encourage active participation, 3. Build on experience, 4. Employ collaborative inquiry, 5. Learn for action, 6. Empower the participants (Lawler & King, 2000; Lawler, 2003). These principles also take into account that adult learners are self-directed, adult learning is transformative, and critical reflection is necessary for deeper learning—three tenets that are accepted as foundational in the field of adult education (Chen, 2014).

Lawler and King (2000) believe that faculty development programs that are built on these principles and adult learning theories will be more successful and will promote professional and personal growth in participants. As more professionals integrate adult learning theories into their program design, it is important to understand how participants perceive these opportunities in relation to their personal and professional growth. Therefore, this qualitative study seeks to understand the experiences of adjunct faculty members who participate in faculty development programming in a small, rural-serving community college. As the literature demonstrates, teaching and learning are central to the community college mission, and adjunct faculty members deliver the majority of instruction in these institutions. Because of their deep impact on the learning environment, adjunct instructors should be provided with support services that include orientation, mentoring, and instructional development opportunities—all facets of a comprehensive faculty development program. Moreover, retention is a concern for small, rural community colleges that often have difficulty in recruiting qualified instructors (Murray, 2007). Since teaching is deeply satisfying for those who choose to work in community colleges, researchers advocate for the inclusion of adjunct instructors in programs that support teaching and learning (Eddy, 2007; Murray, 2007). It is important, therefore, to understand how adjunct

faculty members perceive these opportunities in relation to their personal and professional growth.

### **Summary**

Adjunct faculty members are an integral piece of the community college mission, and as institutions begin to recognize the vital role they play in student learning, comprehensive faculty development programs are emerging to support their needs. Given the short history of the community college and the equally short history of comprehensive faculty development programs within them, more attention is currently devoted to establishing a need for professional development activities rather than examining how these activities affect adjunct faculty members. Researchers have consistently called for increased professional development, orientation, recognition, and integration into the social life of the organization, all of which should be present in a comprehensive faculty development program. As the research into faculty development demonstrates, programs should not be limited to instructional development, but should also include personal and organizational support and leadership. For those adjunct faculty members who have access to and participate in faculty development programs, there is little research that explores the impact on their relationship to the institution and to one another, and little is known about the influences on their personal and professional growth. From this review of the literature on community colleges, adjunct faculty and faculty development, a key question emerges—how does a faculty development program impact the personal and professional development of adjunct faculty in community colleges?

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored the impact of a faculty development program on adjunct faculty members in a small, rural community college. Retaining highly qualified instructors is of particular importance in rural settings, and professional development may have a positive influence on personal and professional growth. Since there is little qualitative research on adjunct faculty experiences of faculty development, this phenomenological study seeks to understand the impact of professional development activities on this population. Faculty development leaders who work to integrate adjunct faculty into the social fabric of the institution, while also providing instructional support, will benefit from knowing how adjunct faculty think about these activities in relation to their professional learning and development. Additionally, the perceptions of adjunct faculty working in rural settings can lead to improvements in faculty development programming at rural community colleges.

Phenomenological research seeks to understand how people experience the world around them (Finlay, 2009; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Broadly stated, the aim of phenomenological researchers is “fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). While there are a variety of approaches to phenomenological research, Sloan and Bowe (2014) identify descriptive and interpretive as the two classic versions of phenomenology. The descriptive phenomenology of Husserl, which is also referred to as *transcendental phenomenology*, attempts to take a more objective approach to the study of experience by taking a global view of the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Researchers “bracket” their own assumptions through phenomenological reductions so that a pure description of the phenomenon may be achieved (Finlay, 2009). Heidegger, however, did not believe that

researchers could remove themselves from the experience or from the interpretation of how others make meaning from that experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). According to Sloan and Bowe (2014), “Heidegger was of the view that the observer could not remove him or herself from the process of essence identification, that he or she existed with the phenomena and the essences” (p. 1294). Initially the work of Heidegger, interpretive phenomenology is also referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology and was further developed and refined by the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer and more recently by Max van Manen (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In describing hermeneutic phenomenology, Sloan and Bowe (2014) write that “the focus is on understanding the meaning of experience by searching for themes, engaging with the data interpretively, with less emphasis on the essences that are important to descriptive phenomenology” (p. 1296).

Because of its focus on individual experience, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to better understand adjunct faculty experiences with faculty development. Drawing from the long tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, IPA research seeks to understand how individuals perceive their experiences (Finlay, 2009; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Following in the philosophy of Heidegger, the researcher plays a central role in meaning-making and does not attempt to bracket out personal experience (Finlay, 2009). In explaining the goals of this method, Smith and Osborn (2008) state that IPA explores “in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states holds for participants” (p. 53). Similarly, Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) describe IPA research as a form of inquiry in which researchers take a close look at a specific phenomenon in order to generate new knowledge about a specific question. Interviews are used to collect data in the form of participant stories and

accounts of an event. Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) write that “the researcher begins by hearing people's stories, and prioritizes the participants' world view at the core of the account” (p. 22). Once the interviews are complete, the researcher then builds an interpretation of that experience by looking for themes across the cases. Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) further explain that “the researcher attempts to make sense of the participants' experiences and concerns, and to illuminate them in a way that answers a particular research question” (p. 22). For this reason, IPA research questions are broad and open so that the researcher may explore the topic in detail (Smith & Osborn, 2008). To guide this study, the following research question was used:

How do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth?

A secondary question was used for interpretive analysis:

How do the principles of adult learning influence instructor perceptions of faculty development?

### **Setting**

The rural setting is one that poses unique challenges for the people who live and work in these communities. While rural community colleges must meet the same challenges as other higher education institutions, they have the added burden of serving their local communities with fewer resources. Recruiting and retaining qualified faculty is of particular importance in these settings due to smaller local populations. Little is known about the experience of adjunct faculty members who choose to live and work in these communities; therefore, the research was situated within a small, rural community college in the northeast. The college administration supported this research and granted permission to conduct the proposed study.



For the purpose of this study, the college will be known as Northern Community College (NCC). Meeting the definition of a rural community college based on the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (n.d.), NCC is a public two-year college accredited to confer the Associates as the highest degree. Further, NCC is a comprehensive community college that has a dual mission of providing career and transfer programs while providing workforce development and community programming to a rural population. While enrollments have grown over the past several years, NCC enrolls just under 2,000 students in approximately 30 degree and certificate programs served by less than 100 permanent employees. Similar to other community colleges, the majority of instructors are adjunct faculty members. At the start of the most recent semester, approximately 30 faculty members were considered full-time and 125 were adjunct faculty. However, typical of the rural setting, many adjunct instructors are also full-time staff members or contract employees who divide their time between teaching and other work such as advising, tutoring, or providing administrative support.

The faculty development program at NCC has been growing since 2010 when a full-time faculty development position was formally implemented. Over the past six years, the program evolved from a new faculty orientation and two “professional development days” into a more comprehensive program that provides workshops and courses on classroom teaching, online teaching, mentoring for new faculty members, new faculty orientations, a book group and other activities that meet the needs of both full time and adjunct faculty members. Both full-time and adjunct faculty members are offered the same opportunities, and adjunct faculty members are often given a stipend for their participation. Due to the small size of the college, there are no events that are tailored to one group (i.e. an “adjunct faculty day”); rather, everyone is invited to participate in each activity regardless of employment status. These activities are offered in face

to face and online formats in order to meet the diversity of needs and schedules inherent in this type of setting. Online workshops tend to attract the highest number of adjunct faculty members due to greater flexibility in scheduling.

### **Participants**

This study focused on adjunct faculty members who participated in professional development activities at Northern Community College. The study was limited to adjunct faculty members who teach from one to three courses per semester with no other benefitted or contracted duties assigned to them by the institution. Only current instructors who have taken part in a professional development activity within the previous calendar year were invited to participate. Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) write that “participants can offer researchers an understanding of their thoughts, commitments and feelings through telling their own stories, in their own words, and in as much detail as possible” (p. 20). Currency is an important aspect in capturing the feelings and emotions associated with the professional development experience, and recent participation in an event may afford a more accurate interpretation of the impact of the activity.

Because IPA studies are concerned with capturing an experience in as much detail as possible, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend using a sample of no more than six participants. They specifically write that “IPA studies are conducted on relatively small sample sizes, and the aim is to find a reasonably homogenous sample, so that, within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail” (p. 3). Based on these criteria, the sample for the study consisted of five participants who took part in at least one of three specific workshops. These workshops are extended in length (from one to five weeks) and were designed on adult learning principles. Each of the three workshops is constructed around the stated

learning goals of the participants, utilizes participant experience and expertise as the foundation for learning, actively engages participants in dialogue and discussion, promotes collaboration, and provides multiple opportunities for direct application of learning. One benefit of this research for the participants is that the adjunct population will be the direct recipients of any recommended interventions that arise out of this inquiry.

## **Data**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) requires rich data, which is collected through in-depth interviews that elicit stories, emotions, and thoughts about a particular event or phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend the interview as the primary means of data collection in an IPA study because they are “consonant with an intimate focus on one person’s experience” (p. 56). In order to encourage the collaborative and conversational style of interviewing that Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) recommend for IPA studies, a semi-structured interview format was used. Merriam (2009) proposes this type of interview for situations where the researcher needs flexibility rather than rigidity in working with the participants. Questions may be asked in the order that best fits what is happening in the interview and wording can be changed to match what is happening in that moment. Further, Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) state that semi-structured interviews “are easily managed; allow rapport to be developed; allow participants to think, speak and be heard; and are well suited to in-depth and personal discussion” (p. 22). The interactive nature of the semi-structured interview allows for greater contextual sensitivity, providing the empathic tools that a researcher will need in order to successfully navigate the interview (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For this study, participant interviews were conducted at the research site in a private conference room where the face to face conversation was recorded and later transcribed.

Because experiences are unique to the individual, member checks were used as a validation method. Merriam (2009) describes this as one of several validation methods in which participants provide direct feedback about the researcher's interpretation of their experiences. The importance of validating findings is also stressed by Creswell (2012) who describes the member check process as a method to determine the accuracy of the findings. A member check may be completed through a follow-up interview or in writing and the researcher asks the participants to comment on "whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Using this method, each participant was given an opportunity to comment on the written transcript and the emerging themes. This process was conducted in writing, and individuals were invited to confirm the interpretation or to suggest changes that would better capture their experiences.

### **Analysis**

The unit of analysis in the study was the interview transcripts, and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes across the cases. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe this process as "the identification of the emergent patterns within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance, usually first for single cases, and then subsequently across multiple cases" (p. 79). This means that a set of themes must first be identified in each transcript or case, and then connections may be made across the cases. The analyst may look for points of similarity or points of departure depending on the scope of the research question. Smith and Osborn (2008) describe this as the idiographic approach to analysis where the research begins with a detailed examination of one interview and then builds toward more general examples as each subsequent transcript is examined.

Additionally, a secondary-research question can assist the researcher in identifying themes during the interpretation phase (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This secondary-question is a more refined theory-driven question that can be used to examine existing models (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend engaging with a theory as a comparison between experience and evidence presented in the literature, but caution that the phenomenological account of the experience must be completed first before an interpretative question is utilized. In this study, a set of themes was constructed from a close reading of the transcripts in order to document participant's experiences with faculty development. The transcripts were then reviewed a second time and interpreted using the six principles of adult education in order to highlight convergent and divergent experiences among participants.

### **Participant Rights**

Participation in this study was voluntary, and while it is not possible to guarantee absolute anonymity, several steps were taken to safeguard the identity of research participants. All participants were provided with a description of the project and the consent form in writing, and these materials were printed and handed to each individual in person. For those who agreed to participate, personal email addresses were used for communication where possible and they were collected directly from each adjunct instructor. During the interview phase, participants chose their own pseudonyms. An identifying marker was placed on the interview transcript as a temporary means of identifying the participants, and the key to the marker was kept in a separate file. This key was destroyed once the member checks were complete. This is meant to maintain the privacy of the participants, and records of participation were not shared with other faculty members or college officials. Transcripts were saved in a password protected file on a personal computer that is not owned by or associated with the research site, and all electronic records

were password protected. Participants were provided with all information about the study in writing as well as the steps taken to protect their identity. Participants were able to opt out of the study at any point until the data was aggregated and categorized; informed consent was collected and saved separately from the data files.

To protect the interests of adjunct faculty members at NCC, individuals who were asked to participate were informed that no negative actions would occur as a result of their decision. They may still participate in faculty development programming regardless of whether or not they engaged in the research process and regardless of the information provided through interviews. Therefore, participation in this study will not negatively impact employment, nor will it provide benefits or perks beyond general improvements to the faculty development program. Further, changes that do occur based on this research could potentially benefit all instructors at NCC. However, one potential unintended outcome of this research is that participants could come to the conclusion that the faculty development program does not provide benefits and become reluctant to participate again in the future.

### **Potential Limitations and Biases**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is limited due to the small sample size and type of phenomenon under study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In order to fully document the experiences of adjunct faculty members using IPA, only a small sample was used. Van Manen (1990) does not advise attempting to generalize results beyond the experiences of the participants. In fact, he states that “the tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 22). However, the benefit to this research is that the voice of the adjunct faculty member is documented. This type of analysis can point to themes and areas of inquiry for larger studies,

especially within other small to medium rural-serving community colleges. In writing about the potential for generalization, Riessman (2008) concludes that the analysis of a case has the potential to generate knowledge that is the foundation of further research. The categories generated through textual analysis create theoretical possibilities that then become the basis for new ways of understanding a particular phenomenon (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, the documentation of adjunct faculty experiences, no matter how small the sample, has the potential to contribute to new understandings about how to create more valuable programming for this underserved population.

Potential biases stem from my own background as an adjunct instructor taking part in faculty development programs, and my subsequent role as a faculty developer. At Northern Community College, I am the full-time administrator responsible for faculty development, and I also serve as an adjunct faculty member. My role is typical of this particular setting where administrators take on multiple responsibilities in a full-time capacity and teach part-time for a variety of reasons, including teaching courses when other instructors are unavailable. Having served in this capacity for several years, I am the creator and facilitator of the faculty development program. Similar to other rural community colleges, I am the only staff member tasked with this duty, and there is no dedicated center associated with the program. These personal experiences are what have led me to investigate this “abiding concern,” as it is called by van Manen (1990, p. 31). He writes that hermeneutical phenomenological research is comprised of six activities, the first of which is “turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world” (p. 30). The researcher is a “real person” who “sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). As the primary administrator responsible for the creation of faculty development programming, I have an interest in the

outcomes of this study. However, my interest is in improving programming for the continued development of adjunct faculty members and not in proving that a specific program or activity is more valuable than another.

### **Summary**

This study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to understand the experiences of adjunct faculty who have participated in faculty development in a small, rural community college. As a qualitative research method, IPA relies on in-depth interviews to explore feelings and thoughts associated with an experience. Transcripts are constructed from the interviews in order to examine the experiences of individuals with the phenomenon. While professional development activities are often recommended as a means to increase adjunct faculty job satisfaction, little is known about how adjunct faculty members perceive these opportunities. This study documented the experiences of adjunct faculty members in a small, rural community college in order to understand how faculty development programming impacts their personal and professional growth.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand how adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences offered at a rural community college. IPA was used for its idiographic approach to data collection and analysis, and the experiences of each participant were examined in detail. Smith and Osborn (2008) explain that “IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side” (p. 53). Analyzing individual accounts, the researcher attempts to make sense of the experience by highlighting the commonalities and differences expressed by each of the participants. To do so, research questions are used to explore the topic in detail and to generate new knowledge about a specific phenomenon. For this study, two broad research questions were used to guide the analysis:

1. How do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth?
2. How do the principles of adult learning influence instructor perceptions of faculty development?

Five adjunct faculty members who teach at a rural community college in the Northeast, known in this study as “Northern Community College” (NCC), participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. Throughout the rest of the study, these participants will be known by the pseudonyms of “Steve,” “Susie,” “Paul,” “Song,” and “Ann.” All participants took part in at least one professional development activity within the previous calendar year, although each instructor has participated in several different types of activities over the course of their employment at NCC. Each participant has several years of teaching

experience, and the length of service at NCC ranges from two to ten years. Teaching assignments at NCC are limited from one to three courses each semester, and the participants are not assigned additional benefitted or contracted duties by the institution.

### **Method of Analysis**

Data collection consisted of the five semi-structured interviews that were recorded and later transcribed to create interview transcripts. These interviews generated rich data that is necessary for qualitative research. As O'Reilly and Parker (2013) write, "generalizability is not sought by the researcher and the focus is less on sample size and more on sample adequacy" (p. 192). In this sense, the goal of the researcher is to achieve depth and breadth from the sample. Further, O'Reilly and Parker (2013) state that "the purpose is not to count opinions or people but explore the range of opinions and different representations of an issue" (p. 192). This is similar to the stance of Smith and Osborn (2008) who encourage a focus on the richness of the data collected. In this study, the transcripts demonstrated rich data that contained similar emergent themes and the last interview revealed no new data. Once thematic saturation had been reached and the transcripts were fully transcribed, member checks were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts and to verify that the content was a fair representation of what each participant intended to communicate. The analytic process then began with a close reading of the transcripts to become more familiar with content, organization and structure. This is in keeping with the advice from Smith and Osborn (2008) that states, "it is important in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account" (p. 67).

After an initial reading of the transcripts as a whole, the first transcript was read several times using the first research question as a guide. Descriptive notations were made in the

margins, following the recommendation of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). These exploratory notes were then grouped into categories, and the process was repeated to confirm and add detail to the categories. Smith and Osborn (2008) describe this part of the process as creating “concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text” (p. 68). Examples of a priori phrases used are “practical benefit,” “community building,” “continued learning,” and “expression of respect.” Themes were generated from the categories, and passages from the transcript were selected for their ability to support and illuminate the theme. Examples of emerging themes include “decreases feelings of isolation,” “provides continuous learning about chosen profession,” and “fulfills personal interest.” The list of themes with associated quotations was then sent to the participant for final verification. This process was repeated for each remaining transcript.

Once themes were established for each transcript, they were then compared and organized into clusters. Themes were chosen based on the richness of the data and their ability to illuminate the experiences of the participants. Smith and Osborn (2008) recommend focusing on “the richness of the particular passages that highlight the themes and how the theme helps illuminate other aspects of the account” (pp. 74-75). The passages associated with each theme were then compared and only those themes that were well-supported by rich data were chosen. Following the advice of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the transcripts were analyzed and coded using only one research question at a time. Once themes were established and passages were located to sufficiently answer the first research question, an analysis was then conducted using the second, theoretical research question. Therefore, the findings from each question are presented separately with their associated themes and passages. Interpretations and implications are then presented in chapter five.

## Adjunct Faculty Perceptions of Faculty Development

Three higher order themes emerged from an analysis of the data using the first research question: How do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth? The topics emerging from the data included a love for teaching, the need to learn more about teaching, and feeling respected through the offering of professional development. These general topics were grouped into three higher order themes: 1. teaching is a passion and a choice, 2. value derived from participation, and 3. gratitude for inclusion in faculty development. Ten sub-themes were identified as recurring patterns in the data. The higher order themes and associated subthemes are presented in table one.

Table 1

### *Higher Order Themes and Associated Sub-Themes*

<b>Higher Order Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Teaching is a passion and a choice	The act of teaching is a part of a lifelong career path Faculty development encourages professional growth
Value derived from participation	Provides continuous learning about chosen profession Fulfills personal interest in current topics and trends in education Encourages small changes to teaching Provides a pathway for being part of the college community Decreases isolation
Gratitude for inclusion in faculty development	Imparts feelings of respect and feeling valued Stipend is a gesture of respect for one's time Timing, format, and convenience are important factors

**A passion and a choice.** Since teaching is a part of a lifelong career path, faculty development represents an opportunity for professional growth. Faculty development experiences for each of the participants are framed by a passion for teaching and a commitment to their chosen profession. As Paul stated, "...if I just take the love for teaching out, and look at it that way? Then it's just a job, and I would say it would be kind of depressing sometimes." For each participant, teaching provides meaning beyond gainful employment. Passion, vocation, and identity are repeated often throughout the interview transcripts, and teaching is described as both a form of connection and a way to help others. Song described a connection to her students when she stated that "I like teaching, teaching is kind of like my students are my family for that semester..." Teaching also provides connection and fulfillment for Ann who finds meaning in helping others:

...I like helping people [...] it's nice to feel like you are having a job that means something. I used to work a lot of [other] jobs, and I guess they meant something, but you don't really see that initial, or that immediate feedback, that what I did helped the universe go on. Here, you definitely get some immediate feedback.

Steve described being a teacher as "something that I always felt like I was meant to do" and teaching as "part of my vocation." In describing his previous employment he said:

...that's where most of my active vocational life has been. But in both of those arenas I was also a teacher. I mean that's what I was doing. It was in one form or the other. So the transition to a classroom setting was just a change of venue not so much a change of vocation.

Similar to Steve, each of the participants described teaching as part of a lifelong career path that was either an act of service that sparked a passion for teaching or an intentional career

choice. For example, Ann's fear of public speaking initially led her to tutoring, an experience that helped her to become more comfortable in a classroom setting:

And I've always seemed to... I've had a knack for it. Because I've always volunteered since I was little. And not just volunteering, but volunteer tutoring. Yeah, I was always comfortable with it, and I never really thought I could do it, so it wasn't a career option. But as I got older I realized, standing in front of a group of people really was something I could do.

Similarly, Paul was also a volunteer; however, his plans to teach began earlier and were more deliberate. His "love of teaching" began "when I graduated high school. I went to college. I started out in engineering, and then went to math, and then I was going to go into education." He described his path into teaching as the pursuit of an enduring goal:

...so I just always had a passion, even in the corporate world, I was always the person they would give the new person to, to show them the ropes and training and do a lot of that stuff. Actually, [...] when I graduated from my undergraduate I went back and substitute taught at my old high school while I was looking for jobs. I was a volunteer basketball coach for inner city youth. I did that so... So those types of things. I just like showing people, just give them little tidbits, so it's kind of been a passion. And now I try to do it as full time as possible.

Both Ann and Paul expressed a desire to teach full-time. Ann stated that "I would prefer to be a full-time instructor. Since I don't have a day-job that I really like, I would prefer that to be my day-job." Song and Susie, on the other hand, are both retired educators who continue to teach because it provides them with a sense of purpose. Susie described herself as a lifelong teacher:

I've always been a teacher in some way, shape, or form that even when I was not working in a teaching situation, I was a cashier and some kid would come up and hand me money and I'd put the hand over the screen and go "what's your change?"

Song's sense of self is also intimately tied to the act of teaching, and she described schools as "a place where I feel comfortable." Having retired from a long career as a teacher, Song returned to teaching as an adjunct faculty member because "I was depressed. I needed to be back in a school." In describing her career, she said:

I've been teaching, since 1964, and so, off and on, taking a couple of years off here and there. But since nineteen sixty four, so I've been in schools practically all of my life, except for the first five years and then three or four years in between, I've been in schools.

Faculty development encourages professional growth for each of the participants, though the outcomes are different depending on where they are in their careers. For each of the participants, faculty development provides encouragement to grow as a teacher. Steve said that his faculty development experience helped him to understand that:

...it's the reality of teaching as a practice and a discipline that anybody who is going to be in the business just needs to keep working at it. [...] So it was just a reminder that, to me that, doing what I am doing requires some ongoing learning and keeping in touch with new ideas and fresh ways of looking at things.

Paul agreed in his statement that "I think it's good that all your faculty should always try to learn things... and better themselves as a faculty." He went on to say that:

I like to learn from what other people have to say. I love hearing stories. And somehow you can use the lesson in that. I use a lot of different stories that I hear in my classrooms and discussions.

Describing her experience with faculty development, Ann found confirmation of her own teaching effectiveness. She said that:

...even if it was sometimes just affirming, it was nice to know that I was on the right track. Sometimes I just make up stuff in the classroom. It's nice to know that I was making up the right stuff.

For Steve, Paul and Ann, faculty development is an opportunity to develop in their chosen profession, whereas Song and Susie, who are retired educators, see it as a way to stay up to date with the latest research in education. Susie remarked that “things have changed so much since I first learned what was needed for teaching and I first started teaching. The attitude of the children, the adults, the students in general.” She added that “I think faculty development is a great thing because there are so many new things coming up.” Song also expressed satisfaction in continued professional learning:

I want someone else to do the research for me. My research days are over, I am done. But that doesn't mean that I am done learning, or that I don't want to know anything more. [...] I don't want to go to the library anymore, I don't want to go to search engines anymore, so if somebody else does that... so if you are doing that, it's like you prepared the meal, I'm going to sit down and eat. And so I like that. I like that that's an offering.

**Value added.** While each of the participants has a different motivation for participating in professional development activities depending on their career goals and personal interests, the perceived value of participating in faculty development activities is similar for all instructors. Continuous learning about their chosen profession, an interest in current topics and trends in education, changes in technology, small changes to teaching and a connection to the college community are repeated several times throughout the transcripts. Remaining current was a



highlight in many of the conversations. In fact, Steve stated that faculty development has “given me some reason to think that I am doing something to stay up to speed,” while Paul adds “I love learning.” He goes on to explain that “I just love to learn about things, and [...] I feel like every other faculty member out there has got something that I can grab and maybe apply to my class.” Song and Ann described an appreciation for practical, just-in-time workshops that provide guidance on changes in technology or format. Song, who often participates in technology workshops, said “I’ve been to the blackboard ones mostly because I can’t seem to master it. I learn a little bit something new each time.” And Ann, who was asked to teach a five week course for the first time, was appreciative of the opportunity to discuss the condensed format before she was expected to teach:

... anytime that you have something unusual that comes up like a short class or maybe a hybrid class is good to have some idea of what’s expected. Can I remove material? How do you handle the abbreviated schedules? And stuff like that [...] I really liked that.

Similarly, learning about new trends in education also provided a sense of satisfaction for Steve who participated in a five-week workshop about online teaching:

...the courses that you’ve done on online teaching have given me a real appreciation for the richness that online experience can be. I mean, it can work. It can. And as a classroom teacher I’ve been a bit skeptical about how that goes, so I did gain something of a hands-on understanding of the mechanics of online teaching. And that, that was, it’s been worth a lot to me.

While learning about changes in technology and format came up repeatedly during each interview, from online and hybrid teaching to implementing flipped classrooms, several participants expressed an interest in learning more about current students. Susie identified this as

a further learning need when she stated that "... I just sometimes don't feel like I'm getting like what I feel I need, is the information on the way kids function and focus today." She went on to say that "I think that's where I need some more guidance, direction, in knowing the culture of the students that are coming in today." Similarly, Song said that "I want to learn more about what is really coming out of schools." She clarified this by explaining "I like to know what the new research has shown. And I keep hearing that high school students today don't know what they used to know, and I haven't found these students to be slugs at all."

While the participants spoke at length about their appreciation for the learning opportunities offered through faculty development, only a few mentioned specific changes to teaching. When asked about changes made as a result of workshops, several of the participants were not able to think of specific examples. Others acknowledged that the workshops encouraged them to consider how they worded policies or how they interacted with students. For example, Paul remarked that "I learned rather than typing in a discussion to a student: "here's a scenario..." It's kind of like, "how would you consider this?" Or, "what do you think would happen if we did this?" Susie also reported promoting more interaction among her students and encouraging them to take the lead in their learning:

Initially, I was so much more the present the information and work with the group and always be the one who's there to nurture and make sure they've got everything. And I started to do a little more, as I looked around the class to see who was really understanding and grasping the [subject], to kind of get them to be little leaders in the group, and actually try and help. And, you know, they just jump right in there and say "let's review!"

Steve, on the other hand, described changes to content organization as a result of a workshop on online teaching:

The idea of modules and to thinking in terms of course modules has influenced the way I have approached teaching [the subject]. And I think it's helped me, and I think its helped students too because I've been able more easily to present the material in chunks in ways that students can carry it away. It's more portable, more adaptable for them. So I do remember carrying away that idea. The way of organizing in modules and chunking material.

While changes to teaching were only noted by a few of the participants, they all discussed an increased sense of connection to the college community after participating in professional development activities. Each instructor reported some feelings of isolation that were decreased by the opportunity to meet others on a professional and a social level. For these instructors, faculty development provided one pathway for being a part of the larger community. Steve stated that "I think adjuncts are at great risk to having little sense of community with the faculty because there are no requirements." He then goes on to explain:

But I think that the opportunity to participate in something like the training experiences that you offer that facilitates contact with other faculty, both adjunct and full time faculty, has reinforced the sense of being part of something [...] a community of scholars, a community of people who care about what they are doing, a community of people who want to get better at, who understand something of what others are going through. All of that I think is important. Bonding to that community.

Participating in professional development has also provided a sense of community for Song who reported that getting to know other instructors is an important aspect of the experience:

...getting to know people is good. I like meeting a guy from [another country] in my professional development class, you know when we were in the computer room. I like that camaraderie. I just, without professional development I wouldn't get to know these people. There are people who come in here, and I know that because I've been trying to sort all this mail, these books, there are people who come here but never come to the adjunct room. They go to their classroom... they get out of their car, go to their classroom, and go back to their car. They do nothing else. So I don't even know those people. I know their names, and I know where they teach only because they get stuff sent to them. And I don't know... that's not the experience I want. I want the experience, I want the total experience. I want the camaraderie; I want to know what is going on, I want to know if there's something new, I want to know what it's all about, but I don't want to do the research.

Paul, who primarily teaches online courses, described online teaching as being "on an island all by yourself." He sees faculty development as providing a reason to interact with colleagues:

It's hard because you've got adjuncts who teach in the classroom and then adjuncts online. And adjuncts in the classroom, I can imagine, you come in, you teach a class, and then you leave. You know, you check the adjunct office, check your mailbox. Nothing in there? No books on the table and then you go. So there's not a lot of, I guess, reason to interact.

Susie confirmed this in her statement that “it’s a little bit of where I am, I sneak in the back door, go into my classroom, do my thing and then I leave. So, I really don’t have as much interaction all the time with people.” Professional development, however, provides her with the opportunity to meet other people and to discuss teaching: “it’s that contact with the other people in the school and getting to know who they are. And getting to know what they teach. And their philosophies, and their perspectives on things.”

In contrast, Ann appreciates the freedom and autonomy that are afforded to her as an adjunct and did not speak to community building. However, she reported that “even when I [teach] during the day, I don’t know my colleagues. Because we still only come for that one class and you leave, you don’t really hang out here too much.” Elaborating on this, Ann says:

I know [one woman] because she was my mentor. Other than that, no not really. That’s actually kind of a, I don’t know if it’s a problem, but it’s always been a little weird just cause I’ve never known my colleagues, as an adjunct at any school. You are a little on your own, nobody to talk to, you talk to your students cause there’s no one else.

However, Ann was grateful for the opportunity to turn to a colleague when she had questions about the college. As a part of a new faculty orientation, each new adjunct instructor is provided with the name and contact information of another adjunct faculty member who serves as an “adjunct advisor.” Ann referred to her assigned advisor as her mentor:

I liked the idea about the mentor. Especially for any new faculty cause you don’t know where things are or what to do so it was nice to have ... I didn’t use [my mentor] for the longest time, and but once I finally started,... as the semester went on and I found that there were things that were coming up, so I did go to her a few times.

**Gratitude for inclusion.** Regardless of the type of program, the reason for participating, or the perceived benefit, each participant expressed gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to participate in faculty development and felt that it was worth his or her time. More specifically, being included imparts a feeling of respect and of feeling valued, being provided a stipend is a gesture of respect for their time, and the timing, convenience and format are important factors in making a decision to participate. Moreover, knowing that opportunities are available and open to adjunct instructors was important for several of the participants whether they took part in all of them or not.

When asked about his experience with faculty development, Steve said “well first of all, I was happy for the opportunities. I’ve not been able to avail myself of all of them, but I’ve been happy to take advantage of them when I could.” Paul added that “as far as professional development, I am glad you offer those professional development things because it is just one avenue that lessens that island experience a little bit.” The concepts of value and respect are mentioned in each of the interview transcripts, and many of the conversations included talk about feeling valued. Steve explained that:

... it gave me a sense ... a satisfying sense that the school itself wanted to strengthen the role and performance of its faculty, its adjunct faculty, and cared enough about doing that [to] take some practical steps in that direction.

While talking about faculty development as a means to build community, Steve also reflected on how a professional development program conveys feelings of value. He said:

One of the appeals of being an adjunct is you don’t have any requirements that you have office hours or that you go to meetings or that you take on extra-curricular assignments or activities. But if you think about that too long, you say “well they really don’t need me or

anything! I'm just a hired gun," you know? That's all I do. I just walk in, do my thing, walk out, and that's all they care about, you know? But I really think there's more caring than that behind it. But without something concrete to give evidence of that it can be forgotten. So again I come back to the community, building the bonds of community as being a way to strengthen a sense of an adjunct's professionalism and a sense of being valued is important.

The concept of respect is most often mentioned in conjunction with compensation.

Northern Community College (NCC) offers adjunct instructors a small stipend for participating in certain professional development activities; the stipend can range anywhere from \$50 for a three-hour workshop to \$300 for a five week online course. Regardless of the amount, each participant mentioned the importance of the stipend, and several shared that being paid is often a factor in their decision to participate. Paul revealed that "if the stipend wasn't there, I wouldn't be as active. Because I can go do other things with my time." Song, who shared that she does not need the stipend, says that she likes it "just because it makes me feel like you value my presence." In addition to a small stipend, each new instructor is given a pen and a small pad of paper with the college name on it during the new faculty orientation. Song mentioned appreciating this take-away several times during the interview and when talking about the stipend she said:

I like it. Like I said, I don't need it, but it doesn't matter. I like it. It's almost like... it's like the pen! I couldn't believe how excited I was about the pen. I just couldn't believe it. Everybody likes to get something. I think it's a good thing too.

For many of the participants, the stipend signifies a gesture of respect for their time.

Steve mentioned that "I think the idea of offering a stipend is good though. And the amount is

probably insignificant. It's probably more showing respect for a time commitment." Susie further explained:

...getting that extra stipend, it helps. But it is also a sign of respect... that we want to pay you for your time. That, yes this is professional development. Yes, you need to get it to stay on top of whatever. But, we respect that this is your time, and we respect that this is important.

In contrast, Ann described the stipend as adding value to the activity. She said that:

It seems weird because it's only for twenty dollars. Its like, "do I really need twenty dollars?" But somehow it just magically makes it... I guess anytime there's a cost in something you see the value. If it's free, then "yeah whatever." I could just look at it on the internet. But it must be worth something if they are willing to pay me... twenty dollars. It must be psychological, I think.

Ann later added:

Well maybe some if it is because... the full timers, they have to go to meetings and stuff but that's part of their job. They have 40 hours a week, it's included in there. When you ask an adjunct to go to something, you're asking them to donate their time to do it. It just doesn't seem fair, and I guess there is that to it.

While a stipend contributes to an adjunct instructor's decision to take part in professional development, participants reported that timing, format, and length of the event are more important considerations. Susie explained that "I'd like to be a little more active with the college, but most of the stuff is daytime stuff and I'm teaching an evening class." Travel time to and from the college is a consideration for instructors who may not live close to campus. Susie further said that "I don't necessarily want to come for something that happens at one or two



o'clock, then I've got a couple hour window before my class starts. Do I go home? Do I come back?" Ann also remarked that a half hour commute to campus makes a one hour workshop unfeasible. When discussing the new faculty orientation she stated:

It was nice that it wasn't just an hour. That's what always is kind of annoying, especially for those who drive a bit to get here, just to go to an hour thing. So, there was a lot to it, and we had some food. That was good.

A complicating factor for some participants is the feeling that the shared space commonly known at NCC as the "adjunct office" is not a comfortable place to spend time between an event and class. Susie remarked that "even though there's that faculty room across from my classroom, nobody hangs out there. It would be almost nice if the adjunct office were more of a ... less sterile situation, than it is." Song described the office as "messy," and Ann said that she only uses the room "to print." These instructors described trying to find an alternate space to work or to meet with students, but it is difficult because there is limited space on campus in general.

Another consideration for instructors is the format of faculty development workshops. Online workshops can solve the timing issue, but it is not a format that works for everyone. Song, who enjoys meeting face to face with others and appreciates professional development for the community building aspect described her participation in a week long online workshop:

I took the week long one in January. And I also came to the meeting anyway. Because, because I want to be here, and I didn't like online. I don't like online because I have a hard time reading on the screen.

Paul, on the other hand, prefers the online format because it is more convenient for his schedule:

Because like I said, everything you do is online, and I teach online here so I am in the class, I check the class every day, my classes. So I am in there anyway. So for me to get out of my last class and jump into the professional development? I can do that easily.

The duration of the online format also provides an opportunity for in-depth learning. Susie said that:

...four to five weeks is probably good. I would say if you hit three weeks, you are just hitting your stride and getting into “all right, these are the days that I can read, and these are the days that I can answer.” So, but by four to five weeks you’re really getting what you need out of it.

### **Adult Learning Principles**

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommend the use of a theory-driven question for secondary analysis – “to use the data as a lever to evaluate existing theories and models” (p. 48). However, they warn that “given the open nature of qualitative data collection, you can’t be certain that you *will* be able to answer them” (p. 48). When analyzed using the second research question, the interview transcripts reveal minimal evidence to suggest that adjunct faculty perceptions of faculty development are influenced by the application of adult learning principles. The second research question asks: How do principles of adult learning influence adjunct instructor perceptions of faculty development? After a complete analysis of the first research question, the interview transcripts were again analyzed and coded using the six principles of adult learning developed by Lawler and King (2000). The six principles were used as the codes and marginal notations were made to identify corresponding passages in each of the transcripts. These passages were then compiled into a master list under a heading for each principle. Findings are presented according to each of the principles: 1. Create a climate of respect, 2.

Encourage active participation, 3. Build on experience, 4. Employ collaborative inquiry, 5. Learn for action, 6. Empower the participants (Lawler & King, 2000).

**Create a climate of respect.** The first principle addresses the variety of experiences that adults bring to their learning. Lawler and King (2000) recommend examining participant goals, expectations and expertise when planning for professional development. Many of the faculty development workshops at Northern Community College (NCC) are designed based on the stated needs of the participants. To do this, a survey is sent out prior to each workshop to collect information about potential topics and questions. Then, content is provided during the workshop that addresses those identified needs. Several of the interview transcripts reveal an appreciation for content curation with comments such as “it’s interesting to read some of articles,” as Susie mentioned or as Paul added, “certain articles were, that you read were good.” Steve further explained that:

The literature that you introduced us to has been good stuff! You know, I don’t know that I’ve read all of it because there has been a lot of it! Enough to really benefit or feel like I was benefitting from it.

**Encourage active participation.** Active participation is the second principle of adult learning, and Lawler and King (2000) explain that “adults are accustomed to being active participants in their daily lives” (p. 22). Therefore, faculty development workshops should actively engage adult learners in their own learning. To this end, many of the online workshops at NCC are based on a discussion model where participants are asked to read curated content and to formulate a response to a discussion question or to develop an artifact that they can later use in their own classrooms. Commenting on her experience with an online workshop Susie said:

This really requires you to be the active participant. And in that respect it's good. I think it is good because you really need to think and process and go "okay." I either have to flat outright say, "none of this really fits me because this is what I do and this is how I do it." Or, to be able to say: "well yeah, you know, I can pull this little bit out, or I never noticed that thing before." I think there was a chart in one of them, and I was like "yeah, you know? I never thought of doing it that way." So it does kind of make you think a little bit beyond just sitting there and being the quiet person in the corner of the classroom.

**Build on experience.** Adults bring diversity of experience into their learning, which is the third principle. Adults learn from and through their life experiences and will actively engage with previous learning in order to understand a new construct or concept. Lawler and King (2000) caution that "we cannot divorce the learner's past experience from the present educational event" (p. 23). Faculty development activities at NCC attempt to draw on the experience of participants by inviting them to share stories, lessons, and artifacts that are connected to the topic being discussed. Susie commented on this exchange of ideas and states:

It's nice to get to hear the input and give input because even if it doesn't focus specifically on my needs, I still have other teaching experience. I still have other thoughts on things, and sometimes something another teacher is doing that is maybe more of a hands on class, they have some ideas and some suggestions that I never thought to use.

Susie also shared that she relies on her previous experience when listening to others during face to face meetings and discussions:

I also have a special ed background. So I remember, in doing the physically in the room professional developments, when we were doing that, we actually showed up and went to meetings in different rooms and presentations. It was interesting because there I had a

tendency to sit there more as a special ed teacher, going “all right, yeah these visas, and these other things and the special needs students, and I’ve had some of them in my class,” and so I know where I’m coming from and how to deal with those.

In contrast, Song described using her expertise as a way to review and understand information gained through reading materials:

And you know, the teaching ideas that you put in our mailbox. You know, I look at those. And education hasn’t changed much in the last 50 years, but, it’s... it’s just kinda fun to see how it gets recycled. And the same idea gets a different name, depending on somebody else’s dissertation who came up with a model. And we have models that we haven’t produced yet, friends of mine and I who sit around and have coffee and design ways to examine schools. I like to find out what’s new or what is recycled.

**Employ collaborative inquiry.** The fourth principle of adult learning builds on the academic concept of collegiality and encourages social learning opportunities. Lawler and King (2000) recommend engaging instructors in both development and delivery, “thus acknowledging faculty experience and expertise” (p. 23). As mentioned earlier, participants in faculty development workshops at NCC are asked to identify their learning needs and share their experience and expertise with their colleagues. Social learning is highly encouraged, and the interview transcripts reference idea sharing several times. As mentioned earlier, Paul said that “I like to learn from what other people have to say. I love hearing stories. And somehow you can use the lesson in that.” Another example is from Susie who, when considering the ideas she gained during a professional development workshop, shared:

...when it comes to assessments? I’m always open to something new. My challenge is there are no rubrics out there, so I have to keep creating and generating my own rubrics

on things and constantly tweak things. Although somebody, in one of the classes, one of the online discussions, had mentioned something about letting the students, you know, how am I doing? Let the students kind of grade you on it? And I was so frustrated because I created [a rubric] on Blackboard, and I couldn't transfer it. I couldn't get it into the dialogue to show people. Because I am so Blackboard novice (laughs), that I couldn't figure out how to get it in there to show people. And I thought "you know, this is a great idea. You know, a few weeks in, and I am doing a class participation grade for them. Why not ask them how they feel I'm doing and where I might need... instead of waiting until the very end, and even after the fact, having the students fill out the evaluations and getting those evaluations going "well this could have been better and that could have been better." Or "this was wonderful and that was wonderful." You know, to kind of get that along the way, I thought "well now that's a good idea."

**Learn for action.** A recommended outcome for professional development sessions is the ability for participants to apply new skills or information immediately. As stated in the fifth principle of adult learning, faculty developers should plan for an immediate and practical application of new knowledge by the participants. Lawler and King (2000) state that "incorporating the concept that learners will take action on their learning and will utilize the information presented after reflection is crucial for change to take place" (pp. 23-24). Several workshops at NCC are designed with the goal of immediate application. Participants may be asked to create an artifact that could be immediately placed in an online course, or to create a lesson that they could use in a face to face classroom setting. Steve described using ideas from a workshop on online teaching in a face to face classroom:

I haven't taught an online course, but I've benefitted in the classroom though from doing some of the things that we did online. And just even from the kinds of questions that you were asking and the way that you framed questions and um promoted interaction among the participants. All that was good, that was good stuff! And it was transferable from online to classroom.

Ann also said that she was able to put information to immediate use after a workshop on teaching in a condensed format. She stated:

Well, like with the summer one, I mean I really was planning everything crammed into the four or five weeks. And for the most part I didn't find a lot I could cut out, but just knowing I could? Or there was alternate ways to do things; it doesn't all just have to be on the test, stuff like that.

**Empower the participants.** The sixth principle of adult learning is a synthesis of the previous five and describes an ideal situation for growth. Lawler and King (2000) write that “when learners are able not only to comprehend new information but also to place it in their context, make meaning of it, and take action to incorporate it into their daily lives, they become empowered” (p. 24). Participants in faculty development workshops should feel safe to explore and share new ideas with their colleagues, and to take risks in their teaching as a result.

Participants in workshops at NCC are encouraged to reflect on what has worked well and what could be improved, and they are urged to support their colleagues by using the framework of critical friends. While empowerment did not explicitly come up in the interview transcripts, several comments speak to the personal impact of faculty development. First, Steve remarked that he “felt like I benefitted. It was practical... in practical terms. And it was worth my time to do.” He then added that “the impact was all positive. Made me feel more connected to the

school. And I feel like what I was doing there had worth.” Lastly, as mentioned earlier, Ann described her experience as “affirming.” She said that:

Even if it was sometimes just affirming, it was nice to know that I was on the right track. Sometimes I just make up stuff in the classroom. It’s nice to know that I was making up the right stuff.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study was to document the experiences of adjunct faculty members who have participated in faculty development activities at a small, rural community college and to understand how it affects their personal and professional growth. Findings based on five semi-structured interviews reveal that adjunct faculty members are appreciative of the opportunity to participate in professional development activities and that they find value in the experience. Their involvement with faculty development is framed by a passion for teaching and a desire to know more about students and teaching methods; however, each of the participants also expressed a need to become more familiar with their colleagues. Community building, an increased sense of connection to others, and greater familiarity with the college are all mentioned as outcomes of participation. Finally, the opportunity to participate in professional development increases feelings of value and respect, and provides one pathway for being regarded as a college employee.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how adjunct faculty members who teach in a small, rural community college perceive faculty development. Professional development is often cited as a means to improve morale and workplace satisfaction for adjunct instructors, but little is known about how services impact this group of employees. Moreover, there are few studies that examine faculty development in rural-serving community colleges. The rural setting creates a unique backdrop for teaching and learning, so it is important to understand how faculty development services impact adjunct faculty members who choose to work in these colleges. Size and location contribute to the challenges faced by rural community colleges, and both have a direct impact on faculty development offerings. Recruiting qualified faculty is more difficult due to the small number of local residents who are eligible to teach, and the salary and isolation of a rural college pose additional challenges for recruiting and retaining instructors (Murray, 2005). Retention is a concern because of this difficulty in recruiting new instructors, so turnover due to academic loneliness or a lack of cultural opportunity can be detrimental to the institution. Therefore, it is crucial for rural community colleges to retain instructors, but little is known about adjunct faculty perceptions of faculty development and its impact on their personal and professional growth. In her research on contingent faculty, Kezar (2013) noted that an essential task for researchers is to understand adjunct faculty experiences from their own perspective and using their own words. Yet, there is little research that gives voice to adjunct faculty. This qualitative study begins to fill this gap by documenting adjunct faculty perceptions of the impact of a faculty development program on their personal and professional growth.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to document the experiences of adjunct faculty members who participated in faculty development activities within the past calendar year. This method was chosen because it requires the researcher to focus on individual accounts of a specific phenomenon. Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) further describe IPA research as a method of inquiry that has the potential to generate new knowledge about a specific question. In order to understand adjunct faculty experiences with professional development using IPA, instructors who had taken part in at least one of three specific workshops were invited to participate. Five instructors from a rural community college known in this study as “Northern Community College” (NCC) volunteered, and all five were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Interview transcripts were then analyzed using two research questions:

1. How do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth?
2. How do principles of adult learning influence adjunct instructor perceptions of faculty development?

The interpretative phenomenological analysis of the transcripts occurred in two steps using each research question as a guide. The first step was an exploration of participant experience with faculty development, and three higher-order themes emerged from the analysis. The data revealed that teaching is a passion and a choice, there is value gained from participating in professional development activities, and adjunct instructors feel gratitude for being included in faculty development. Rich data support these findings, and conclusions may be drawn from them. The second step was an analysis of the impact of adult learning principles. While some evidence is present to suggest there may be a positive impact, there is minimal data from which to draw significant conclusions. Participants spoke about engagement with the materials,

appreciation for active learning methods, and lifelong learning; however, the discussion about these topics was often minimal and did not yield rich data. Therefore, this chapter will explain the relevance of the findings, describe the implications for practice, and make recommendations for action based primarily on the first research question.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Using the first research question of how do adjunct faculty members perceive faculty development experiences in relation to their personal and professional growth as a guide, the analysis revealed that participation in faculty development activities was a positive experience for each of the participants. A passion for teaching provides a framework for understanding adjunct faculty experiences with professional development because they want to learn more about their chosen profession and improve their teaching skills. Adjunct instructors at NCC are not required to participate in professional development, so it is unlikely that these instructors would participate if they did not find teaching to be an enjoyable experience. While two of the participants are retired educators, each of the instructors made a choice to pursue teaching as a part of their careers. Their love of teaching motivates them to remain current in their field and to learn more about the latest trends in education. Moreover, the participants describe themselves as lifelong learners saying, “I love learning,” or learning “makes me feel alive.” Because they value learning so highly, the participants feel that the faculty development program provides opportunities for growth and development that are enjoyable as well as affirming.

The participants recognized the personal and social value of participating in faculty development. While they talked about benefits such as continuous learning opportunities and keeping up to date with the latest research, the greatest impact from faculty development is from an increased sense of connection to the college community. Each instructor reported some

feelings of isolation that were decreased by the opportunity to meet others on a professional and a social level. For these instructors, faculty development provides one pathway for being a part of the larger community. Adjunct faculty members at NCC are typically not temporary employees. For most, the work is steady and stable and they are longtime instructors who maintain regular teaching schedules. Even though they work on a contract, their role is more akin to a part-time employee than a contract employee whose service is limited to a project. Since they feel like employees, they want the social benefits that they believe full time employees have. This includes formal events such as public recognition and informal get togethers such as employee picnics. Therefore, faculty development provides an avenue for social engagement with the institution and provides an increased sense of connection as a college employee, helping adjuncts to feel as if they are valued and respected members of the college community. This has the potential to positively impact student learning since adjunct instructors may feel more willing to contribute to the institution in the form of college service or more time spent on campus. Students may then have more contact with instructors outside of the classroom, leading to advising and mentoring opportunities. Additionally, supported instructors may be more willing to try new teaching techniques that improve the teaching and learning environment.

Lastly, the participants are highly appreciative of the opportunity to participate in faculty development and express gratitude for being included. Instructors choose to participate for a variety of reasons; however, access to professional development is highly regarded. An invitation to participate that is inclusive of all faculty members imparts feelings of respect and helps adjunct faculty to feel as if they are valued members of the college community leading to improved morale. As mentioned previously, workplace satisfaction can impact student learning

if instructors feel comfortable enough to spend time on campus. Increased instructor presence can benefit students through mentoring, advising, or tutoring.

While access to professional development improves morale and a sense of connection to the college community, instructors at NCC also describe satisfaction with receiving a stipend because it confers value on the activity and increases feelings of respect that the instructor gains from being included. The general perception is that the college respects its adjunct faculty enough to provide professional development and to pay them for their time. While each of the participants expressed similar feelings about being included in faculty development activities, the point of divergence among them was the format of the activity. The lifestyle of an adjunct faculty member may preclude someone from participating fully in all types of events, so it is important to schedule a variety of activities. Workshops at NCC are offered both face to face and online, and some of the participants expressed a strong preference for one over the other depending on learning style and teaching format. Others described the length of the workshop to be a factor in whether or not they would participate based on travel time and their teaching schedules. While creating a variety of activities in a small community college may be difficult due to the small number of potential participants, with careful scheduling and organization of an event, an instructor may see the value and be more willing to attend if it is also convenient.

Using the second research question of “how do principles of adult learning influence adjunct instructor perceptions of faculty development” to analyze the interview transcripts, the analysis explored the connection between adult learning principles and adjunct faculty perceptions of professional development. While there is minimal evidence to support a significant conclusion, there is some data to suggest that there may be a connection between the application of adult learning principles during workshops and the positive outcomes experienced

by the participants. Many of the workshops at NCC are designed according to the principles of adult learning outlined by Lawler and King (2000). Participants in specific workshops are asked to identify their learning needs before the start of the activity; they are encouraged to actively participate in a community of learners; and they are asked to create teaching artifacts that can be used in classrooms or online courses. Collaboration and discussion are a significant part of the workshop design, and participants report feeling a greater connection to their colleagues as well as benefitting from active participation in the event. The connection between collaboration during faculty development workshops and increased feelings of connection to the community should be explored further to determine the extent to which this occurs.

### **Implications**

Findings from this study indicate that faculty development programs have a positive impact on the personal and professional growth of adjunct faculty members. The participants reported feeling respected and valued, and they are generally happy with their instructional responsibilities. This finding is consistent with other studies that indicate adjunct faculty are generally satisfied with their teaching work; however, recommendations such as recognition from administrators, a designated workspace, orientation, and ongoing professional development continue to be highly relevant for this group (Kezar, 2013; Kezar & Gehrke, 2013; Rich, 2015). Similar to the findings by Leslie and Gappa (2002), participants in this study are stable employees who have taught at NCC for several years, and they are generally satisfied with their jobs. However, as Deigel (2013) and Tarr (2010) found in their research, limited engagement with the institution leads to a sense of isolation that contributes to the problem of integral employees feeling as though they are disconnected from the larger institution. Faculty development programs provide one step toward increasing instructor engagement with the

college because they provide social connection and an opportunity to learn more about the institution. Purposeful and timely events allow for collegial exchange, professional learning in the form of instructional development, and updates about the operation and administration of the workplace.

While faculty development activities provide some social opportunities for adjunct faculty, many of the participants in this study described the conditions of their employment as isolating. They found few opportunities to talk to others about their subject areas, and they reported knowing only two or three other college employees. Each participant mentioned some variation of the phrase, “come in, teach, and leave.” Because of this isolation, adjunct instructors are unaware of what happens in the larger organization. For example, new policies are often implemented without their full understanding of how they affect their work. The nature of their work lives keeps them from fully participating in the work of the larger organization, and they feel disconnected from the social life of the institution. This finding was present in the research of Gappa and Leslie (1993), who made over 40 recommendations for the support of adjunct faculty. The recommendations that impact faculty development programs are orientation, mentoring, recognition of work or achievements, and invitations to informal gatherings and social events. Twelve years later, Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005) also noted that adjunct faculty “do not participate in decisions about their work and receive very little support” (p. 35). They also acknowledged little opportunity for networking and community building within institutions, a function that can be accomplished by a comprehensive faculty development program.

As is common in rural-serving community colleges, NCC serves a small population in a wide geographic area with few resources. In addition to insufficient financial resources, the

college also grapples with a lack of space for both students and faculty. These factors impact both adjunct faculty and the faculty development program for several reasons. First, there is a lack of social space for adjunct instructors. NCC provides one large office with several computers and cubicles for meeting students, yet it was described as “sterile” and “messy.” Since it is not a comfortable space, adjunct faculty are less likely to spend time on campus between a faculty development workshop and their scheduled classes. There are also few options for passing the time locally since there are no coffee shops or similar establishments within walking distance of the campus. A second, similar consideration for the rural setting is travel. Several of the participants in this study mentioned travel time as a factor in whether or not they would participate in a face to face workshop. The rural environment plays a role in adjunct ability to attend workshops because of the distance they travel from home or other places of employment. For those who drive a distance, if the event is not on a day that they would usually come to campus, they may be reluctant to make the trip on a different day. This leads to difficulty in scheduling faculty development events. Adjunct instructors teach classes throughout the day; they are not primarily evening instructors. Because of course scheduling, there is no one common time that adjunct instructors tend to be on campus, so the critical mass necessary for a face to face workshop may not be present in a small, rural community college.

Considering the small number of instructors who may be available to attend a workshop or event, time spent in travel, and the high importance of community building, workshop topics are an important consideration. The literature on community college adjunct faculty often describes them as experts in career fields who have little experience or education in teaching methods (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Wallin, 2005); however, the participants in this study were either retired educators or longtime instructors who mostly teach general education courses.



Consistent with the recommendation that part-time faculty receive instructional support in pedagogical techniques as well as classroom management (e.g. Lyons, 2007; Wallin, 2005), the participants in this study were interested in technology (both how to use it and how to use it to teach) and classroom management techniques. Advances in technology, the changing educational culture of online learning, and a changing student body are all concerns that should be addressed through professional development programming. However, the participants in this study also reported a high need for more networking opportunities. Some reported feeling isolated in their subject areas and cited the ability to talk to other instructors in their discipline as a priority for future faculty development efforts.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Findings from this research suggest several considerations for improvement of faculty development programs for adjunct faculty. First, faculty development leaders and other administrators who provide support and services to adjunct faculty members should work to create more comprehensive programs that focus on each of the three prongs of faculty development—instructional, organizational, and personal development. Studies conducted by Eddy (2007) and Latz and Mulvihill (2011) reveal the need for comprehensive faculty development programs that take institutional goals into account as well as supporting organizational efforts to create student-centered learning environments. Creating a holistic program that focuses on both the professional and personal development of instructors will create a foundation for the professional community that supports adjunct faculty in developing high-quality teaching practices. Reduced isolation can increase creativity, potentially leading to improved student learning outcomes. For example, participants in this study expressed a desire to talk to others in their discipline about good teaching practice, and a supportive peer to peer

environment would help all instructors focus on student learning. With this in mind, faculty developers need not only focus on instructional techniques to the exclusion of networking and other social opportunities. In fact, these types of activities can be combined to create more robust events that provide a balance between social, instructional, and administrative content. Taking travel time into account, which was a concern for several participants in this study, events that are longer in duration and provide information about new policies, technology, and equipment, instructional guidance, and networking opportunities are more likely to be seen as valuable by adjunct faculty.

Second, professional development has to be convenient for adjunct faculty who teach in a variety of formats and during various times throughout the day. Workshops need to be offered in the format in which the instructors are teaching or in the format in which they want to teach. For example, professional development for online instructors may work well in an online environment because it is perceived as convenient, whereas someone who wants to learn how to teach online would perceive it as practical. Both Steve and Paul mentioned the practicality and convenience of professional development since they were learning how to teach online, as in the case of Steve, and learning new skills for teaching online, as in the case of Paul. Classroom instructors who would like to learn more about classroom management or who are learning how to use technology would benefit from meeting in a face to face environment. This was mentioned by Song who enjoys the camaraderie and support of a face to face class when it comes to learning new technologies. The challenge in scheduling these types of workshops is that instructors are not often available at the same time and many are unwilling or unable to come to a short workshop on a day that they do not teach, which were concerns expressed by each of the participants in this study. Small colleges that do not have large numbers of

instructors on campus at the same time will find scheduling difficult for these reasons. Therefore, creating robust learning and networking experiences as mentioned above is a necessity. The length of a workshop should also be a consideration since researchers are beginning to show a connection between the length of a workshop and impact on teaching practice. Longer workshops that are extended in length or meet on more than one occasion are believed to have a greater impact on teaching practice (Chism, Holley & Harris, 2012). Therefore, online workshops should be extended in length to allow for a more meaningful asynchronous exchange to evolve, and face to face workshops should allow time for both topical and social interactions with colleagues.

Third, the first semester of employment is a critical time for adjunct instructors to be introduced to their colleagues and to the larger organization. Kezar and Sam (2013) found that access to orientations and institutionalization of policies to support adjunct faculty have a positive impact on the work environment. Instructors can spend more time focusing on student learning when they are familiar and comfortable with the workplace. Ann confirmed that getting to know staff members and other adjunct instructors during the orientation was helpful because she knew who to approach with questions as they surfaced later in the semester. Susie, on the other hand, found the orientation helpful but wanted further support in handling student concerns and disruptions. Therefore, orientations and mentoring are necessary for an adjunct instructor to successfully navigate their new environment; however, instructors also need more support in classroom management techniques and how to approach students who may be disruptive to the learning environment. Employees who are new to the college and who may only know one or two colleagues are less likely to seek advice about student behavior or other classroom issues that arise in a semester. Therefore, new instructors should be provided with orientation,

mentoring, social opportunities to meet peers and other college staff members, and instructional support that focuses specifically on classroom management techniques. Faculty developers should also create a program where new instructors are contacted at key points throughout the semester to ensure they are comfortable with their role at the college and that their concerns, if they have any, are being met.

Finally, the stipend is an important motivator for adjunct faculty who take part in professional development. While they participate in workshops because they love teaching and want to grow professionally, they also feel that a stipend is a gesture of respect for their time. As Ann mentioned, adjunct faculty who are not compensated for professional development are volunteering their time. While they may benefit intellectually from participation, the lack of a reward structure or some type of recognition for their service can lead to burnout and apathy. For many, the amount of the stipend is insignificant; the associated feeling of worth and value are more important. For this reason, faculty development programs should offer some compensation for attendance at workshops and events. This compensation does not always need to be a monetary incentive, however. Colleges who have local business partners who are willing to donate discounts or goods could provide different incentives such as books, gift cards, or food. Alternatives to stipends should be explored by those who are financially unable to pay adjunct faculty for their time.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study, further research is warranted in several areas that concern faculty development programs and adjunct faculty:

- Because interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) requires a small sample size, adjunct faculty experiences with professional development may be explored using a different

research method that allows for a larger sample size in order to substantiate the findings in this study.

- One goal of faculty development is to encourage change to teaching practice. The results of this study suggest that changes to teaching are minimal, and that instructors who do make changes are making small changes. Further research should explore the impact of faculty development on changes to teaching practice.
- Due to the minimal evidence that adult learning principles shape adjunct faculty perceptions of professional development, this research question should be explored in more depth using a different methodology.
- Adjunct faculty members report feelings of isolation. While faculty development is one method that can be used to decrease this sense of isolation, further research into other avenues for community building is needed.
- Required professional development may encourage community building for adjunct faculty members who do not take part in faculty development, but it is unclear how a requirement would affect morale. Research into how required professional development impacts adjunct faculty is needed.
- A recurring theme from participants in this study concerns space. Having access to a more comfortable space is an important consideration for those adjunct instructors who would like to spend more time on campus. While this may not be an issue for larger colleges that have ample office space, smaller institutions may struggle with providing reasonable space for adjunct faculty members. Further research into how smaller institutions can create spaces for adjunct faculty that are efficient and personal is needed.

## **Conclusion**

Adjunct faculty members are integral employees in community colleges, and as their numbers grow, researchers have consistently called for increased professional development, orientation, recognition, and integration into the social life of the organization. As a result, comprehensive faculty development programs are emerging to support their needs. However, more attention is currently devoted to establishing a need for professional development activities rather than examining how these activities affect adjunct faculty members. This study adds to the existing literature on faculty development programs in rural community colleges and documents the experiences of the adjunct faculty members who participate in them. While there are a number of studies that discuss adjunct faculty job satisfaction and the type of programming that can and should be provided for adjunct faculty, the first-hand experiences of the adjunct faculty members who participate in faculty development programs has gone unexplored.

Therefore, the goal of this study was to document the experiences of adjunct faculty members who have participated in faculty development activities at a small, rural community college. Two research questions were used to guide an analysis of the impact of professional development on the personal and professional growth of five volunteers. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the interview transcripts generated from these interviews and three higher-order themes emerged as a result. These themes reveal that adjunct faculty members are grateful for the opportunity to participate in professional development activities and they find value in the experience. Community building, an increased sense of connection to others, and greater familiarity with the college are all mentioned as benefits of participation, and each participant expressed a desire to become further acquainted with the college and their colleagues. In fact, the greatest impact of a faculty development

program is on community building and helping adjunct faculty feel as if they are a part of the college community. As the research into faculty development demonstrates, and this study confirms, programs should not be limited to instructional development, but should also include personal support and organizational development.

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