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EXPERIENCES OF THE EXCELLENT: A STUDY OF EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY AND WAYS THEY THINK ABOUT THEIR TEACHING

By

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES OF THE EXCELLENT: A STUDY OF EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY AND WAYS THEY THINK ABOUT THEIR TEACHING

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Higher education literature continually focuses on the urgent need to pay more attention to teaching. However, while community colleges are traditionally viewed as institutions devoted to this enterprise, they are also castigated due to their perceived lack of quality, under-served student population, and a lack of faculty publication. There is emerging evidence, on the other hand, that while certain elements of teaching in the community college context present barriers, more work needs to be done to learn about how to identify and nurture great teaching despite such obstacles and negative perceptions. One way to advance such understanding is to consider how best practice is initiated by its best teachers. This dissertation was designed to explore the pedagogical knowledge and stories of six mid-west community college faculty deemed exemplars by their Presidents and Vice Presidents, Provosts/or Academic Deans. By revealing more about the teaching lives and contexts of excellent community college faculty, this research may contribute an enriched sense of the themes that encompass this world, viewed through narratives constructed from this special group of subjects.

This dissertation is dedicated to community college students and their teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most people ask me why I did it (they would never do it), what I want to do with it (they think I want to go some place), and what I will do now that I don't have to do it any more. My answers shift depending on the day, but the opportunity to follow my "it" is something I cherish. The work was supported by many people. My two "Marilyns," Marilyn Moore and Marilyn Amey, my mother and my dissertation director, have my deep appreciation for their many hours of guidance. My mother, who passed away before I was entirely finished, was my first teacher and reader of my work. Marilyn Amey was a continual teacher and reader of the ideas, research processes, and narrative inquiry framing this study.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

> I think the exemplary teacher starts with the passion for the subject to begin with. You can tell they love the material, and it just oozes out of them. Everything they do is relating their enthusiasm for the topic and that's why I got into college teaching. —Todd Stephens, * Midwest Lakes Community College

Professor Stephens loves what he does, a pedagogical act of juggling seventy-plus Bio 100 students in three lecture sections and three labs, offering community talks, birding adventures for his students and colleagues, and infinite acts of one-on-one mentoring with students, coupled with conversations with colleagues. Stephens says he starts his day with coffee and a clear plan: "When I go into a teaching week, that's all I do. Not much of anything else matters. I mean I think about the processes. Even though I've taught them dozens of times, I still think about how I am going to deliver *today*, and I can still see my students sitting in front of me." Stephens, a "vet" of Midwest Lake with thirty-plus years of teaching, wears the uniform of the environmentalist: all natural fibers and Birkenstocks, an easy match for his down-to-earth conversational tones, unruly thatch of reddish-gray hair, and mischievous blue eyes, framed by classic wire rims. Like most full-time community college faculty, he has to balance a dizzying array of tasks:

teaching underserved students how to succeed in college, serving on committees, staying current with his field, revising curriculum, sharing his talents with the community, and using technology that changes even more quickly than the students' needs and abilities.

However, at the heart of this work lies his firm conviction that these tasks are meaningless without belief in what we do and how we do it. Despite changes in mission, enrollment, and finances, Stephens says we must accept the challenge:

> I think it's [the community college] one of the most crucial academic opportunities we offer that is not replicated by someone else. We thrive. We not only survive, but we thrive and survive as a level of education because we're forgiving. We're an open door. If you try once and you don't do well, try again. You really have to teach. Our students have to be taught; they have to be encouraged.

Stephens' reputation, both with students and colleagues at Midwest Lake Community College, is stellar. In addition to research grants and awards through organizations like the National Science Foundation and state level recognition, Stephens has received both of the college's top teaching awards and been nominated as best professor by students and colleagues consistently throughout his forty plus years devoted to teaching at Midwest. His colleagues in the biology department not only respect him but also enjoy collegial conversations and lively debates over a brew at the local pub. One of his former students, Dan Latimer,* began teaching at Midwest a few years ago after beginning his career at another community college. Stephen's influence on Latimer and others has been profound. Latimer says that "Your ability to teach, along with the quality of your teaching, come also from the life that you live. An influential instructor is

one that can actually cause you to change the way you live *your* life and as a result, reflect that change in the quality and scope of your own teaching. Todd Stephens had that kind of effect on me when I was a student here and continues to challenge me now that we are colleagues."

The Problem Statement

This type of contribution shows the powerful connection between teaching and learning, teacher and learner: "Subject matter is overrated and far from the most critical element of students' learning...Extraordinary teachers see their primary task as trying to prepare the students for life" (Acker, 2003, n.p.). Stephens' efforts clearly reflect the kind of impact community college professionals consider crucial for excellent community college teaching (Baker, Roueche & Gillet-Karam, 1990; Roueche, Milliron & Roueche, 2003). Further, Stephens has contributed successfully to his campuses' organizational culture in ways that will benefit students and colleagues for many years. However, Stephens is retiring. While his pedagogical beliefs and mentorship live on in those he touched, his work as an exemplar is not fully available to all community college professionals as a means to improve teaching if it is not made available through published research.

In their 2003 ***Community College Journal*** article promoting effective teaching through effective teachers, Roueche, Milliron and Roueche (2003), point out that many faculty in the community colleges come from K-12 or university environments, and understanding their roles as community college educators was a major change. "Some

noted that it was only through years of experience that they finally let go and learned to accept, love and connect with students as they are—not as they might wish them to be" (p.36). This process of learning how to teach within the context of the community college reflects Parker Palmer's assertion that sharing who we are, with ourselves, with our students, and with our stakeholders is a necessity. "If we stopped lobbing pedagogical points at each other and spoke about who we are as teachers, a remarkable thing might happen: identity and integrity might grow within us and among us, instead of hardening as they do when we defend our fixed positions from the foxholes of the pedagogy wars" (1998, p.13).

I argue that this need to understand teaching through teachers is imperative and should be researched frequently as a means to create intentional, thoughtful, *public* community college dialogue. Several researchers in higher education have decried the paucity of literature available on community college teaching, pointing out that while community college faculty claim teaching is the core of what they do, a lack of publication in this area belies this premise (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Sperling, 2003). Although there may be problems with the lack of reward structure or clear role of publication for community college faculty that may be the root of the cause (Cohen & Brawer, 1996), the effect is losing what we learn through attrition and depending on either internal lore (McGrath & Spear, 1991) or external researchers to get the story "right."

The issue of the need to advance community college teaching and scholarship is exacerbated by continual criticism leveled at the overall quality of a community college education, especially in terms of general education outcomes (Eaton, 1994; McGrath &

Spear, 1991; Zwerling, 1976). These concerns may marginalize community college faculty, further eroding their motivation to engage in scholarly publication or envision their changing roles as teachers and leaders in the higher education community. Further, while there is growing support for identifying and commending the work of exemplars (Bain, 2003; Roueche, Milliron & Roueche, 2003), there is still too little institutional recognition. Andrews and Erwin report in their national study that almost half of reporting colleges said they had no merit recognition for faculty, whether it was in terms of remuneration, equipment, travel or honorary plaques (2003).

Perhaps because there are few voices coming from community college faculty, the majority of the scholarship tends to define great teaching as a set of preferred techniques (Gillet-Karam, 1994) rather than describing work of great teachers. This gap in the literature has been identified but has not been sufficiently explored. Although Roueche, Milliron and Roueche (2003) note some improvement in the reward system in community colleges over the years, especially because of the work done by the National Institute for Staff Organization and Development (NISOD), they state: "However, despite such increased attention to recognizing teaching effectiveness, the literature reveals ***no comprehensive investigation*** of exemplary community college teaching since 1990" (2003, p.18). Thus, community colleges may be losing the opportunity to learn more about what exemplars can teach community college stakeholders.

What can we learn about excellent teaching by examining the experiences of excellent teachers and the ways this remarkable group think about their teaching practice? The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the ways six exemplary community college teachers, thought about their teaching. The goal was to learn more about these

community college exemplars through their stories and demystify what happens to them as they prepare, practice, and reflect on their work.

While there are many accounts of why teaching needs improvement and techniques to accomplish it, understanding and teaching students well is difficult, and continues to deserve research attention. Furthermore, higher education stakeholders need to remain concerned about the teachers who provide these experiences. The intent of this dissertation was to suggest that *teacher quality* may be improved by studying *quality teachers*. For example, many students when asked about the significance of a particular course often remember their teacher more than the content. Sometimes, this is due to the presence of a special or exemplary educator who taught with such strength that learning remained with the learner well after the classroom event concluded. This seems especially true of those students who later became teachers themselves. One such faculty member stated, "Although some of my best teachers have retired and some have died, they live on in me. They live in my students also" (Acker, 2003 n.p.). This kind of commitment was explored as a way to find evidence of excellence and nourish not only its conditions, but its participants.

Defining Exemplary

This study used the terms "outstanding," "excellent," and "great" synonymously, as they appear in the literature (Roth, 1997), but I focused on the term exemplary because it denotes a significant model worthy of imitation. Teachers known as exemplars stand

out from other faculty either in the present or in the collective memories of their students and colleagues, similar to the example of Professor Todd Stephens.

Thus, I argue that the teaching Stephens and other exemplars typify can be a useful source of knowledge and/or renewal for *all* teachers. In ***Inspiring Teaching: Carnegie Professors of the Year Speak,*** a book sharing the experiences of both four- and two- year higher education exemplars, editor John Roth, points out that the themes echoed by the narratives of the exemplars used in ***Inspiring Teaching*** provide positive support and a potential template for *all* higher education professionals:

> Taken together, the essays in this book provide a professorial portrait so lofty and idealized that scarcely any real professor could possibly match it. Certainly I do not. Nor do I know of any professor, living or dead, who has done so completely and perfectly. Nevertheless, rather than being disheartened by such conclusions, they lead me to grasp two important insights: First the lofty and idealized portrait has merit; trying to fit it is worthwhile...Even if I cannot incorporate perfectly and completely all of the inspiring teaching practices detailed in this book, my reading also tells me that I can and should go beyond the ones my teaching already contains and emphasizes. I believe that other readers of this book will share the same realization, which can lead to constructive change. (1997, p. 229)

While Roth points to the possibility that exemplary teachers have the ability to effectuate change in their students and colleagues, it might also be very useful to think about these changes even further within the context of our individual community colleges and professional development goals. Although community college teachers in different

disciplines and different regions have an array of diverse challenges, perhaps all can benefit from an emphasis on learning more about successful practice from successful practitioners. What we learn may then inform community college faculty orientation and professional development programs, perhaps leading to the creation of a culture of exemplars and a climate fostering the continued growth of their practice.

Separating Technique From the Teacher

> In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. (Palmer, P., 1998, p.3)

In his book, ***The Courage to Teach,*** renowned educator Parker Palmer asserts that teaching well is difficult; it requires self-knowledge and the ability to reflect meaningfully on one's teaching. Consequently, while it is necessary to acquire a solid set of pedagogical tools for the classroom, his book is based on the premise that "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from identity and integrity of the teacher" (1998, p. 10). This assertion is based on his own reflections in the classroom. "I have taught thousands of students, attended many seminars on teaching and reflected on my own experience. My stockpile of methods is substantial. But when I walk into a new class, it is if I am starting over...The techniques I have mastered do not disappear, but neither do they suffice" (p.10). In the current context of the demand for

improved teaching and its scholarship, Palmer's remarks should be carefully considered. If we cannot improve teaching by identifying and sharing successful techniques, what *would* work?

Although Palmer's books have a spiritual and philosophical emphasis, rather than an overly scholarly one, many would agree that an arsenal of the most current techniques, even in the hands of a confident, experienced teacher, does not ensure success (Brookfield, 1995). Many of us are surprised by our failures, or how one group can respond so differently to the same lesson as another. While Parker Palmer has been recognized as an exemplar, he confesses that each teaching event has the potential to be both blessing and curse for him and his students.

The opportunity to learn more from these mysteries should be open to critical examination and our pedagogical and scholarly efforts. Midwest Lakes' Todd Stephens, and exemplars like him, report the challenge is worthwhile:

> I guess over the years I've had approximately six thousand students over a forty year career. Community college teaching is the experience that allows you to make the difference that is definitive. Over the years, I've had a wide range of students, from older women who don't know if they can do college work, from younger students who don't even know where to begin. I try to set standards to make them step up to a plateau that they never thought they could reach.

Stephens' comment here, echoed by thousands of colleagues, shows an area of teaching rich with scholarly and pedagogical possibilities. How does he teach biology in this context? How does he lift the bar so that expectations remain high? How has

Stephens made sense of this process? Teaching tips and techniques are often reductive. What can we learn through qualitative exploration of what Stephens has experienced logically, intuitively, experimentally and successfully from his experiences with his six thousand plus students? The purpose of this dissertation was to provide exemplary responses to these kinds of questions.

Research Questions

Three primary questions framed this exploration of the exemplary community college faculty member.

1. How do faculty exemplars think about their teaching?
2. What does it mean to be a faculty exemplar in a community college?
3. What factors shaped these exemplars' views of their teaching?

Theoretical Constructs

> Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity'...and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. (Richardson, 2000, p.181)

The intent of my study on community college exemplars was to interrogate, collaborate, identify and analyze the thoughts, reflections and practices of six Midwest community college exemplars. Since little research has been completely focused on the

exemplary teacher at the heart of the complex teaching mission of the community college, this dissertation was intended to provide a beginning to the rich stories comprising life behind the open door.

Given that much of the available literature on great teaching and great teachers reflects themes of passion, enthusiasm, and identity (Bain, 2003; Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, P., 1998; Roueche, Milliron & Roueche, 2003), my primary interest resided in attempting to reveal the lived educational experience that emanates from the exemplar. For example, bell hooks (2000), a writer and educator, strongly believes teachers should confront students to think critically about themselves and question assumptions they are being taught. Hooks uses the example of one of her influential high school teachers, Ms. Annie Mae Moore. Her narrative of Moore's teaching reveals an African-American woman in an African-American school, striving to teach her students to rise above culturally imposed barriers and realize their significance. This teacher, whom hooks calls a "pedagogical guardian," helped hooks claim her identity and prepare her for an oppositional educational and cultural context. I wanted to explore and design a study to shed light on my subjects' stories about teaching and how they made sense of what they thought they had to do to help their students "survive and thrive."

Assumptions

The Problem Statement, the review of the literature, the theoretical approach, and the study's methodological design were based on the following assumptions:

1. Although there are few recent studies of great teachers, especially at the community college level, exemplary teachers are as important to study as great teaching, as the teacher implements the method.
2. Everyone can learn from exemplars and how they understand the learning needs of their students, especially within the current context of the emphasis on improving teaching and student outcomes.
3. Exemplars are inspiring, critical to the success and reputation of the community college and its teaching mission.
4. Exemplars need to be a defined part of the community college story: the traditions, culture, climate, values and norms associated with their colleges and the narratives told by them and about them.
5. Community college scholarship and the scholarship of teaching need to be documented more frequently. These areas often lack in-depth description and analyses, further contributing to the growing concern that community college faculty need to realign the roles with the growing demands placed on today's community colleges.

Significance of the Study

Many changes are taking place in the community college and one of its primary challenges is to reevaluate the role of faculty and align it more precisely with the needs of stakeholders. I believe that much of the work faculty do with students and how they understand such a diverse student body has yet to be captured, a concern echoed in Chapter Two's Literature Review. Community college faculty do not usually begin their

careers at these institutions intentionally (Fugate and Amey, 2000), nor do they always have a sense of success about their effectiveness (Cain, 1999).

Studying exemplars allows those of us in higher education to consider how we support faculty concerns about teaching. For example, by learning more about the paths of exemplars, we may find ways of fulfilling the high expectations we have for our students and instruction. Further, there is interest in improving faculty development programs (Bellanca, 2002; Murray, J., 2001). Programs developed by colleges to orient new faculty, renew seasoned teachers, and introduce new technologies and pedagogies may benefit from learning from those who have the reputation of being the best, perhaps having a reciprocal effect on strengthening the reputation of the community college.

Baker, Roueche, and Gillet-Karam (1990) point out that it is also important to empower exemplars: "We propose that the exemplary teachers of community colleges not only be identified and celebrated, but that their skills become the vehicle by which a cadre of excellent teachers, apprenticed and mentored by the exemplary award-winning instructor, is produced" (p.299). They further suggest that exemplars could take on important roles in in-service work or serve as visiting scholars. However, we currently have very little knowledge of what exemplars think about these proposals.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

> The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution. Quality instruction should be the hallmark of the movement...quality instruction must be consistently rewarded, and effective teachers should be grounded in the scholarship of integrating, applying and presenting knowledge through effective teaching. (*AACJC Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*, qtd. in Baker, Roueche, & Roueche, 1984, p.xxxi)

One might think that since there is a consistent mandate for better teaching in the community college, the literature about two-year teaching would offer consistent models and documentation about great practice. While there is some scholarship in the area of community college pedagogy as noted in chapter one's problem statement, the debate about what makes great teachers, great teaching, and the degree of effect an excellent teacher has on student outcomes (Murray, H. 1997), continues, as well as a contrary and consistent body of literature suggesting that community college teachers lack the time or interest in publishing work about their teaching. This viewpoint is represented in the following review of the literature.

These conflicting ideas about successful teaching may be why the majority of research at this level is dominated by themes of barriers to this goal. Contrasting the effort to identify and elevate the work of the exemplar, is a preponderance of literature

focused on suggestions for improvement. Although the preceding quotation from the *Building Communities* document is indicative of the previous emphasis on instructional effectiveness rather than student learning, the mandate for good teachers and good teaching techniques remains a persistent theme in community college research. I just have one question. Where *is* the teacher?

While there is some research looking at creating teaching excellence by learning *about* what exemplary teachers do (Baker, Roueche & Roueche, 1990; Roueche, Milliron & Roueche, 2003), this literature does not emphasize the teacher. Instead, the content reflects an interest in identifying and analyzing the *effects* of skills, behaviors, and characteristics of excellent teachers. While it is useful to document effective traits, considering them in isolation from actual people may make it difficult for stakeholders to consider actual practice.

The Demand for Effective Teaching Practice

"I think teachers today have got to stand fast on the art of teaching. There is such importance in direct classroom contact, especially at the community college." This comment by Midwest Lakes' Todd Stephens reflects commitment to what community college faculty believe: teaching is what we do. This philosophy, however, has been under fire. Due to changing market conditions, societal needs and policies, the quality of teaching the nation's community college students receive is under scrutiny from private and public sectors alike (Laanan, 2001). Faculty are considered to be the arbiters of the curriculum, and as such, serve as agents of instruction (Cohen and Brawer, 1996). This

responsibility has become more complex. Rather than a conception of teaching as a number of sections and student contact hours, measuring teaching effectiveness is also based on intensifying the relationship between teaching and learning and the teacher and learner (Barr& Tagg, 1999; O'Banion, 1997; Roueche, Milliron and Roueche, 2003).

Gillett-Karam (1994) says the effective teacher is one who is responsible for the learning process and helping students learn how to learn. Drawing on the areas of leadership and psychology, she further identifies six components critical for excellence in community college teaching:

1. Engaging the desire to learn
2. Increasing opportunities for success
3. Eliminating obstacles to learning
4. Empowering through high expectations
5. Offering positive guidance and direction
6. Motivating toward independence. (p.412)

It is difficult to argue that these components are not important for excellent teaching, but how to accomplish these goals is not clear. Outcalt, in his literature review, "Community College Teaching—Towards Collegiality and Community" (2000), says that teaching effectiveness can be accomplished through collaborative learning, learning communities and enhanced faculty participation in the development of curriculum. In Miller's ERIC Review researching the future of community college faculty (1997), he purports that some researchers have suggested stronger pre-service programs along with "grow your own" faculty preparation and recruitment programs.

How one develops the research foundation for such a program is not clear, yet appears again and again in the literature as vital to the success of the faculty member and the college. For example, in "Professional Development for a New Age" (2002), Bellanca suggests that the fast paced changes imposed by educational competition, technology and new policy means that community college employees must update their skills to succeed in t heir organizations: "Designing focused, planned, and effectively delivered professional development programs can provide community colleges with a skilled workforce able to think and deliver learning options in a new way" (2003, p.37).

However, the specifics of what is needed for successful programs are not as clear as the demand for them. Again, without such information, especially in terms of what constitutes excellence as opposed to merely "getting by," community college faculty might be reticent to fully participate. In addition to proposed changes in pedagogical approaches gleaned from research identifying gaps in teaching practices, studies have been done to measure effective teaching in the college classroom. Murray (1997) points out that more quantitative work has taken place in K-12. In his literature review, Murray suggests that more research needs to be done in higher education to identify teaching behaviors that truly make a difference: "...it can be argued that classroom behaviors represent the leading edge of teaching, the point of direct contact between teacher and student, and thus is more likely to have an impact on student development than other types of teacher characteristics. Good planning and good intentions on the part of the teacher will go for naught unless these plans and intentions are translated into effective classroom behaviors" (1997, p.172). Murray also points out that we need to know more

about the thought behind teaching and understanding, along with the development of theories delineating the teaching behaviors that affect students in particular ways.

It may be surprising, but whether teachers really do make a difference in student outcomes is still debated despite anecdotal commentary from students that clearly shows that how a teacher's ability to transmit love for the subject, for instance, can make a big difference (Acker, 2003). To support some of the ambiguity about teaching effects, Murray cites studies reporting that teachers have little impact at the K-12 level or say that since teaching is common or frequent (like repetitive household tasks), differences in level of teaching do not exist. Murray's own study (1997) using randomly assigned students and their performance level on final exams, does show that more expressive teachers may have an edge.

Feldman (1997), in his article "Identifying Exemplary Teachers and Teaching: Evidence From Student Ratings," looks at the concern expressed by many college faculty members who believe that student evaluations are not reliable measures of effectiveness. His study, contrasting student grade and teacher evaluations in sections chosen either randomly or intentionally, showed some differences. However, those differences were varied, suggesting that there is no one way to teach best. Feldman notes, "Given the diverse ways noted in the dossiers of capturing the scholarship of teaching, gathering teaching evaluations may or may not be one best way to identify excellence in teaching. But it is an important way..." (p. 385).

While these findings give us some sense of how important a teacher's level of enthusiasm or pedagogical strategy might be in terms of student impact, they are nebulous. It is difficult to construct a clear, complete picture of great teaching beyond

some general techniques that appear somewhat obvious. In his chapter "Shortcomings of Research on Evaluating and Improving Teaching in Higher Education," Menges (2000) points out that this concern exists at both the four- and two- year college level. While we know quite a bit about what faculty do as teachers in terms of time, goals for students, and pedagogical methods, we do not know much about why faculty teach a particular way and what theories guide their teaching and learning processes. Part of Menges' concern also lies, as do others, with what teachers are not and should be doing, but he espouses the belief that what is called for is a deeper understanding of practitioners and their practices, perhaps using Shöen's (1995) "theory in action" model. Especially important to the emphasis of my study is that Menges identifies a gap in qualitative studies—a lack of data about participants and information about the contexts in which teaching and learning occur.

At the two year level, Miller, Finley, Vancko, Bergin and Garvey (2000) cite a 1996 study by Hammons and Barnslay showing there is a paucity of solid research on characteristics of effective community college teaching. They suggest that because of the demand for greater accountability, more attention be given to development and evaluation programs for faculty improvement. This is certainly not startling information, but again is not very conclusive in providing a vision of how these effectiveness issues will be handled or how the programs will work. This notion continues to confirm my belief that stakeholders appear to know what they want, but cannot fully demonstrate the details of how to achieve great teaching. Thus, faculty may lack adequate research to connect their own work to that of the exemplar, the subject of this dissertation.

Two studies, one at the four-year level conducted by Ken Bain (2003), and one by Roueche, Milliron and Roueche (2003), look more specifically at exemplary faculty and their effect on students. A third study, a doctoral dissertation by Arlana Bedard (2003) identifying and analyzing exemplars at several California community colleges, does a better job of linking great teaching to strong student outcomes. These studies are very recent and reflective of the emerging literature that may close the gap between teacher and method. This research will be discussed near the end of this chapter to illustrate how a focus on the exemplary teacher is vital to learning about great teaching, and what I think my qualitative work with Midwest community college exemplars may contribute to the field.

The Demand to Link Improved Teaching and Mission

Another barrier to an emphasis on exemplary culture has to do with a preponderance of literature devoted to how difficult it is for faculty to handle changing conditions and the diverse needs of the communities two-year colleges serve. Garland (1994) notes some of these. Using several different community colleges in various regions in the county as examples, he shows how one college wants to serve a large number of students at multiple locations and offer a wide array of programs, while another small college's mission statement is more similar to that of a four-year liberal arts college in that it seeks to provide students with personalized thoughtful education based on Judeo-Christian tradition. Other colleges offer a business program and orientation, so

there is a wide range of possibilities in terms of aligning strong teaching with a college's specific mission.

This range of possibilities may impact stakeholders' views of what comprises a quality education. Given the movement to performance-based funding in many cases (Laanan, 2001), lack of documentation regarding the clarity of mission and appropriate student outcomes may impact faculty even more in terms of the accountability factor and teacher quality. The college's mission to be all things to all people means that the faculty member is expected to teach all things to all people, so delivering quantity and quality may be difficult, if not disheartening. Again, there is a paucity of literature widely available to faculty providing models of how to adapt their teaching to the unique needs of their institution.

Hudgins and Williams (1997), assert that becoming more accountable in terms of linking educational outcomes to mission and evaluating effectiveness is simply the right thing to do: "Since higher education is about teaching and learning, about preparing for life, and about influencing values, we should expect to be held accountable" (1997, p.54). What is not discussed is how individual faculty members are responding to this broad-based charge. What are their successes and failures in preparing community college students to do well in the classroom and in life?

The Demand to Realign Faculty Role and Increase Professionalization

> Teachers are expected to be knowledge experts, assessors, evaluators, managers, data controllers, artists, group facilitators, counselors,

> information processors, lecturers, problem analysts, problem solvers, coaches, mentors, behavior controllers, and value clarifiers. Their formal education is ill-designed to prepare them for these multiple roles; waiters and airline stewards receive more on-the-job training. (O'Banion, 1997)

While O'Banion's list is extreme, it does provide a sense of the expanding role of the community college faculty member, and how the growing mission of the community college has impacted it. "Community college students have a wide range of abilities, interests, and goals, and, consequently, community college faculty spend the majority of their time teaching and working with students...there is an inherent tension for faculty between access and maintaining standards for success. As the demands for outcomes increase, faculty may want to view their teaching role in terms of student learning rather than student contact (Rifkin, n.d). However, Rifkin's focus is centered on general tensions within the profession. While this may be helpful, again, there is little available on what successes or failures have transpired for *individual teachers* in this paradigmatic shift.

For example, Terry O'Banion's work (1994; 1999) with the Learning Organizations documents the efforts of individual colleges and their programs, but does not focus on the work of specific teachers and what they did to participate successfully in the efforts of their organization and how these initiatives were carried out in specific classrooms. Those faculty reading about learning organizations may not see the potential opportunities to improve instruction personally if they fail to relate to the organizations portrayed in O'Banion's books. And who is the community college faculty member if not a bumbling, stagnant, stubborn failure producing students who fail to achieve at the ever-

changing spectrum of personal and professional expectations? Perhaps I have overblown the stereotype; nevertheless, I believe this is a perception held by some stakeholders even if it is not explicitly stated in the literature.

A faculty member must be adept in shaping his or her role and overall job performance to the needs of the college and its learners. Todd Stephens, for example, teaches his sections, attends faculty development seminars on use of technology, and takes students and colleagues on field expeditions during weekends, mentors lab assistants and science colleagues in addition to continually revising curriculum and meeting with students. His interest in connecting with students is obvious:

> ...And then in the classroom it's about caring for our audience. We're thespians and we entertain, but another part of it is enthusiastic transmission of the material you're working on. And it's caring that the students really get it. I want my students to care as much as I do about biology. Some of them do get there and some of them become biologists in one way or another, from doctors to dentists to foresters to med techs—all of it...well, pragmatically, to deliver this enthusiasm in biology in particular, it takes great organizational skills.

Again, little is mentioned about what teachers are doing in the classroom and how they figure it out. Overall, given the demands, community college faculty have to negotiate a path through a dazzling array of interests.

Stephens' perception of his work is not really reflected in current literature on role. Much of the work in this area shows faculty in a dimmer light. In McGrath and Spear's (1991) *The Academic Crisis of the Community College*, the authors report that the

new professorate is as weak and disordered as the institutions themselves. They blame these circumstances on role ambiguity; two-year faculty are more like high school teachers, rather than a profession like their four-year counterparts, even though they are trained the same way. McGrath and Spear see "...a progressive academic drift—away from rigor toward regurgitated anemic practices" (1991 p.142). Community college faculty are often depicted at the bottom of the professional hierarchy (Townsend and LaPaglia, 2000). This concern, and others like it, portray a position on the lower rung of higher education and a teacher struggling with an almost unattainable goal. It is as if the community college's purpose was an illusion and the teacher a marginalized, ineffective spectator to a ceaseless replication of ineffective learning and student outcomes—a "cooling out" mirroring much of the criticism leveled at community college students. Cohen and Brawer (1996) express much of the same discouragement, noting that in an environment of expensive instruction and multiple sections, a revised professional role for faculty is not possible. However, there is little dismay in the voice of Todd Stephens, which may provide a sense of balance to these concerns.

Many researchers have pointed out that one reason the community college faculty member's role may be ambiguous is that even the career path is nebulous. Fugate and Amey (2000), in their study of the career paths of faculty point out that while teaching is claimed to be a strength at these institutions, few studies look at developing faculty models *or* the construction of role. If faculty are not being socialized with values and a climate focused sharply on exemplary practice with exemplary practitioners as mentors, how is improved instruction going to take place? In addition, as these researchers point out, any role re-conceptualization tended to occur between year one and year two for the

faculty member during the tenure process. Further, Fugate and Amey are concerned about creating a stronger professional identity and culture:

> ...not only does the recruitment process need to be educative in helping persons think through careers as faculty, but it needs to orient them toward the community college environment itself. Appropriately trained, committed professionals are critically important in the postsecondary sector whose mission is, in part, to support those students who have been neglected and marginalized by the traditional collegiate system. These students might be better serviced in the end by the best and brightest of the future professorate being intentionally channeled into the community college rather than having their academic prospects hang on the hopes that some faculty find their way into this sector. (2000, p. 9)

Given the average career span of a faculty member, there is clearly room for growth, if this is the actual goal for strengthening the profession. Cohen and Brawer (1996) also advocate for a professionalized community college faculty, believing that changes would enhance the colleges' reputation for teaching, especially because faculty are often more identified with secondary teachers than as members of their own teaching profession. "Teaching has always been a hallmark of community college; a corps of professionalized instructors can do nothing but enhance it" (1996, p.97). These changes, according the authors, could be accomplished by structuring the faculty around the discipline of instruction, strengthening its disciplinary affiliations, potential for scholarship and enhancement of curriculum and professional development. However,

there are few accounts of how individual faculty have adapted to this proposal and the degree of improvement these changes made to excellent teaching practice.

Cain's (1999) discussion of faculty reflects some narratives of frustrated, struggling teachers and a degree of cynicism regarding their role:

> To use the Wal-Mart analogy, the teaching faculty places the order for the merchandise, stocks the shelves, meets the customers and determines the strategy for this particular sale and guides the customer to the best purchase to meet their needs...since success in the community college is an elusive concept, the job of the faculty member, especially in a shifting educational paradigm, is almost impossible. (p.47)

Although Cain's discussion is not entirely a negative portrait of open door misery, he does say that the kind of immense change expected of community college faculty is difficult because they are being asked to become something other than what they have been in terms of their teaching identity. He also states that the faculty participating in his research claim that change was imposed upon them. Again, I think that my study of exemplars might expand our view to those community college faculty who have a reputation for teaching with passion and empowerment. This research might serve as a useful balance for understanding how they think about their work.

The Demand for Increased Scholarship

While the movement to enhance and redefine what constitutes scholarship and the advancement of the scholarship of teaching is encouraged and explored at the four year

level, community colleges have been on the boundaries. In "Making the Way for the New American Scholar" (1996), Rice points out that four- year colleges and universities and struggling to meet the needs of growing numbers and kinds of learners, changing the role of the scholar within the academy. Pointing to different times and different needs, Rice posits that faculty reward structures have not changed significantly, so faculty are caught between the old and "adding on" (p.10) of new aspects of role and workload. The challenge summarized by Boyer (1990) and Rice (1996) was to ensure that faculty were participating in creation and advancement of knowledge, in some ways emulating the lifelong learning theme directed at students.

Although two-year faculty have the "advantage" of a pay structure that "rewards" teaching, they are also challenged to broaden their view of scholarship and publish their work on teaching. Similarly to their four-year counterparts, there is a mixed message in the literature whether two-year faculty participate fully in this revised model and how to encourage scholarship and build excellence into a teaching culture. Ford's 1999 ERIC Review, "Scholarship in the Community College System," posits that scholarship and teaching are vital to the future of the community college despite the barriers. Among those barriers listed in her article were a lack of time and a lack of reward from the community college. Another problem is that the two- year college also needs to redefine what is meant by scholarship, perhaps including the notion of action research.

One negative view of two-year faculty scholarship is provided by Sperling (2003), who asserts community college faculty lack professional experience in teaching and scholarship:

> Unlike elementary or secondary school teaching colleagues, more often educated through schools of education, few community colleges instructors are grounded in learning theory...There is very little theoretical scaffolding or framework on which to build or refine teaching practice...community college faculty most often 'back into' these sorts of understandings. They discover them in a hit or miss fashion through practice and observation. And teaching wisdom, in community colleges is often passed along, like folklore, from one faculty member to another. (2003, p.596)

Although Sperling's analysis of faculty shortcomings in scholarship takes some potshots at the expertise of community college faculty, she believes that faculty can and will rise to the occasion. Praeger (2003) takes an even stronger position in "Scholarship Matters." This writer contends that community college faculty remain on the fringes of postsecondary education because of the emphasis on teaching and the lack of publication. Praeger believes that publication externally validates ideas, and in order for community colleges to be taken seriously, especially in regard to teaching, faculty must add, legitimately, via refereed journals and other publications, to higher education discourse. Eaton's (1994) earlier work shows this same sentiment, asserting that scholarship is vital to the future of the community college and should not be optional.

James Palmer (1994) found a similar lack of traditional publication. However, he blamed weak publication on weak institutional support. Citing another study he conducted in 1992, Palmer said that 72 % of faculty respondents thought out-of-class scholarly work would enhance their teaching, but resented what they perceived as a lack

of support from their college. Palmer quotes a faculty member's complaint that extends to the lack of support from colleagues: " 'Active hostility [toward publication] is found not only with the administration but also among faculty members who seem to associate research and publication with all that is evil in the university system. I would not like to be forced to publish, but I am very angry at the lack of toleration for those who do'" (1994, p. 431).

James Palmer points out two hypotheses for the barrier to research and publication. One is that some research shows the lack of interest in publishing accumulating from the community college socialization process. Faculty may compromise their initial interests in high standards and scholarship due to challenges presented by struggling students and faculty indifference. Another possibility Palmer sees in the literature is that community college faculty members perceive their teaching and orientation to students as fulfillment of their role. Fugate and Amey (2000) suggest that while faculty see the value in conducting research, this work is an accessory to the vital aspect of their role—teaching. Although he believes that more research needs to be conducted in this area, Palmer agrees with the contingent that find faculty professionalization and role weak.

However, "Casting New Light on Old Notions: A Changing Understanding of Community College Faculty," (n.a. 1998) was an article in *Change* intended to dispel stereotypes of two-year faculty using research from a national Carnegie Foundation study comparing responses of teachers at four-year and two-year colleges. The study showed more comparisons between these higher education faculty than are usually acknowledged in the literature. One stereotype explored in this article is scholarship. While only 6% of

two-year faculty reported a primary interest in research, reflecting the 5% reporting that their college expects such engagement, 38% report they are active in publishing or preparing professional presentations. Further, this research in the *Change* article shows that community college teachers only spent 2.3 hours less than their four year colleagues on these activities.

The article advocates that community college faculty are well-suited to advancing the scholarship of teaching and adding to the teaching and learning conversation: "community colleges, the nation's premiere teaching institutions—could serve pivotal roles in identifying and developing best practices that would have a great deal to teach the nation's postsecondary teachers" ("Casting New Light, 1998).

The Hidden Treasure—The Community College Exemplar

"I try to set the standards to make my students step up to a plateau they never thought they could reach. That is the whole teaching experience for me." Midwest Lakes' Todd Stephens believes he can teach well and also believes his students are capable of much more than what is often expected of them:

> We have some people in the community college movement that I call enablers that are so sensitive and empathetic to the student point of view that they *step down*, I think, to where the student is, to make them comfortable, but they don't get the student moved to a higher level that they have to be. My approach has always been at the opposite end of the pendulum than that. It's the sense I convey to them that I have standards. I

mean I don't say it directly like that, but my whole hidden agenda, which is not hidden very long, is to get them to step up.

Stephens has a clear idea about how to raise the bar and creates a powerful learning environment to achieve this goal. As colleagues we get an important sense of value here, one that honors the student and the teacher. However, being student-centered at the two-year level doesn't always mean we cannot have high expectations; rather, some of us may have become so sensitized to the largely underserved population of community college students that we may diminish their success by lightening course content or by denying failures of students and faculty alike. Perhaps this could account for some of the burnout expressed in the literature. Again, how exemplars in this setting address the lack of preparation of many students, the proverbial elephant in the living room, could be helpful in advancing thoughtful dialogue. Another noticeable point Stephens communicates in this section and elsewhere in this proposal is that exemplary teaching has little to do with the latest teaching style and more to do with the teacher. This is not to say that good teachers should not adapt to technology or implement new pedagogies, but Stephens' comments consistently point to the notion that teaching excellence and a culture of excellence lie in spirit and commitment to the vocation.

Baker, Roueche and Roueche (1990) think that putting exemplars in the community college front and center can provide leadership and change:

> We believe that exemplary practices and behaviors of teachers as leaders in the classroom constantly give definition to and challenge the dynamics of the classroom and teaching...they exhibit characteristics that tie their students to them by mutual aspirations and student goals. More

> importantly, students find they can transcend their immediate problems and needs, because they bring commitment to their exceptional teacher...they become more productive and increase their ability to apply what they learn in their lives. (pp.94-95)

Not only do the preceding comments reflect those of Stephens, they show the importance of the exemplar as a participant, if not a leader, in the on-going community college story.

Little has been written of the exemplar and the creation of an exemplary culture. Ken Bain's (2003) recent study, *What Best College Teachers Do*, focuses on the four-year exemplary teacher espousing these teachers had a strong emphasis on student learning. It is interesting, however, to note that the characteristics Bain identifies in his pool of exemplars has little to do with technique and more to do with the teacher. This book discusses real teachers, for example, Jeanette Norden, a master teacher of medical students. Bain's portrayal of Norden shows a teacher who finds it important to get students to confront themselves as human beings. Bain's list of exemplary teaching characteristics included getting students' attention, seeking commitment, helping students outside of class, helping students engage in disciplinary thinking, creating diverse learning experiences, and asking the right questions, amongst others. Bain also affirms that no one method works for teaching and that good teaching also encompasses failure, something we do not talk about very often.

Roueche, Milliron and Roueche's (2003) *Practical Magic: On the Front Lines of Teaching Excellence*, is one of the few community college research projects that concentrates on the ways the stories of exemplars can contribute to our knowledge. By

focusing on exemplars, all faculty receive a practical guide to help them adapt to the sea of change facing our institutions. Using the National Institute for Staff and Occupational Development (NISOD) winners as their pool, their book contains both quantitative information based on surveys and focus groups, along with qualitative information gleaned from interviews. Again, as noted in Chapter One's Problem Statement, these researchers pointed out that no comprehensive investigation of community college exemplars has been conducted since 1990.

In the article, "The Power of Magic," (2003) based on their book's findings, Roueche, Milliron and Roueche noted that their study's subjects reported that respect for students, being tough in the classroom, continual assessment, active involvement, and listening to students were key factors for successful teaching. They also pointed out that more needed to be done to reward great teachers. A national study by Andrews and Erin (2003) supports this finding. They report that fifty-five percent of the administrators responding to their survey said they had faculty recognition programs in place, and these researchers, based on motivational theories applied to faculty performance, asserted that more work needs to be done to reward both full- and part-time faculty for excellence.

Finally, the work in Bedard's (2002) dissertation *Community College Teaching: Institutional Support for High Student Outcomes* is noteworthy to this review because it links teaching excellence to student outcomes. Bedard asks three important questions. What do faculty do that leads to strong student outcomes? How could community colleges successfully support faculty who achieve high outcomes? How can what we learn be incorporated into an effective teacher development program? Specifically, though, Bedard, a California community college faculty member, is interested in

improving student success in math and English, two courses with historically low student completion rates. Bedard and her colleagues looked at developmental math and English faculty at two community colleges. Bedard's purpose was to use the findings to improve faculty development.

Pointing out issues with diverse needs of developmental students, problems with multiple, conflicting missions, and a history of weak student outcomes in California, Bedard states: "Teachers are often the only link between students and their community college. Student contact with other college personnel is minimal...Despite the importance of teaching, evidence suggests that it is not sufficiently supported at any level" (2002, p.25). To be fair, Bedard acknowledges that teaching and learning are affected by many variables such as state support, the personal background of the student and level of family support, the strength of the college's curriculum, and institutional support. She does advocate, however, that the quality of classroom rapport needs to be the main concern. Since access is often more valued than measuring student success, Bedard thinks institutions need to clarify their goals.

Another finding of interest to this dissertation is that while Bedard focuses on math and English developmental faculty, which are not the subjects of my study, she found that the teachers who produced the high outcomes were not always the ones she and her colleagues expected—the teachers who used the most engaging or cutting edge teaching techniques. This might mean that Parker Palmer's (1998) belief that the identity of the teacher is more important than technique and his assertion that great teachers use a variety of techniques, may support the notion there is truly no one best way to teach. If this makes sense, then we might get closer to learning about great teaching by learning

about the world of the exemplar from a rich, detailed, qualitative approach. This assumption and my approach to the dissertation are discussed in Chapter Three, Methodology.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was the exemplar and his or her community college "world." The following research questions served as the frame for my dissertation:

1. How do faculty exemplars think about their teaching?
2. What does it mean to be a faculty exemplar in a community college?
3. What factors shaped these exemplars' views of their teaching?

These research questions are connected to some of the premises discussed in Janesick's (2000) "The Choreography of Research Design." Janesick suggests that since "No one can dance your dance, so to speak" (2000, p. 390), considering what one wants to say and constructing a holistic approach is vital. Qualitative design requires the construction of an authentic and compelling narrative of what occurred in the study and the various stories of the participants (Barbour & Barbour, 2003; Cole, 2001).

Research Design

As noted in Chapter One's theoretical construct section, my intent was to work collaboratively with six exemplary community college teachers. The qualitative, collaborative interview approach suggested by several researchers (Cole, 2001; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Woods, 1985) guided my methodological process and data gathering, especially in terms of the need to be aware of balancing the researcher's role and need for

rich descriptive data with an awareness of the subjects' potential concerns for confidentiality, and possible vulnerabilities (Glesne, 1999). We need to know more about how community college exemplars frame the context of how and where they work, not to mention how they think and feel about themselves and their practices. For example, Todd Stephens is unlikely to have the same way of sharing his perceptions and experiences with his students as another exemplar. New meanings may arise from a collaborative approach during the data gathering and its analysis. Therefore, as a member check, each subject had the opportunity to review his or her section throughout the interview process and make revision suggestions. In order to begin to learn about how the selected community college exemplars think about their work, define what the term exemplary means to them, and discuss the conditions that have led to their high performance, I relied on their input during the process of our work together, especially during the interviews.

Rationale

Although this interplay reveals that it would be difficult to identify a truth "out there," and is subject to validity concerns regarding qualitative research, Woods (1984), among others, defends the possible findings gathered from this kind of research strategy. He encourages the dialectic between theory and data collection; its objective resides with the writer and its quality depends on how good the researchers are. Certainly, it is *crucially* important to pay close attention to how the research is conducted and analyzed, and to do so with care, but individual exemplars most likely both amplify and defy pre-

classified constructions of great teaching and teachers. Thus, findings will not be generalizable. This concern is also noted in the study's limitations section.

Patton (1990) notes that while any study design requires the researcher to consider tradeoffs in terms of external and internal validity issues, qualitative methodology favors depth over breadth. Further, Patton points to the importance of considering purpose in connection to making these choices. My interest in this study was to focus on the teacher more than on pedagogical method. Consequently, the exemplar's assistance with the interview and its analysis serve as the primary goal of gathering and working with the data.

Identification of Exemplars

I used a small number of subjects, a characteristic of most qualitative studies. As noted in the Human Research Ethics Handbook, in order to obtain depth from the data, the number used for the study was not only smaller than most quantitative studies, but was intended to uncover as much as possible in terms of potential responses to the research questions (NHRMC, 2001). In order to accomplish this goal and ensure that I captured a well-investigated portrait of the exemplar and his or her stories and experiences within a reasonable scope, I chose to use fewer than a third of the generally accepted size of n=30, an accepted level of probability suggested by some statisticians (DePaulo, 2000). In this case, six exemplars from up to six colleges reflected a range of exemplar perspectives in a community college context. Since the basis of this study was explorative in nature, validity is not a reasonable test of its merit.

Selection

More than six needed to be invited to participate, so I used a reputational sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) to gather information and contact potential exemplar candidates. I wanted to gather a pool of 12-18 potential candidates from up to six accessible mid-west community colleges, so that the emphasis would be on securing subjects I could get to with relative ease. My intentions were to get quality in-depth data through the multiple interview process described in the section on data collection. Presidents and Academic Deans or Provosts were formally asked in electronic letters to recommend two or three of their *best* teachers based on the criteria *they* chose. Lists I received from each leader resulted in the pool of 28. Although these leaders are not always the most cognizant of how well community college instructors teach in the classroom (Grubb, 1999), they do bear the immediate responsibility for the teaching and learning reputation of their colleges. Therefore, I found it reasonable to ask them to identify their best. Due to costs, another consideration also noted by both Patton (1990), and Creswell (2002), and time constraints, I had the aforementioned practical limitations in terms of identifying potential exemplars from those community colleges within reasonable driving distance. I did not think that regional limitation, given my stated purposes, would significantly affect my findings, as the conditions that impact exemplars (institutional budgets, underserved students, work load and role issues, for example) are fairly similar (Palmer, J. 2002; Roueche, Milliron and Roueche, 2003).

Beyond the need to collect a reasonable pool of exemplars through the purposive sampling technique, there were obvious concerns with selection criteria. Once again,

Patton's (1990) discussion regarding small sample sizes and the nature of qualitative inquiry was helpful to my thinking. The logic of extreme or deviant case sampling (pp.169-170) is that by using extreme or special cases, such as my interest in the exemplar, the researcher could discern conditions that produce positive or negative results and shed light on useful boundaries for supporting programs and people.

I began by identifying all community colleges in Michigan within a one-way radius of eighty miles. Using email, I contacted Presidents and Vice Presidents or appropriate Deans depending on the organizational structure given on each campus website. From this initial inquiry, I received responses from five instead of the desired six, but received a sixth contact with a leader by extending the geographical limit to one hundred miles. The six campus leaders nominated exemplars somewhat differently even though all received the same request. In four out of six cases, I received a list from both the President and the Vice President or Dean. Those lists contained four to eight best teachers"; in all cases the lists contained different names. In the other two cases, the Vice President made it clear that the task had been delegated by the President to him or her and I received a short list of nominees from each.

The pool that resulted from consulting leaders was intended to be inclusive, as I reasonably assumed that all community colleges have exemplars (however many or few) on their campuses. Therefore, gender, ethnicity, years of experience, and instructional disciplines were not used to select or screen potential subjects. Full-time status and nomination as exemplars using the definition of the nominator were the only criteria. Close colleagues of the researcher were excluded from the sample, as were subjects who were not nominated by campus leaders. The 28 subjects identified by the nominators

were then contacted independently to see if they wanted to participate in the study. Of those, the first six who formally accepted the invitation were selected. This part of the process yielded a study comprised six faculty from five community colleges.

Data Collection

Interviews of the exemplar participants were conducted in September, October, and the first part of November, 2006. After obtaining their written consent, I audio tape recorded two separate interviews with each participant. The protocol included using the frames of guided conversation and the open-ended interview techniques outlined by Cole and Knowles (2001) and Glesne (1999). Subjects were provided with the semi-structured questions ahead of time. They were also contacted by telephone and email communication to support work with transcripts and analysis (Ryan and Russell, 2000). The participants were encouraged to take a collaborative approach and make suggestions during the process. All interviews were held on the campus of the exemplar.

Framework Guiding the Interview Rationale

Citing the work of Clandinen and Connelly, Creswell (2003) points out that narrative research has a twofold result. Stories about the lives of the participants are retold by the researcher. The effect is collaborative. Hiller and Diluzo (2004), who conducted a study on internal migration in Canada, take the collaborative aspect further, suggesting that a constructivist intention makes the interview a 'special performance' that

connects the interviewer and the subject, creating an interpretive relationship with the study that results in new meanings. Although I was the interviewer and generated the primary focus and the energy needed for the research, I hoped the selected participants were committed to some sense of mutuality. Together, I thought we could add a layer of understanding to the "community college story." Given that many community college faculty produce work that is often either undocumented or under-researched, attempting collaborative efforts to understand community college teaching may give stakeholders a stronger sense of the voices and issues, simply because more are involved, or because collaboration often leads to innovation. Over time, we may develop better ways to disseminate what we do.

Further, as a community college professional, I was interested in many of the relationships connected to the expanding field of life history, a research area devoted to the exploration of the life story of a subject within a larger setting and community. Although, as Cole and Knowles (2001) note in *Lives in Contexts*, researchers in this area do not always agree on all the definitions, life history researchers are interested in the connection of the researcher to his or her topic, participants, textual representations, the context of the participants and the responses of the readers. Cole and Knowles point out that while one can never say that to know one subject well is to understand the larger group in which he belongs, focusing on an in-depth presentation of a subject helps us understand the complexities involved.

Although life history methods vary, life history researchers must carefully explore potential barriers of fear, confidentiality and trust (Cole and Knowles, 2001). Cole and Knowles assert that as the story is told and reshaped, the subject should have access to

transcripts because the story belongs to him or her. I think, in the case of this dissertation thoughtful consideration and discussion of the interview goals was crucial since the researched exemplars have a reputation for excellence and were in a clear position to generate provide additional insight into the research process. I discuss my use of Cole and Knowles further in this section.

Another reason I was attracted to this kind of research is that the collaborative, dialogic nature of the interview may also lend itself to addressing the gap I identified in community college literature. There is very little available detailing the in-depth, everyday lived experience of the community college faculty member, exemplar or otherwise. We are just beginning to tell their stories and how they connect to the culture, climate and organization of the community college. As Todd Stephens points out at the beginning of my study, he believes that the kind of teaching done in the community college is unique. Since exemplars stand out in terms of their ability to connect with students and their colleges, we need to listen to the stories they tell about how they came to be the kind of teachers they are. With all of the demands for teaching improvement, we may be overlooking what we may learn from our successes. And these successes may be articulated through the voices of my subjects and their stories captured in the presentation of the research data.

Since the aim of my research was to learn about exemplary teaching by focusing on the teacher rather than the method, I relied on four scholars whose work has been helpful to the process and analysis of the data. Cole and Knowles's (2001) discussion of the aims and rationale of life history writing in the book they edited, *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research* was used as the basis of how to approach the

collaborative intent of the project while gathering data from the life of the subject according to his or her context. Stephen Brookfield's (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, a book intended for teachers of adults across post-secondary settings, provided a sense of the frames from which teachers could think closely about their work in a reflexive way through autobiography, students, colleagues, and use of professional literature. In each of these frames, Brookfield urges teachers to challenges themselves in terms of questioning the assumptions they have about who they are, who they teach, and their choice of pedagogical tools. However, the themes derived from the data and used as analysis tools in my study came from the participants' responses and are briefly outlined at the end of this chapter following the discussion of the scholars mentioned here. Finally Corrine Glesne's (1999) section on interviewing in *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* served as the foundation for developing the questions and how to "make the words fly" (Glesne, 1999).

In their chapter "Doing Life History Research," Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest that in order to get close to the life of the researched, the traditional hierarchy of power residing with the interviewer may not be useful, and in order to elicit rich, personal data, establishing a trusting equal relationship between researcher and participant is the goal. Although other scholars may suggest that the data gathered from this partnership may raise validity issues, Cole and Knowles believe that equality between the two leads to appropriate results for life story telling. When subjects know what the research agenda is and are invited to participate, they can be helpful in terms of what they might contribute. They suggest gathering data through what they call the guided conversation. Although the difference between a guided conversation and an interview session does not seem to

be much, the idea behind it is to develop questions that frame a series of conversations (2001). These questions need to arise out of mutuality, a negotiated relationship that openly addresses issues of trust, privacy and the goals of the partnership in relationship to the research. I found that considering this strategy was useful in terms of obtaining responses from the participants that reflected the kind of depth interviewers hope to achieve. Faculty seemed comfortable with the conversation and appeared to "open up," easily.

Brookfield's (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* assumes that teachers who think deeply about their teaching do so not only because they want to change the world by challenging the assumptions of others and of themselves, but because this process is a critical journey and paradigms should be continually tested as situations change. He suggests that when teachers examine their own experiences as learners they are reflecting on intense emotions that underlie many of their pedagogical methods. His chapter on critical conversations (1995, pp.140-159) provides suggestions for engaging in meaningful dialogue with colleagues. A potential strength of this kind of work is that, "Peer conversation suggests new possibilities for our practice and new ways to analyze and respond to problems. Colleagues can open up unfamiliar avenues for inquiry, and they can give us advice on how they deal with the problems we're facing" (1995, pp. 142-143). Although Brookfield notes that these conversations are not always fruitful and can inadvertently emphasize the very problems of fairness and openness we wish to eradicate, awareness of listening authentically to the teacher's story and working collectively to achieve insight as a means to improve practice can create continued helpful dialogue about good teaching. Another reason I found this strategy useful is that it

augments Cole and Knowles's (2001) suggestions for the guided conversation and is focused on emerging meaning via the teacher and his or her telling of teaching experiences in the context of life experience.

Glesne's "Making Words Fly: Developing Understanding Through Interviewing" (1999, pp.67-94), helped clarify how interview questions are shaped to fit what the researcher wants to know, but inevitably must be retooled and retested as each interview and each interaction with subjects teaches the researcher about how best to elicit information. Her advice on how to create open-ended questions using past and present concerns of the subject was useful in terms of asking my subjects to comment on their perceptions of teaching in the community college setting.

Managing and Recording the Data

All interview audiotapes and transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet and the list of the actual names of those interviewed and pseudonyms were separate from the tapes to protect confidentiality. Three complete sets of transcripts were made for each subject; an original transcription without notes was preserved for accuracy. Microsoft Word was used to maintain the rest of the data. No other software programs were used.

Field notes, drafts of narratives, coding schema and journal notes were kept in notebooks with the notated set of transcripts for each exemplar.

Analysis

The process of collaboration and reflection has a potential niche in terms of its connection to the community college context, the realities involved with day-to-day community college teachers and their concerns about what it means to be the best, delivering what others consider best in the two-year organization. In the words of one community college colleague teaching at a large urban campus, with whom I have shared my ideas for the project: "We struggle from the time we begin with doing this kind of work and basically have to teach ourselves how to do it. It's a mysterious process and if I can help demystify it, I would be happy to help you try."

While considerable debate continues, qualitative inquiry has extended its boundaries to include research paradigms that in some ways blur knowledge distinctions affecting the ways research is conducted, analyzed and represented (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In the context of this exploration of six different people with very different lives, it was helpful to keep in mind that other researchers (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson,1994) were grappling with how to consider relationships between researcher and subject, and embrace its postmodern tensions. For this study, I viewed the interview process of data collection and analysis as an opportunity to think about teaching outside of my own intellectual, emotional, and pedagogical box.

However, in some ways, I was opening Pandora's Box, filled with accounts of my subjects' personal truths inviting many possible interpretations. Glesne's (1999) description of the artist's role (p.156) in qualitative research demonstrated that there was a way to make meaning by seeking to connect the narrative sequences in the interview

segments and synthesize them into the stories that are described and presented in Chapter IV, the data presentation. Another concern was addressed by Tierney (2000), who says writers are not human tape recorders, and other people and issues of memory and time affect results. In terms of the analysis to follow, the work of Ellis and Bochner (2000) could be applied to thinking about the significance of narratives, while still emphasizing the importance of verisimilitude.

There are other considerations in relation to "truth" for researchers interested in the role of subjective knowing. In addition to suggesting that the personal narrative has a place in connecting the human matters of choice, agency, and emotions to their social science counterparts, Ellis (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) says those of us researching and writing about narratives should be less concerned with whether a narrative is an accurate reflection of the past and more engaged with understanding the function and the consequences of their narratives. Although the bulk of my attention as a researcher concerned trying to learn as much about the experiences of my subjects through the stories they shared, the events and people I described are filtered through the lens of my own life and work as a community college colleague.

While this element does not represent Ellis and Bochner's idea of autoethnography, the researcher's understanding of her own life experience as a story, the narratives written from transcripts of the interviews are affected by subjectivity and reflexivity due to this professional context. My intention as a writer and researcher was to reveal different layers of my subjects' narrative accounts. In each story from the data presentation in Chapter IV, readers are invited to enter the exemplar teacher's life from several time frames and roles: the student, the new faculty member, the parent, the

department chair, the colleague, and most importantly, the exemplary classroom teacher. This invitation is intended to elicit readers' notions about the essence of understanding some layers of teaching through the exemplars and the meanings they have shared.

Other concerns are that much of what the exemplar subjects chose to share was likely influenced by the interview questions [see appendix 2]. The themes listed here emerged from the process of coding the data. As Creswell notes (1994), categories derived from the data may be organized several ways. In the cases of my subjects' transcripts, the primary pattern was derived through sheer repetition—the number of times the faculty studied made references to their pasts as students, the kinds of experiences they had in the classroom, and other tasks, for example. While the actual coding scheme began with twelve areas subjects referred to frequently, as I continued examining their responses, these categories began to cohere more simply. In terms of a visual representation of the themes, linear or categorical style diagrams that might resemble a plot or life trajectory did not seem an appropriate fit. It appeared that who they were and the stories they told were inextricably linked [see appendix 3] similar to rings that are visible when examining a cross section of a tree.

Overall, the description of the data was organized via the way each subject elected to discuss his or her teaching based on past experiences as students and how that information was used in the present. Much of each subject's teaching appeared to reside in what he or she said needed to be learned as a student, a finding that appears to align with some of the autobiographical connections with teacher practices discussed by Peter Woods (1985), and as mentioned previously, Stephen Brookfield (1994). In the findings presented here, while the unique contribution of each of the participants will be

discussed, overall, their stories offer a horizon of meanings I grouped into three possible themes: their life history (being); their beliefs about their students, colleagues and organizations (believing); and their work (doing). Further, the analysis of each theme reveals an iterative bridge showing how these faculty members translated their experiences into the ways they teach, and also how they think about it at their community colleges, the essence of the research questions framing this study.

Delimitations of the Study

Given that the purpose of my study was to learn about excellent teaching through the stories of excellent teachers, some elements of our potential understanding are outside the scope of what narratives can reveal. One consideration mentioned above is interpretation. Although my participants and I can work together to construct a fairly accurate picture of their experiences, what the readers learn from this undertaking may be as varied as the number of readers .Further, there may be exemplary traits or stories that are yet to be captured. Since my criteria for exemplar selection and analysis is based on current characteristics identified in available literature and those of the campus leaders used to nominate the exemplars, other elements besides those presented here may be revealed as we research community college faculty.

As a result, subsequent analysis did not rest with correlations showing that strength lies in number. On the other hand, while some bias is unavoidable, this study could be replicated by those interested in asking other questions of other faculty groups and we

may form a more coherent picture of today's community college as seen *by those who teach there.*

Limitations of the Study

Although the study may reveal some patterns of comparison and contrast according to extreme case qualitative sampling (Patton, 1990), as noted in the study's design section, findings are probably not generalizable, a concern that has been raised in association to issues of validity and qualitative research (Barbour & Barbour, 2003; Creswell, 2002). The use of extreme case subjects, regional sample selection and potential differences in collaboration styles of subjects may raise flags regarding subjectivity and objectivity in the researcher and the researched. However, given that my purpose was to conduct basic research and provide rich description, the limitations appear to be in line with the general tradeoffs of qualitative research (Patton, 1990). I hope that the resulting six stories illustrate something new and meaningful about community college teaching and excellence, but they also probably lead us to asking many more questions about how excellent teachers come to be.

CHAPTER IV

EXEMPLAR CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

> ...I think it was also vitally important that the professors who taught those courses allowed their students to see them as more than experts in their field of study. They allowed us to know them not only as scholars who struggled with their own contradictions within their disciplines, but also as human beings with families and mortgages, hobbies and habits. They allowed us to see how they reconciled the diverse areas of their lives...In essence their scholarly lives were not separate from other aspects of their lives—who they were in the classroom was *who they were* [author's emphasis]. (Nicastro, p. 59, 2005)

Although Nancy Nicastro's article, "Teaching from Both Sides of the Desk," discusses her philosophy of teaching in a four-year institutional setting, her reflective comments may also be useful to think about in terms of contextualizing the following presentation of data. In addition to being impressed by teachers who offered a sense of immediacy and humanity in the classroom, Nicastro says in this article that her own teaching philosophy came from her experiences as a student, a theme readers will find echoed in the narratives

describing the subjects. Another point relevant to the exemplars in this chapter is that Nicastro's article reveals a bridge between the past and a present sense of self as a teacher. While she lists several principles to think about, Nicastro states her "bottom line" is to teach from who you are (2005, p. 68). As noted in the Chapter Three, the primary themes derived from the data were being, believing and doing. In addition, while other themes will be analyzed in Chapter V's discussion and analysis of the findings, this notion of a bridge between activating one's past student experiences to understand how to help students and develop a successful teaching practice emerged from the exemplars' interview transcripts and also contributed to writing these stories. However, readers are also invited to explore additional ways of understanding their narratives that may not be accounted for here.

Brad Richards

At the end of her book of essays on writing, *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott says "Becoming a writer is about becoming conscious. When you're conscious and writing from a place of insight and simplicity and real caring about the truth, you have the ability to throw the lights on for your reader" (1994, p. 225). Brad Richards, this community college English teacher, writes with the intention of using his craft to turn lights on. He has been teaching at the same large Midwestern college since 1976 and has taken advantage of each pedagogical and technological development available to writing teachers, currently teaching both on line and in the classroom which is observed by the

coauthor of his latest textbook. Shedding his light into the classroom, you will see an amiable, medium framed guy in jeans and a sport coat nearing sixty kick his wheeled office chair around the desks of twenty developmental writers. He might show one group what he came up with for his response to their definition assignment, he may slide out in the hallway for a minute to give a private pep talk, or he may jump out of his wheels to crouch next to someone whose hand appears locked around a pen. He is watching faces, checking body postures of students in small groups; he listens, too, to figure out where their switches are that day, admitting that some days, some classes, are better than others. His light also reveals what he calls a "writerly teacher," someone whose practice emanates from his experiences in and out of the classroom and is founded on helping students understand that believing who they are and how they think shapes their success as college learners:

> You know the challenge is to find out what they are good at and build on it. This is my credo in developmental ed. Our approach, I think, typically, is to find out what they are bad at and kill it...what we should be teaching is confidence, fluency and form, because that's literacy, right? Can you read with understanding? Can you write about what you've read? And can you make some kind of connection between what you've read and what you know in your bones as a result of your lived experience?

What Brad Richards knows in his bones comes from his own truth. Despite a Master's Degree in English from a prestigious university, Richards says he did not start learning something about writing until he started teaching at his community college. This move prompted him to enter a Doctorate of Arts program where he met a teacher who

taught by writing with and for students, an immediate class environment that changed both Richards' approach to writing and his practice. After completing his dissertation Richards was able to focus more on writing poetry, fiction, and freelancing, which included books for language arts teachers, but the real change started in the classroom as he began writing with his composition classes:

> I would make an assignment and I would write the paper providing them with illustrations and I made a discovery. The one thing I discovered was that there were some assignments I was giving them that I had a hard time doing myself. It seemed like a clever enough thing when I hatched the idea, but then when I actually had to do it, I would say, holy cats, this is hard. And then I felt ashamed.

Through this "failure," Richards developed a written voice he would continue to develop as he scripted instructional materials for networked computer labs in the eighties and nineties, which led to online teaching and his current publication of a textbook. Over time, he also became more conscious of the mental processes writers experience and the kinds of skill sets required to move effectively through the writing process, especially in terms of what happens in the developmental writing classroom. Richards still loves teaching and his students and, even though many developmental writers will not be ready for the transfer-level composition course in one semester, he believes that they come to class with wisdom and he wants to give them ways to demonstrate their knowledge.

> I want to help them with the cognitive means to investigate their ideas, especially when we are talking about the rhetorical modes, when we are talking about systematic ways of exploring what we know and providing

students with a protocol of usable procedures of digging down, bringing up what they know and giving shape to it. I see that as a very clear cognitive agenda in the class. That's part of what we're doing and the reading too. It's been real interesting spending time with students talking about how you read something. I gave my students in paragraph to essay [English 093] class a poem yesterday called *Rain.* So we read this poem and I say write for five minutes and just sort of summarize who's in it, what's happening and why should we care, the standard sort of stuff and the students got kind of flummoxed and didn't know what to say. And so I suggested they start with the obvious and never be afraid to say the obvious. So we look again and see there's this kid named Paul in the third grade and pick out what we can see is happening. Then I tell them something we practice over and over again. When you read something and it's hard, number one, don't give up, and number two, there may be things that you don't understand in this but you also want to be fully aware of what you do understand. I think our developmental readers often when they are faced with something that's dense and not immediately transparent, give up. So part of my teaching as a reading teacher in a writing class is at least be aware of what you do know.

Those who have seen one person sitting absolutely still in a room of moving pens and pencils know that fear and anxiety are barriers to such awareness. One African American Muslim woman Richards described in his sentence level to paragraph (English 088 class) appeared sullen during every class. A couple of weeks into the semester,

Richards noticed she had very little written during a free writing exercise. He decided to risk breaking the barrier first, and described kneeling next to her desk.

> ...with my head—my kids call this close talking—quite close to her and I ask her are you having trouble? And she says well yeah, I'm just not really sure what to say. Then I said, well you know when you're doing this the most important thing is quantity. I want you to allow yourself to write as much as you possibly can. And don't worry about getting it wrong. And just the very fact that I got close to her that thirty seconds and said I want you to give this a try, there was a breakthrough there, so now all of a sudden she is with me. That force field is gone.

The student told Richards later that she was born with fetal alcohol poisoning and she was not sure how well she could do in his class but wanted to try. Her participation improved and while she was not yet ready to pass the class, Richards encouraged her to repeat it under his guidance because he was worried that the attitudinal shift could be destroyed if she entered a different class with a teacher unfamiliar with this story:

> ...if she gets into someone else's class, she is going to be crucified. She is going to be out the door in two weeks and everything will be lost. Well, this semester she is not in my class. I don't know where she is. She told me a little bit about her personal life. She had a son who took off in a car and there were some problems. You see this is a student, and there are many, many, many students like this, who at a place like our college, if all the stars are aligned, if there's less mayhem in her personal life, and believe me you know it's frightful, if there's less personal disorder in their

> personal lives, if the money issues come together, and if this student can get four consecutive semesters at this institution, she can make amazing progress. Amazing progress. But my view is, you know, if that's going to happen, number one, they have to have a conversion experience or something approaching that in the first class they take, and they have to be persuaded that this is a place they can be successful. And number two, they need to be promoted if you can point to tangible progress. Because if I hold that student back, we know, I mean I just heard one of our retention guys say that nationwide, 75% of African American males who matriculate into colleges last only one semester. Now we can do something about that, but what not to do is focus on everything that they are doing wrong. You've got to build confidence strength. You've got to build on what they know how to do.

Richards then demonstrates to students how this activity connects to writing by showing them how their reactions to what they read become annotations they can name to take them from the unknown to the known. He points out that while people think abstractly in many situations, the kind of thinking needed in an academic context is often foreign to them. Further, in the community college, developmental learners range in ability and it is difficult for a teacher to meet all of their needs. Even so, while he does not tell his students it is going to be easy and they cannot make up for years of what they should have learned in one semester, he focuses on successes that can be achieved during their time together. Richards says most of his students are convinced that what they write

is "Worthless and wrong...so one of my first jobs, I think is to break down those obstacles."

He has them free write and while they can only write a few words in an hour at first, Richards has them graph their progress so they can see how their fluency is improving so then can prepare assignments at home with more confidence. Richards believes that focusing on grammatical error is off the track for students and for other teachers. Instead when it is time to edit he tells students that they need to be self aware and look for the goofs they make so they can work smart. Richards speaks with despair as he describes the perceptions of many teachers he works with or meets. They tell him that developmental writers do not even write in sentences or have long convoluted ones throughout their papers and Richards says this view is off the mark. Most developmental writers may not have the sentence perfectly but most are complete.

How does he know? Calling himself a collector and a counter, his analyses of student writing are based on a large collection of student samples spanning several years and have been used during presentations at conferences. This work continues as Richards applies his research to a developmental writing textbook he recently coauthored and is sharing at national conferences with other writing teachers. Recent samples from the past year show that ninety percent or more of sentences in a developmental sample are complete. He thinks that teachers' attention to errors before fluency reflects a lack of theoretical foundation and a practice that puts their focus on teaching to the error and testing, which creates a negative attitude in students:

> I mean you look at people who have been teaching for 25, 26, 27 years, the ones who have really gone to rot, the ones who speak most blamefully

of their students and how bad they are. To me that's just transference. These people are so ineffective in the classroom. They are so bad at what they do. And they've ceased trying to hone their licks and get better...curiosity or lack of it is an important issue. As community college teachers we process a lot of paper. A lot of paper and a lot of students. The fact is that community college teaching is five, six, seven composition classes, perhaps. Who's got the time to be inquisitive? That's a very real problem, but community colleges are sometimes characterized by students who aren't great writers. Then it may seem likes it's beneath our dignity to be interested, and I mean dedicated to the investigation of this work. You process papers. So you scrawl some notes in the margin with a little post mortem at the end of the paper and go on to the next one. I think that the teachers who dry up and become bitter are no longer curious about their work. And maybe they were never curious about it to begin with. Maybe what they wanted to do was go into the classroom and talk about Wordsworth and Keats or maybe they wanted to teach Jane Austen and now here they are doing remedial composition, which is hard work.

Richards says that community colleges are ethically obligated to provide quality developmental education to their students and understands that under prepared students are often a challenge. He has found that many students lack self control, often displaying behavior that is a complete distraction. While some teachers might be tempted to refer the offending student to a counselor or Dean, Richards prefers connection if possible. One student who said "I've had enough of this shit and I don't want to do this" during an in-

class discussion task, wound up admitting outside of class during a talk in the college courtyard that she was having a hard time with assignments.

Richards prefaced the conversation by allowing a moment of quiet to pass between them and telling her he was glad she was in the class but had difficulty with her lack of self control. He then assured her that not everybody can do every assignment and once you learn what someone else can do well and what you can do well, you have the opportunity to learn from each other. Richards comments that the student expected him to tell her to shut up, or get out of the class: "I am convinced that this has happened her whole life in education so she is trying to learn something, she has a lot of difficulty and she gets creamed, read the riot act and told she is no good. So how do we deal like that with people in the community college?"

Richards has his own community college story, having begun his studies at another large two-year institution in the state where he teaches. After his first year of studying accounting, his father's field, Richards began his journey into teaching quite by "accident." While driving his VW Bug to college, Richards went through an open intersection and was broadsided. It took him several months of physical therapy to recover from his concussion and fractures, undergoing plates and screws and a body cast. Losing his interest in accounting, Richards gravitated toward a university that offered a physical therapy program. After a few weeks, he realized the career was not for him and his father advised him to stay and get a teaching certificate instead:

> ...and he says, I'll never forget this. He says well don't drop out. Stay there and get a teaching certificate. If you can't do anything else, you can always teach, or something like that. So I stayed and at that time I was

taking an Intro to Lit class and we were reading *Othello* and *Death of a Salesman* and other wonderful works of literature. I was so moved by Linda Loman standing at the grave at the end of *Death of a Salesman* saying 'Willie we're free and clear.' It was so haunting and beautiful. So I stayed, and I decided to get a degree in English.

Over the years, in addition to his degrees in English and Education, Richards, who points out he is not just an English teacher, became certified to teach math, and has participated in or led many state and nationally funded projects in areas outside of English, including science and history. He currently heads a summer creative writing program and is excited about being in the classroom and continuing to develop ideas for future editions of his textbook:

I've been teaching for thirty years. I figure I'm going to go ten more, and I'd like to do the last ten years of just working on my textbooks. But I don't want to make it sound too mercenary. I also want to pay attention to what's going on in my classes—every set of papers I'm getting back. When you become inquisitive about your students, suddenly you see it in a completely different way. I love a line from Walker Percy's *The Message in the Bottle*. He talks about the importance of seeing the exotic in the ordinary. That you want to pick up stuff that's lying around in your backyard and look at it carefully almost like with a scientist's focus and interest....you have to find something to keep you alive and keep you going and make sure that you are really doing as much for your students as you can.

Pamela Nichols

"People seem to know me before they meet me." Nichols smiles ruefully at first, because she just outlined a few of her past projects: talks she has given about culture at a local community center, a national outreach for gifted teachers focused on brain-based learning techniques, securing funding for laptops, and giving in-house presentations on classroom assessment techniques. The smile turns into a huge dimpled grin that would melt the resistance of any developmental writer in her classes, not to mention anyone in the radius of her presence. Having taught on the same small campus for nearly ten years, former students still stop to say hi at the grocery store and send her a note or email to tell her how things are going where they have transferred, so they seem to know her after they meet her, too. A colleague who warned her that his son would probably not pass her class due to numerous writing skill difficulties checks in periodically to tell Nichols of his son's progress after getting his Bachelor's degree. There are other signs: waiting lists for her composition classes on the college's registration website, post-it notes with smiley faces that adorn extra handouts on a table by her office, and persistent knocks, which are followed by questions from students who are not afraid to ask what is due.

Retention is the raison d'etre of community colleges but trying to figure out what works for students who have had little success in school is often a perpetual source of frustration as these students need a great deal of support. Nichols shares a recent experience she had with an elderly learner with an incomplete who had a combination of health problems and difficulty using computers to write assignments:

She's been in and out of the hospital all summer when I had her again in the winter semester. I just kept calling her and asking how are you doing? Are you okay? Oh no, she said. I just got out of the hospital so I don't know if I will be able to make up my incomplete, but I am hoping to. How will this affect my financial aid? Because of the small class size, I can have conversations like that. If I had 250 students, I know for sure that I would not be able to. So that's an important part of retention for us at the community college, being able to have those kinds of relationships with our students and be more of an assistant to them. That's what I do—talking to students, trying to make them feel as though I'm here to help them if I can and staying in touch, staying enthusiastic. I want them to feel as though I am really here to help them, not to torture them and make them write for my demonic pleasure. I think there is so much writing that people do now that they can see the relevance of spelling properly and using the proper punctuation and organizing their thoughts so they are understood. In other classes though, they may have a hard time making that clear connection between real life and subject matter, but this connection is important to keeping them in class.

Nichols talks about a recent article in *Diversity*, a higher education journal that pointed to needs of the community college student that mirrored her methods. Flexible scheduling, immediate feedback, conferences, and time to take care of family and other personal issues top the list. Developmental teachers know though, that access means opportunity but does not ensure success. Students struggling to read and write beyond

their grade level, get to school, and handle personal emergencies need a coach, someone to help them practice time management and negotiate the mysterious path of registering, taking and matriculating through their course work.

Nichols is a graduate of two prestigious universities, having grown up in a cosmopolitan, conservative city. She had no experience with community colleges until she began teaching at the main campus of her current institution. Yet, the academic struggles of her students resonate loudly. Hired fresh out of graduate school with only a few weeks of teaching behind her, Nichols says she hit the ground running and working with developmental writers has been her passion for personal reasons:

> ...I knew that I wanted to be the teacher that I would have liked to have had. Someone who was helpful. Someone who was clear. Someone who wrote clearly on the board. Those kinds of things are important to me because I've had bad experiences with that in the past. So showing and telling and allowing students to practice in class and be given feedback before they go home and write is important because I know I've had so many frustrating experiences and didn't know what to do. I can still remember my father yelling that I should have paid more attention in class.

After three years at the main campus working with a larger population of students coming from upper middle-class backgrounds, Nichols began teaching at one of its smaller campuses, nicknamed as she puts it, "for better or worse, the black campus," where she believes she can do her most valuable work because those students often intimidate their instructors. Nichols admits that her experiences with cultural

identification were not the same as upbringing of most of them, but students identify with her skin color and the kinds of experiences they shared as learners. "...I think I have progressively gotten into my culture, so to speak, and that allows me to have a rapport with students that maybe a non-African American instructor would not be able to have. So I think that's a really big part of my passion. But just helping people to progress and not be intimidated by writing—that's huge I think as a mission that I feel I am charged with so that's important to me."

Nichols' parents are African-Americans from the south and raised their family on the west coast. Her mother, Nichol's best teacher, worked with kindergartners and first graders. Nichols remembers that her mother cared deeply about her students and their families in and out of the classroom. She recalled their names for years and the sense of shared commitment stuck with Nichols even though she did not plan to enter teaching. Her father is a Professor and her sister teaches first grade. Both parents raised Nichols and her sister to pay attention to their speaking, dressing and behaving properly:

> My parents, they are great Ebonics speakers, but they grew up in the south during the time of Martin Luther King, and they knew there was a time to speak one way and there was a time to speak another way. My parents taught me the way they wanted me to sound out in the world. So they only spoke among their friends, Ebonics or dialect. And it was always fun and playful rather than bad or derogatory. But they made sure to teach us the 'right way' to speak and it actually kept me from being accepted in certain circles as I was growing up.

Leaving the west coast for college with no intention of becoming a teacher despite her background, Nichols attended a historically black college and went to graduate school in a completely different environment where her writing was often criticized by professors who either did not know or care about how to be helpful. She shares this experience with her students:

> I honestly tell students that I had trouble with my master's thesis with run-ons and comma splices, and my thesis advisors became extraordinarily frustrated with me and finally just handed me a grammar and punctuation book. 'You read it and you understand it.' They didn't want to break it down for me, and I at times, wondered if they understood it...so I think that [criticism] also kind of brings the shoulders down in class on the first days and weeks when I say, 'well I had trouble with these things that you are having trouble with too'. And then I have the experiences of writing a graduate school textbook and I had to go through the drafting process that I put my students through. And that sure was an eye-opener because we learn in books how we can't take criticism the hard way. We really take it as though it is helpful. We have lots of flowery things to say about the drafting process but then when you are the person who's being criticized and told you know what? We can see that you did a lot of work but you need to start all over again. That was probably the most devastating blow in the whole experience of writing that chapter.

She sees that her students often have difficulty with their teachers because they have not been around white people and this is not the school, home or professional

environment they know. Pointing out that many of her students are the first in their families to go to college, "It's a very difficult situation to be in—just being in a classroom as a person but to be African-American and feel like you don't know what is going on or you feel that this is really tough and you are really struggling. There's just a lot more on your shoulders." Another area of concern is that developmental writers submit their portfolios to an assessment committee that decides whether the students are ready to move onto the next class. The committee is composed of all non African-American people with the exception of Nichols.

During assessment sessions, the teachers share their perceptions of students writing informally and it is clear to Nichols that they have difficulty understanding the casual speech expressed in many of the papers, so much so that Nichols has been called upon to "translate." Nichols cautions her students that they are from a different culture and since many of the language references are not the same, to use definitions of their expressions in parentheses to be clear:

> It's important to make an impression on people that is not going to bias them towards you...I don't want the students to feel like I am this lowly African American writer and I am going up against this large white committee, but I do explain to them that it is fine to talk the way you talk and there is nothing wrong with it, but when it comes to writing you have to rethink your way of expressing yourself. And I think that's true. I don't think that there is really any way to sugar coat it. I notice that people are much more understanding with ESL students and I think it is the same issue, ESL and African-American student writing. But a lot of my co-

workers I don't think see it that way. So it is kind of frustrating to me but it's kind of what I'm dealing with.

Nichols says she spent lots of extra time in her single years meeting the needs of her students, but now she is a wife and mom, and is expecting again. These days she uses email and voicemail to keep in touch with students when she is not on campus. After a morning spent with her young son, she listens to Diane Reim on NPR on the drive to campus and often comes up with new ideas to try. Well-versed in learning style theory and practice, Nichols has an arsenal of class techniques to keep students focused. She is also a taskmaster and organizer, showing students how to keep separate folders of their different assignments, arrive at a realistic study schedule including timing how long it takes them to read a page. To enhance the reading and writing connection, Nichols walks them through the annotation process and provides notes from each class session and what they discussed as a class so they can compare it with their own work and include ideas they may have missed. The notes also include page references with their reading. In addition, students use their annotations and vocabulary lists from a book they are reading (a current choice is *Seabiscuit an American Legend* by Laura Hillenbrand) to play Pictionary style games derived from Nichols' use of brain-based learning techniques:

> ...having actions to support what they are learning academically helps solidify in their minds what it is that I am trying to teach them. So dealing with the vocabulary has been such an issue for most students because there are words that they never heard before or seen before and most of the students have had to buy a dictionary because they don't have dictionaries. Most students have never read an entire book in their life, which is

amazing to me, but it is a great opportunity for them to be positive and have this exposure.

Although these may seem like extra steps for even developmental teachers, Nichols says she would not do it if students did not find it so helpful in improving their writing assignments. While very few of these students will be ready for the college level class the next semester, Nichols accepts that students learn at different rates and some are just slow to understand. When academic difficulty is combined with the kinds of unpredictable life issues for most of them, they are consistently challenged. However, given the kind of scaffolding Nichols offers, she holds them to firm attendance, has them follow her clear guidelines for organizing assignments and follow through on group assignments. This practice is supported by constant conferencing.

While students are reluctant to come to her office, Nichols has structured her class so she can see them individually for a few minutes during class. She believes they need her undivided attention because they are afraid to ask questions in class, both men and women. The one-on-one also helps Nichols zero in on a student's specific needs as their skills and abilities can be very different. Students who have more ability also get feedback that is appropriate for their level. These students often do not get attention because they are not as needy. Nichols says her intention is to make it a good learning experience for everyone. She says these conferences make a big difference and she has had really good retention since she moved to this format.

Pamela Nichols says she believes that students can succeed and wants to show them the steps they need to take to attain their academic goals. She not only articulates

the importance of being positive, but this philosophy physically emanates from her radiant, dimpled, wide smile.

> Just last night I had my second meeting with my lowest level English class and the students tend to be casual and laid back. They don't really have a good sense of being in college and what kind of demeanor you're supposed to have and I'm fine with that because it's a learning experience for them as well as me. Anyway, a student says she wants to ask me a question and she doesn't know whether it's appropriate. And I was kind of worried, but she said 'Are you always this happy? You're pregnant and I've never seen a pregnant woman so happy and I've certainly never seen a teacher so happy so it's just kind of weird.' And I said 'Yeah, I guess I am.'

Ethan Jameson

> I like the sharing environment and I like my own classroom. So I teach. But it was a long coming eureka moment because I was never pointed in that direction. Yet, I realize looking at my classes that I do well here, and I believe they exit well here, so I really enjoy this. Doesn't that sound like a good job in life to you? It's a good fit. I actually found my way into it, and I just have to grit my teeth when I'm in a university environment because I'll get the 'oh, you teach at a community college? Well how very nice.' You have to let it slide off you because you just have to know you do your own job well. I know I could compete at that level. I was a university track

person and actually it was of some interest, but I like this better. I'm quite happy here and I have more students here. If I were there, I would immediately have fewer students because it would be get back to your research writing, and I don't like that as much. I think I deliver better here. So I'm comfortable with who I am, and I just deliver the best I can.

A daughter in college out of state has just called to ask how long she needs to boil her artichokes. There is a pile of graded statistics homework on his office desk, some reference texts next to the Dell and a handout in process. His yawning briefcase exposes more than a few files. More math, more comments to make and the phone rings again. This time he tells his wife he will be home to make dinner.

Ethan Jameson's hair is graying, yet the wide blue eyes behind the wire specs remain kind and sincere. Despite the fact he has been teaching at his institution since the eighties, served as Interim Dean (he chose to turn down an offer to serve permanently) and Department Chair, he sees possibilities more than politics. The stream of conversation provides a steady flow of interests familiar to most community college faculty. He is always thinking through questions you have to be concerned with when working with diverse levels of knowledge in the classroom: What examples work best for students who have little math background? How can you design a fair test when student abilities can vary so greatly? How do you get them to their eureka moments? Luckily, Jameson likes solving problems, and he clearly likes his students and says one reason he chooses to be at his campus is that the students are appreciative:

In this environment they are very grateful for getting an education. You can't help but feel heart warmed by the people thanking you and thanking

you. It made it clear that I like this environment, so part of my eureka moment wasn't just seeing that I liked the teaching. It was also having the good rapport with people who enjoyed my teaching here. I was watching other faculty for years and years when I was part-time then full-time, and paying attention to how much they enjoyed teaching this group. They were saying, I believe, that I like being at a community college because the students are so appreciative of us. They enjoy what we are giving them. We have this student body that came to school with a purpose themselves so they are grateful to the deliverer, the one who is giving them the results that will lead them to their long term goals.

Unlike some community college faculty, Jameson is not one of those teachers trying to make a difference because his own learning experiences were marred or because he struggled as a student. Instead, his face shines with the appreciation of a disciple as he describes his own school days. He acknowledges that he went to a good high school in the Midwest and his teachers provided good instruction even though they seemed to run out of material by the end of the year. Jameson thinks this may created some formulaic teaching, due to having policies on how and what to teach. A strong performance in high school and high SATs brought him to a new arena as an undergraduate and he says his jaw dropped the first day of his chemistry class:

> Everybody had to take freshman chem. And you could be in the upper or lower division of it if you had high math and chemistry SAT scores, so I was in the upper division class feeling tugged in multiple directions. There is this room of about 100 or 150 people and the professor comes in

> standing about 5'2" or 5' 3" or something with a deep baritone voice. But he walked into the room and began talking about the class. He immediately praised us saying you are, and this is 1972, you are the best freshman chemistry class in the entire U.S. rated by SAT scores for math and chemistry. And the only ones that had higher scores were MIT's. Now he thought he had made us all proud but actually it scared us to death. Because we now look at the people around us and we all are thinking we are surrounded by geniuses and we don't have a chance...Now what? He went on to say that because I know you are so good and you are highly capable students, so I'm not going to give anything but A's and B's and C's. Then he adds to the end of that sentence that is after those of you who can't cut it have dropped.

If this was not intimidating enough, Jameson recalls that the professor then began to focus on individual students in the lecture hall and say that person's name when speaking to him. Of course, all of the students were wondering how he had managed to memorize so many names and faces...or had he?

> But to us at the time it looked like magic. It turns out he was a phenomenally good lecturer and when he began talking about chemistry, and I had had two high school courses including a basic one and an advanced course for seniors, chemistry was never like he spoke about it. Everything was suddenly sure, sure, there are formulas but we need to talk about what's really happening here. And he would talk. He was just

typical of my first few days at the university where I would walk into room after room and find nothing but great ideas.

Jameson's stories are punctuated with this kind of appreciation and awe, no matter what the discipline. In one case he spent his entire Christmas break trying to solve four to six insolvable math problems given to students on purpose as a take home exam. When the professor told Jameson that he was excited to see how Jameson had tried to work thorough the problems, he began to see that his teachers were helping him develop and hone his skills for graduate school. He recalls a favorite Shakespeare class taught by someone whose reading of *Macbeth*, a play he again thought he had conquered in high school, woke Jameson up to the realization that he really had not read the play. He became so desperate for ideas for his Shakespeare paper that he could not leave the library. His professor found him there and sent him back to his dorm room, telling Jameson that he was not going to find his paper in one of the books. He needed to go back and keep reading the play:

Jameson has stories like this about all of his professors, ranging from anthropology to acting. It is also clear that his appetite for learning was so voracious that it exceeded what most students are willing to do. In one case, a class in topology required twenty to thirty hours of homework a week while Jameson continued to carry a full load of classes:

> But it was hard enough to meet that many hours and it was enjoyable enough with [the professor] to put those hours there because he made you want to do it. Like I want to solve this puzzle and I'm really interested about this. So I had so many staggering moments where good teaching

made me want to respond well as a student. Good faculty will stretch good students to lead them to be able to answer new questions, develop new things and it's not all by the rules and it's not all about how do you solve this. There would be no new problems solved if we only resolved the ones that had been solved before. We need to ask new questions and answer them new ways. So they will stretch us without showing us how to do some of those.

This learning quest resulted in two degrees, one in math and one in psychology, leading Jameson to graduate school where he studied psychology because of his preference for talking and sharing ideas compared to working in isolation on math problems:

I watched a faculty member I liked a lot who was a "read from the book" type of person. A very nice guy. But I watched him one day in this one particular building that was probably added onto several times and it had hallways that would turn odd corners before they continued, and some jags in the road if you will, and I watched this professor, hands folded behind his back, walking up the hallway talking to himself. And you could hear him so if this is equal to that and clearly reciting mathematical facts and thinking about a problem, and he's walking towards one of these jogs in the hallway. And I'm standing about 10 feet or 20 feet behind him watching him in fascination. This is the truth. He walked right into the wall. He smacked his nose because he didn't see the wall coming even though I assume his eyes were open. He just walked right into the wall.

You'd expect him to say ow or something of that kind, but he just took a half step back, turned to the left, and went that way and then up the jog and went on his way still talking to himself. This is a perfectly sane guy who is very personable if you ever talk to him, but he was so lost in thought he didn't see the wall and wasn't distracted by the accident of probably getting a bloody nose. And I remember at that particular moment I wasn't sure I wanted to be a math faculty member.

However, Jameson started his psychology program only to find out that many of the faculty in his field of interest had left, so Jameson found himself trying to excel in a program in which he was not as happy. What made him happy was teaching, so in addition to a teaching assistantship at the university where his wife was doing graduate work, Jameson began teaching math part-time at his current community college. Over time, he went on to full-time work, serving as department chair and as interim dean, but remaining in teaching because he likes it "...just a hair's breath better." Understanding the difficulty new faculty face in the classroom, Jameson shared his handouts and teaching materials, intending for those faculty finding them helpful to make full use of them. While some faculty have different approaches, all have found Jameson's understanding of how to connect students with introductory courses helpful:

What I intend to do is give a lift to somebody who doesn't know where to begin. It's very intimidating to start a new job part-time or full-time and have a sense of where do I even start? What fits the department's spirit? So I could disseminate a body of materials that I knew would be pretty central and then over a period of terms anybody who drifted will stay very

> easily within what I was comfortable for being the department's philosophy about a particular course. I might see them beginning to drop some sections of a chapter and add some of the other one and still be exactly what we wanted but it is still following their beliefs. And I do really think an essential part of good teaching is teaching within the framework of what you think works...Every one of us, it seems to me, should be sharing with colleagues not just what did work, but certainly what didn't work because we are constantly reinventing all the same things.

This kind of curricular synthesis between colleagues naturally extends to students. Jameson is constantly trying to learn what kinds of study materials and examples work best. While it takes hours to make comments on homework and quizzes, Jameson believes this attention to detail instead of just looking for a correct answer engages students in dialogue. For instance, he asks students questions in papers and expects students to write back. Other colleagues have difficulty engaging students in the practice of homework and they too dialogue with Jameson, which he believes leads to necessary change:

> Some things we all learn a lesson from. Education, after all, does change. You hear people say that it never changes but that's ridiculous. We recently heard somebody say in a meeting, 'Shakespeare never changes' and all of the English faculty look at the ceiling like I can't believe you said that. Literature is interpreted in the times and Shakespeare does

change. It's a living thing and a historical thing both...Math too changes. But one of the ways it changes is by generations of teaching.

Jameson points to recent developments in the teaching of math noting that many concepts being taught at the high school level are concepts that would have been only for graduate students a century and a half ago. People are not smarter, Jameson contends, but our ability to understand and clarify ideas for others as educators changes over time and better teaching is literally passed forward leading to greater access to knowledge.

Students too, are part of these changes, and Jameson encourages them to be responsible for their own learning. Jameson notices what parts of the textbook are not apparent to students and develops transparencies or handouts to show them how to construct strong answers to problems. However, different issues come up for different groups of math students. For instance, calculus students have fewer difficulties with working through problems; instead, they need guidance in learning how to focus on key concepts from chapters rather than smaller details:

> When I give practice materials for the exam, I understand perfectly that I shouldn't be giving them an exam in advance and I don't, but they often lack the ability to separate the wheat and chaff, main theme from secondary topics. ...In the statistics class, I let them have a page of notes from every quiz or test because there are so many formulas and definitions and so forth that they can't memorize them very well and it de-stresses things.

Jameson takes these opportunities for practice as a means to dialogue with students about their choices in what to study and how to take notes, and says,

> If I can encourage them toward a good notes page, it's done the studying for them. I actually try to do that—to talk about organizing a notes page and it is one of my long-term objectives to give them lessons on that and have a model one. I haven't finished this yet because there are so many things to cover, but it is clearly an academic skills thing and many of them have no clue how to find what were the main themes and what they should study. And I try to create materials class by class that push them toward that focus.

Even so, no matter what he does, there are students who do not adequately prepare and do not take notes, many of whom do poorly on quizzes and tests. While Jameson politely asks students why they did not choose to prepare, he says both he and they understand they bear the burden of these choices:

> I think that is important as a communication tool that they know who was responsibility for the learning and it is always them. I am there to help get the learning to happen...And then I begin a dialogue about that and ask them back—what did you put on your notes page? Where was this formula? You make the tool become bigger than it was before and it serves extra purposes. That's been working very well in the statistics class, and I feel like I'm getting better, better, and better success in that one by designing the tools to not let them not do the work. I create something that helps them do their part. In statistics they need a lot of hands-on stuff and they get a lot of worksheets. And in pre-calculus, they don't see what the main themes were. So I guess I am always tuning and adapting and it turns

out different for every class that I teach. But it is the constant awareness of what they are doing. It is not the material; it's the joint experience that we are in it together.

If there are any concerns about connection and collaboration in terms of his work environment, Jameson expresses it in terms of a history of distrust and contentiousness between faculty and administration. Having served in both roles, Jameson understands that recent calls for accountability create tensions about outcomes-based assessment and faculty evaluation matters. Sometimes, he thinks problems rise from the way issues are presented and perceived rather than the tasks involved. He points out that professional development sessions occasionally come off as overloaded presentations of ideas that most faculty already know, draining away time needed for class preparation. At his college, the push for professional development and more time spent with in-service training came at a time when relations between faculty and administration were particularly negative. Mediators were used to assist in working towards shared governance. Finally, the receptiveness to such measures to improve relations between faculty and administration has been as diverse as the responses of individual faculty and the culture of their departments. However, there are also new faculty with fresh perceptions coming into the mix, so Jameson is hopeful:

> They don't have those memories. They have never had the cause to think it [requirements for in-service and professional development] was a negative. They actually believed from their first introduction to the college that it was to make them better with the full belief they would still stay and be better. I like hearing those people stand up and not be negative. I

hate the negativism even when I have contributed to it. But we were in a pretty negative pot at a certain time, and we have not escaped that pot altogether...The measure of success is going to come later down the road because we still have partial participation; some people are happy to go and be in the training and others are not. But in helping the faculty to be better teachers, the college seems willing to provide opportunities. But when the faculty explain what they want for those opportunities, sometimes they can't get onto the same page. The faculty may describe something like we need more equipment or we need release time to develop new things. And of course that all has price tags on it so the administration will often respond with 'all you do is ask for money'. It isn't about money; it's about how you can be better teachers.

Jameson points out that when all is said and done, despite these thorny perspectives, he believes that faculty want to be good teachers and want students to succeed.

So even the most negative faculty when you go into their room, you'd still find a very fine teacher. They just don't want to be part of someone else's machine. So when administrators look at them and think they must be bad faculty because they are negative, that's just the counterpart of faculty looking at administration and saying I bet you just go to meetings and you are bad administrators looking to fire us. Nobody had that objective, not the faculty and not the administration. But they never merged their ideas or believe in each other.

Over the course of his career as a student and an educator, Ethan Jameson has negotiated his own teaching and learning adventure and come full circle:

> To me, part of being an exemplar is I don't think of myself as best or a best or something of that kind because I don't want to think of myself that way. I think about my students. I don't use that as part of my teaching philosophy. If I do this right, I look at how my students are doing in terms of their faces while they are in my classroom and their performance on things that I give them as objectives to do. I measure by the students and by what I am supposed to be doing here.

Roni Franson-Lewis

You do not notice anything unusual at first. The circular gravel driveway leads up to a neatly painted large ranch-style home on a good-sized lot. There is a huge shed painted to match the house, apple trees, and you are off the freeway in a township so small there may not even be a stoplight and a gas station. The doorbell sets off strange alarms: loud shrieks and then barks, low baritone woofs and yap, yap, yap. Claws scratch on linoleum. A small, amiable, blonde woman in pink sweats answers and you see a bit of blue French provincial and a lot of Dr. Doolittle. A dignified sad brown boxer thunks back down in the entryway; around the corner in the living room, you locate the shrieks, a couple of harried cockatiels. She says her son is at school, but the phone rings, which apparently does not get on the animals' nerves compared to doorbells. When she finally

has a chance to sit down, you see she has company. A sweet-eyed trembling Chihuahua in a printed doggy jersey pokes out of her clasped arms.

Although she is home on a Friday, Roni Franson-Lewis, Director of her college's Veterinary Technician Program, where she was a student herself, is usually on campus providing review sessions for students who need extra practice working on the animals or who need to ask questions about the PowerPoint lectures. Her high energy level stems from boundless enthusiasm for her program and belief in her students' abilities.

> One of my teaching philosophies is that I never want to stop improving. I just recently got my Master's degree in education a couple of years ago, but I had been teaching for twenty years. So when I started to go to school to get my Master's, I thought hey, I am a pretty darn good teacher. I don't know what I am going to learn, but I think I do what I do pretty well. And then I sat in the classroom and I learned all of these innovative ways of teaching and communicating along with information about the different learning styles and it really blew me away, and it humbled me and helped me realize that it doesn't matter how long we've been doing it, we still have a lot to learn. And if I look back at the very first semester and my first day of teaching and why this day stands out in my mind I don't know, but it was January 10, 1985. I remember being terrified but I also remember what a horrible teacher I was. And fortunately for me the administrators saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, and I guess that I just believed that if they thought I could do it, I really could do it, so I just set a goal every semester that I was going to continue to improve and

I set goals at the beginning of the semester. I look at my goals at the end of the semester. What do I want to accomplish this year that I didn't do as well as I wanted last year? And twenty years later I am still doing that.

Franson-Lewis firmly believes the extra attention she and the other faculty provide students in the program is leading to those quality results. She chose the program herself fresh out of high school in the mid-eighties after researching Vet Tech programs in a careers class. While she was accepted in a program at a Big Ten University, Franson-Lewis chose the local community college's Vet Tech Program after campus visits because she was attracted by the personal touch of the faculty and the institution itself. While she heard that reputation of the program was weak, she appreciated how students in the program were valued. This element continues to be the primary theme driving the quality efforts in the current program: "I never felt like we were lost or weren't heard. There was always someone at the college to help us. I made sure our faculty continued this effort so we can give the students the same feeling I had."

Since she was invited to teach part-time after graduation, Franson-Lewis has seen the program's reputation soar. Years ago, the pass rate of students taking the state board exam put her program at the bottom. These days, according to a recent program review from the American Veterinary Association, their focus on quality has paid off and the program is among the best in the nation. Although reviewers are only able to rank each program against the Association's outcomes, it was made clear to Franson-Lewis that she doesn't *need* to change a thing. Yet she *does*. She points out that reviewers were most impressed by the program's quality of curriculum and student outcomes, citing that it was important for standards not to be lowered for community college students in comparison

to their university cohorts. Franson-Lewis was thrilled with this philosophy as it echoes her own. She strongly believes that community college students, even under-prepared learners, are capable of not only reaching but surpassing expectations.

The previous standards of the program were focused on passing students and trying to keep people happy. However, students were not passing the state and national licensing exams upon completion of the program, which she took as a sign that the program was not succeeding. After all, if the courses were too watered down, students lacked the knowledge to pass the exams and therefore, could not become practicing technicians. So when Franson-Lewis took over as Director one of her first changes was to raise the program's fail rate from a 70% to a 75%, a move that aligned their pass rates to that of the exams. Other measures, including an extremely thorough orientation and a strict attendance policy for labs (students fail the course on the third absence from a lab), have forced students to become more accountable. After several years of work and attention to hiring faculty who modeled successful characteristics of professionals in the field, the program's reputation improved and grew. For example, out of 110 veterinary technician programs in the country, Franson-Lewis' has had the lowest attrition in the country. While the national average is about 40%, her campus's program averages 18-20%.

Community college faculty who expect less, get less and do the students no favors when they lower the bar. Franson-Lewis' Master's Thesis centered on research conducted with her own students, exploring the relationship between learning style needs and traditional lecture formats. Students given the same information during research sessions consistently scored higher when delivery consisted of hands-on demonstrations, videos

and PowerPoint slides as opposed to the traditional lecture format. She not only made changes to her classes on the basis of these data, but used the data to implement changes in others as well.

The philosophies that I have for teaching have rolled into the program philosophy. We are all about quality. There are a lot of other vet tech programs that students can go to but they are not going to have to jump through the hoops and they are not going to have to do all of the things they do in our program. But what we do produce is a quality, quality, education. We set standards for everything our students do. And our goal is to help them get to this. What we need to do as teachers is to try to take the student and see what we can do to bring them up here without allowing ourselves to meet them halfway. We don't want to lower our standards to get them to pass the class. And I am so fortunate because I have a great faculty and staff that work in the vet tech program and they all believe in this philosophy. It is part of our mission statement. It's part of our goals and objectives for the program. Most of the faculty teaching in the program, like Franson-Lewis, are its graduates. These faculty are expected to be role models in and out of the classroom. In addition to teaching, they serve on boards of veterinary associations and state vet tech associations. One of the veterinarians that works with the program is the President elect of the state Veterinary Medical Association.

> We know what it is like. We were a student once. And I think that motivates them and energizes them and they want the students to be assets to the profession. It is not just a job to me or any of our faculty members. This is part of our profession. And what we are doing is we are training and grooming people to join our profession; we just want quality people

out there. So some of the things we do to get the students there is every one of my faculty members will do whatever it takes to help that student. If their class runs from 10-12 o'clock during the day, that class does not end at ten minutes to 12. If they want to meet before class, after class, that's fine. I just offered to go in last Monday, which is my day off for any students because they have to take their final exam and they wanted to come in and review. We need to be there for our students. We have to be there.

Admission into the Vet Tech Program is competitive; roughly half, around 60 of the 120 who apply have to wait or go elsewhere. Once students enter, the first semester finds many scrambling due to a lack of basic skills. Franson-Lewis says that many are unable to write a complete sentence or perform a basic dosage calculation despite having received decent grades in required first semester English Composition and Math courses. Given the high competency levels required of students, many either struggle or fail. If they fail even one course, they must stop out for a year to bring up their skills and reapply to the program. Out of the sixty admitted, ten or fifteen face this outcome. Although they are devastated by these results, Franson-Lewis pushes them to consider what that failure means. They can do something about it:

> Are you going to give up on your whole dream of being a veterinary technician or are you going to figure out what went wrong, figure out what you can do better, and try again? And almost all of the students that come back a second time pass. We see them, see their determination, and then

often see that they turn out to be better veterinary technicians than ones who didn't have to try so hard at it.

Franson-Lewis cites many of the concerns all faculty have regarding the barriers that community college students face. Most have difficulty with time management, especially considering that the program consists of six to eight classes at a time. Many of these students are working women with families to raise, so life issues and academic skills are intertwined.

Can students be caught before they fall? While some students cannot always be retained, Franson-Lewis says faculty have to be willing to be honest with students about their performance. One of her greatest success stories came from what could have been quite a loss. Several years ago, a student in Franson-Lewis' class had an extremely negative attitude in the lab section of small animal techniques that not only affected Franson-Lewis, but classmates who worked with this student in groups. Confidence was key since students were practicing skills like drawing blood and putting in catheters for the first time. The student said "I can't" so often that the others were complaining, so Franson-Lewis had to talk to her.

> So I pulled her out of the classroom and I said, "Anna, I need you to change your attitude. If you are continue to tell yourself that you can't do something, you are not going to be able to do it and you are hurting animals and you are hurting your classmates and the people that are trying to work with you as a team." And we sat down and I was very tough on her. I said, "You need to make some decisions. If you are going to continue moving toward the goal of being a veterinary technician, here are

some things that you are going to have to work on." We wrote out the goals and I helped her sit down and figure out what she had to do to try to reach those goals. I didn't know if she was going to come back the next day. At the time she didn't have any goals. And she was very angry with me as anyone might imagine and she was crying, but she did come back the next day. For a couple of weeks I got the cold shoulder and you know she was very immature, too. So as the semester went on I could see that she was working towards her goals and that she was rising above the occasion. Before we knew it, she was one of our top students. She graduated from our program. She is one of the few veterinary technicians in our state to have a job at a national zoo. And what is so funny is that I had her come back as a guest speaker in my animal health careers class and she tells that exact story. She said that it was very hard to hear that at the time but she would not be where she is today without that. To her at the time, I was just an instructor who was bashing her, but once she saw through it, she realized that not all instructors would have taken that time and would have let her fail and move on.

Franson-Lewis believes that some faculty just do not like confrontation, but says it is worth it. Why? Not only do direct intervention strategies help some students, but in the case of the Vet Tech program, the strategy fits their mission. The faculty not only want to produce students with great technician skills, but outstanding people skills. Franson-Lewis says that her job is not just to teach people how to take care of animals; it is also to help students succeed in the world. This means that good communication,

pleasant personalities, being able to manage workplace conflict, time, and other sources of stress, are the main factors needed to excel.

Students have the opportunity to practice these values in an out of the classroom. The animals they work with in the lab are provided by the local animal shelter because they have various problems and cannot be adopted. The animals are spade or neutered, given their vaccines, treated for any illnesses, and even behavior issues are addressed. Students work with them seven days a week for three or four weeks and once the animals are returned to the shelter, there is a 99% adoption rate. Outside the classroom, the student chapter of the Vet Tech Society is very active. Recently students held fundraisers to sponsor Franson-Lewis' trip to Louisiana to rescue animals after the hurricane devastation. Again, she believes that it is one thing to tell students to be active, but her students need to see her and the other faculty modeling these values. As a result, the program reflects a strong culture and Franson-Lewis says the students are extremely close-knit due to these connecting activities and experiences in and out of the classroom.

Nevertheless, Franson-Lewis is still trying to improve the program. A twenty hour pilot Institute project slated for two weeks during the upcoming summer will target current students and those selected for the fall semester cohort. Those volunteering to attend will study the areas where many students are at risk, including dosage calculation, study skills like note taking and test taking, and stress management. Franson-Lewis is excited to learn whether this will help improve retention and strengthen skills. The old saying is we teach what we need to learn. However, Roni Franson-Lewis learns what she needs to teach, and her enthusiasm for learning is demonstrated in every element.

Doug Erickson

"What Is Intelligence, Anyway?" a dandy little essay by the brilliant writer Isaac Asimov, tells the story of his encounter with a car mechanic. In it, Asimov's repairman tells us this joke: "Doc, a deaf-and-dumb guy went into a hardware store to ask for some nails. He put two fingers together on the counter and made hammering motions with the other hand. The clerk brought him a hammer. He shook his head and pointed to the two fingers he was hammering. The clerk brought him nails. He picked out the sizes he wanted and left. Well, Doc, the next guy who came in was a blind man. He wanted scissors. How do you suppose he asked for them?" Asimov then makes a scissoring motion with his fingers on his right hand, so the mechanic breaks up into hysterics: "Why you dumb jerk, he used his voice and asked for them." Apparently, the mechanic tried to catch all his patrons that day and knew Asimov would fall for it, as he tells Asimov, "because you're so goddamned educated Doc, I knew you couldn't be very smart" (Conlin, 2005, pp.252- 253).

One way most of us have truly seen the rubber meet the road of measuring different kinds of knowledge is through our increased use of technology. No matter how we adapt, it is nearly impossible for most of us to keep pace. Multimedia classrooms and web-based courses have provided us with exciting opportunities and lots to learn. Now we are looking at holographic technology, allowing everything from a hydraulic pump to a beating heart to float above us in a classroom environment. Doug Erickson, who calls himself the "old guy of the CAD department," looks more like a pleasant, fiftyish version of Radar O'Riley in a baseball cap and a bomber jacket than a crusty faculty member scanning his

retirement benefits. Erickson likes "toys," as he calls them, and his office in the brand new extension campus building is neatly punctuated by model versions of a '69 Corvette and a tiny green '36 Ford. He jokes that his fifth grader has to bug dad to get his cars back. He is also a busy guy. In addition to teaching introductory Computer Assisted Drafting (CAD) courses, he is training new tech assistants and faculty so the new labs can operate efficiently, helping the Dean of this new campus figure out why the wiring and plumbing have their dysfunctional moments, planning and attending kick off events for the community and corporate sponsors, and most of all, putting in the extra time to keep up with relentless versions of software and making sure his students have every opportunity to learn applications.

> It's really not uncommon for me to be working through new commands in software just days or hours ahead of my students. For example, I've taught myself all the operating systems, all versions of CADKEY, AutoCAD, Mechanical Desktop, Inventor, as well as all the incidentals like Excel, Word, Pipeline, Ozone, etc. There was really no preparation to speak of except for the simple concept of learning how to learn. CAD was not around in my undergrad degree. It was barely in its infancy when I was in grad school. At that point in time twenty years ago CAD was just a little bit better than a really glorified etch-a-sketch. It was all 2D which is ok because at least you have the ability to go back and edit things without redrawing it. So that was a good thing. But now it is a different world. Now you can teach people how to do it in wire frame and you can roll it around and do it in solids or you can see it in different colors, different

textures, different shades, and you can create the layout for you to have a solid rolling around on part of your screen. You can do it all parametrically so that you have this parametric solid and you can change one thing and one feature changes and the whole layout changes too. And nowadays it is my pleasure to teach students how to cerate things in solids and assemble them. I am still learning so much every semester.

Erickson knows he is a lifelong learner, but says he did not always have great teachers. Growing up in a small rural community not too far from where he now teaches, Erickson says he had some dispirited angry teachers who clearly not only disliked their profession, but kids as well.

They were fickle, gossipy, angry, and would beat you with a ruler and things like that. But I learned about all the things I never wanted to be as a teacher. They seemed stuffy, condescending, too busy, or too uncaring to help. They lacked a sense of humor and many appeared to have no idea that learning could and should be fun. When I went to the university, I found teachers who were encouraging, kind, patient and enthusiastic. These qualities made me want to go many extra miles to impress them at all if I could. These were people who enjoyed helping students accomplish their objective. Of course, most of the guys that influenced me came from the tech area. When I was in grad school I remember this one professor was fun because he would show up in jeans and tennis shoes. He drove an RX7 and was always trying to build houses on the side and was just a cool guy. He wasn't trying to put on any fronts. He was a full tenured faculty

PhD, but just as common as anybody when you talked to him, never rude, angry or condescending; he was more like David Letterman or Johnny Carson, a very funny guy who was bright, insightful and fun to be around.

Between his Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, Erickson had a stint as a high school teacher in a program aimed to help underserved students. He did not enjoy it because the students made it clear they did not want to be there. In those days, Erickson was paid around ten thousand dollars a year, so he decided to go back to college and get a Master's in education. By then, most of the courses were theoretical and focused on curriculum and evaluation. However, a course in computer aided design with a weak version of CAD captured his interest because it was hands-on. This experience led to his focus on CAD and his passion for hand-on applied learning opportunities. Coincidentally, a friend from grad school asked Erickson to apply for a position at his current campus, but while Erickson was attracted to teaching those who really wanted to learn, given his previous salary as a teacher, he chose to go into industry. Despite getting more money, the rewards were few, so Erickson wound up taking the same community college teaching position he has today.

> The management can drive companies right down the tubes. I was working at a plastics division thinking I am making 24,000 a year and this is good; I can build on this. But I would see day by day that the place was going under. It was going under because they had bad, bad, management. So I got tired of trying to do well at a place where there were few rewards for good work and wanted to teach again. I missed it. Anyway, I'm glad it happened that way and I got to come here.

Since his arrival at the rural extension campus over twenty years ago, Erickson has seen his institution change from a college that shared facilities with another college, to the building of addition, and finally a brand new campus. Growth in his area is also measured by galloping advances made in technology and the changes needed to put real-world computers and software in to the hands of students entering the job market.

> But CAD has really evolved at such an unimaginable rate since then and we do things now that we could only dream of in the days I started. To translate this into the community college setting, the technology allows me to bring in real life examples and get my students to draw them. For example, I have my students draw a '69 Corvette. This is very odd—there is not a straight line anywhere there—but what guy, and 99% of my students give or take are guys, would not know a corvette? So I will have them create all those surfaces and build this car and they can put rims and tires and we create solid bumpers and all that kind of thing. And I will always pose a question to them: How do you think they did that? When they draw an older car I ask them things like how do you define a round swoopy fender like that? How do you define a strange hood like that? How do you draw bulbous wavy forms like that? The students have really good time with it. I have a model of a '67 GTO, so in one of my first surfacing labs I have them create the hood scoop for it and boy, do they love that. And it ends up looking like exactly what it's supposed to be. I have to say that it is still fun and I enjoy it after all these years. And I

always tell them that it is a form of communication and if you have a great idea, there is no better way to communicate than a database in CAD.

Although some colleagues prefer leaving the students to fend for themselves in the lab after the lecture, Erickson is annoyed by those who retreat to their offices claiming that assisting students in the lab is akin to babysitting. Erickson sees continual assistance to his students at all stages of their learning as a necessity to their growth and that he is paid well for this task. Another issue is the diversity of learners. Some of the day students fresh out of high school have a difficult time focusing on his lecture without beginning an application, while many of the returning students in the evening need additional encouragement or have not had direct experience with the new technology. All of the diverse learning needs in the classroom cannot be expected to learn from manuals. Further, Erickson says that many of the choices in how we meet the needs of all community college learners should be determined by common sense rather than an instructor with a punitive personality:

> You might want to refer to a manual now and then if there is something specific that you need to know how to do, but I wouldn't expect people to say this is what I have to learn and I have to learn it out of manuals. I hate having to learn that way. I wish there was somebody who could teach me all the stuff before I teach it but there's really not. So to me I like to teach it the way I wish that I could be taught. But you know it's not a matter of all those ridiculous things as should I have so many F's in my class, should I flunk this person because he is two minutes late. Come on. Common sense makes it perfectly obvious that is not what you should do.

I talked to a guy at another community college and he was taking the same rapid code typing seminar that I was and I'll never forget it. He told me that yeah I teach this machining class and I tell them by god they better be here at 5:00 or I am closing that door and I don't care if they are one minute late, I don't care if they are ten seconds late. If they miss the 5:00 mark, I close the door and I move on without them and they are out of that class and I am not letting them in. I was thinking are you really doing everybody a big favor there? Honestly, these are probably people who just scrambled around trying to find a babysitter so they can come to class so they could better themselves. You know, what good do you think you are doing closing this door at 5:00? We all like people who are punctual, and I understand that, but to wield your power in that manner—that's self serving, I think. I mean, personally, my classes are pretty small, and I don't mind if I have to repeat something because someone came in late or something. I don't care. It is what I do. I get paid to do that. But some people just have this lack of common sense and they just don't want to bend.

Erickson prefers using the lab setting for both lecture and lab and likes to get students focused on his demonstration of a task and asking questions right away. His eyes light up talking about his students and their discussions, saying that they have reshaped his beliefs about learning and the role of the community college.

They are, as a whole, good people who have found the motivation to do better in life, and more often than not, they have to do it amidst the many

> difficulties and obstacles that life offers. Work, overtime, swing shifts, child care, elderly parent care. You name it. I've taught at high schools, the university where I was a graduate student, and this institution, and the commitment level of the student is higher here than anywhere else, hands-down. In a way, I feel that many of my students have found themselves trapped and limited, but I can be instrumental in helping them find their way out. I now believe that I am very fortunate to teach here. The biggest advantage of teaching at a community college, in my opinion, is that I do not have to publish in order to keep my job. I vividly remember a time at my university where profs disappeared for weeks at a time so they could hide out and try to get an article published. In the meantime, the teaching they should have been doing fell on the shoulders of some poor graduate assistant who really didn't have the background but couldn't say no.

Erickson is no stranger to the belief systems of those who do not see the strength of community colleges. He thinks that much of the negativity comes from those who are in an age group that had little or no connection with community or technical colleges. Doug Erickson graduated high school in the mid-seventies when technical and community colleges near him were still new. Most of his classmates went to four-year schools, while those who did attend community colleges did not finish or did not use their Associate's degrees in their fields. He thinks that these problems leaves too small of a constituency. Those with Bachelor's degrees do not really know what community colleges do. They only know, as Erickson puts it,

> ...that a bachelor's degree beats an Associate's degree. In my opinion, that gives people the right to look down upon community colleges regardless of the fact that they don't fully understand the hands-on technical experiences that are provided by the two year college. Also, since tuition is just a fraction of most universities, I think a lot of people believe they are getting something better because they are paying so much more. Yes, I'll agree that a bachelor's will usually beat an associate's degree, but not without mentioning that there are quite a few worthless bachelor's degrees out there, while most associate's degrees were designed to give the graduate immediate employment opportunities. Do these perceptions affect the culture? Probably. But on this campus or in these classrooms, people here have a better understanding of what we're all about. In fact, I've had many engineers take one or more of my CAD classes to help them with their jobs. Why? Because their schooling was wither too long ago, or it focused more on theory than on practical hands-on.

While some of his students' success rides on the future of the economy and the picture has not been quite as bright as in the past for graduates of his program, Doug Erickson remains positive about their future. Co-ops and placement are strong and features such as the two-plus-two articulation agreements with universities and special events attracting prospective students and employers are working in terms of retention and building support for CAD related programs.

Erickson also expresses pleasure when describing the students who have returned from other trades, especially those displaced workers retraining due to on-the-job

injuries. For example, an electrical lineman fell and hurt his back, but received a degree in CAD and he now works at a company around the corner from his home. A worker who had a high-stress job building engines had a heart attack. With his community college degree he became a senior mold designer with a nationally-known manufacturer. One of Erickson's co-op students was so delighted that his position led to a full-time position with the company that he treated Erickson to dinner. A younger student completing a two-plus-two program became an engineer for an international automobile company, and another student came back and has joined their faculty. Erickson has an endless supply of these kinds of examples from student successes over the years, but his personal definition is based on concern, connection, and common sense:

> I simply see myself as a professor who loves to teach, enjoys the students, and believes in the program as well as the mission of the community college. Other than that, I hope I am perceived as a faculty member who will go the extra mile. In the local area industry I hope I am perceived as a specialist in Computer Aided design who takes pride in preparing students to do an excellent job when they get out there.

Amar Nabhan

The controversial middle-eastern scholar Edward Said remarked, "Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks march against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each

other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. But for that wider kind of perception, we need time, patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction" (par 27, 2003). Said, whose book, *On Orientalism*, both changed and polarized anthropology, died in 2003. He often wrote examinations of the west's view of Arabs, exposing how stereotypical views of Arabs rested on the foundation that many of the books and movies depicting the Middle East were created by people who had not been to the east nor knew much about Arabs or their culture. These images have emotional resonance and cache when it comes to the way we communicate in a post 9-11 society layered by fear and mistrust. Despite the enormous learning potential of a digitally connected, blogging, information-immediate environment, we have to make thoughtful choices about what we are accessing. The portals may have opened, but we should remember we still take what we know of ourselves on the trip.

While Amar Nabhan, Director of his campus's Honors Program and Professor of Anthropology, is past the mid-career post, his intensity and energy reminds one of a cross between a starving artist and a member of a think tank sharing his views on C-Span. His clothing is *GQ* black; he stands tall and sits regally. His eyes change from an open warm brown to a sharp flinty squint when he speaks about some of the conflicts he has squared against. Yet, he softens as he discusses how crazy life got with his recent move to another house during the beginning of the semester and trying to juggle family responsibilities with the many meetings demanded by his job. With his PDA plugged into the computer, and journals, newspapers and scholarship notices neatly piled on an adjoining table in his

tiled sixties-modern office, Nabhan begins to talk about the meaning he makes of his life: his journey as an anthropologist, avid writer and reader of both journalism and fiction, and most of all, his convictions about the importance of thinking critically and creating room for dialogue and learning from others' perspectives.

He says he persistently asks students questions about what they think they know and is determined to provide two forms of mentorship based on these conversations. First, he wants students to realize that their conception of themselves and their future can be bigger than they think, and secondly, learning to think with an open mind and to test their assumptions is the key to realizing their potential. "I am constantly trying to figure out the world. I really don't have all the answers, but I am passionate about what I think I know."

Nabhan frankly admits his practice of mentoring and being a teacher and Honors Program Director is derived from personal history. He teaches at a large two-year ethnically diverse institution not far from where he grew up in an Arabic community. His family did not have many members with a college degree. While his intellectual talents were noticed at an early age and he was selected to attend the most prestigious public high schools in the city, he was pushed into engineering. Yet, his passions lay in philosophy and literature. The Vietnam War and the draft loomed large, yet, Nabhan says he was burned out and disenchanted with school by his senior year. Lacking good advising or career guidance, he wound up at the only university he had ever seen or knew anything about. It was not until his junior year that he learned how the hierarchy of universities worked. After comparing possible graduate school options, Nabhan wound up with a fully funded scholarship to a big ten university to study anthropology.

While he enjoyed the field, Nabhan calls himself a generalist as he savored history, philosophy and literature as well. Unlike his colleagues, he never saw anthropology as an end, simply as a means to study human behavior and human history. These wide interests led to a teaching position in Algiers and a government funded position at another community college, another position with Amnesty International, and a job as a research associate at a university. During this time Nabhan completed his dissertation on Arab Americans, a move that disenfranchised him from some colleagues who believed true anthropology meant that one had to study a culture overseas to be valid. Even though he had been abroad, he lacked assistance in finding an academic position, eventually alienating him from university life. When the opportunity to teach at his current community college arose, Nabhan was only too happy to take the job. His predecessor had retired, and he was left with the task of revitalizing and increasing enrollment in his college's anthropology program, and he succeeded, he thinks, largely because his interests were broad.

> What I wanted to do was make it interesting to people and you have to put yourself in their mindset. If I come in with my narrow interests and if I am an anthropologist thinking my area is the evolution of Neanderthals and the big debates that rack that area, and it is really a form of archeology or paleontology and while we do touch on that in the intro course, I am just going to be so focused and they have to know everything about kinship or this and that. I could do that but I know that they would be bored out of their minds. And they will never see why do they need to be bothered with these things. They are never going to remember most of it. For example,

we do part of the human evolution thing. Now most people drop that. They won't teach that. I can't drop that because if I drop that, I am doing a disservice to my students. Why? Because they have come in from all these city and suburban schools where the schooling is lousy anyway and they don't know anything about it. Evolution to them is a forbidden word because they are either for it because they hate churches or they are suspicious of it because of the churches or their religious denomination, so we are sending these people out into the 21st century and they are clueless and yet the rest of the world, the educated world, is clued in. I'm not doing anyone a service so the point I saw in teaching was to challenge people based on what they are bringing in...Because ultimately what anyone who got a decent education, what we all experienced was when that light came on in your head, you felt liberated from what you had dragged into that classroom. Prejudices, stereotypes, misinformation, falsehoods and maybe some things you knew like the sun rose in the east in the morning and set in the west but maybe you discovered that was an illusion anyway. Poetically it is nice, but it is an illusion. Half the things we are learning are counterintuitive to what we think we have been taught or have heard. And so being turned on to education is saying I want to really know. So I always thought my mission was to turn people on sufficiently and arm them with enough so they could find their way from there—at least to the next way station.

In terms of helping students to the next way station, Nabhan is staunchly in favor of helping students in or outside of the Honors Program develop bigger dreams for their lives via the opportunities that come from attending prestigious colleges. Nabhan pushes students at his institution to apply for scholarships.

> I learned through kind of really fortuitous things what higher academia was all about through connections that were really informal.
>
> Consequently, what I've realized that goes on in the community college is that they don't have a clue. They are like where I was and this has been my big guidepost in life. It is that our students are pretty much out of the elite educational system. They don't understand it. They don't know it. Or what they know about it is not very conducive to using the system to their advantage...but the point is that, and this is outside the classroom you might say, and it's in my role as honor's director, but what I have always done here is set up a system of mentoring and in transfer seminars where what we try to communicate to our students is knowledge and that set of networks and information that normally would accrue to students through their parents if they were professionals or through certain high schools which are very adept at sending a large number of their grads to ivy league schools or other schools.

Nabhan has developed a communication system that requires students in the Honors Program to review scholarship competitions via email and apply. The list of winners keeps growing and he shares this list so students see potential results. Last year, one of his mentees, a woman from Albania, won a "genius" award worth $90,000 over

three years. He has also had students place in the prestigious All USA national scholarship competition. He refers to these students with the sense of pride one hears from a parent and admits he gets really excited for them when something good happens. Their success is one of the biggest "perks" of teaching.

> We've been doing this and I have had Coca Cola and all sorts of scholarship possibilities that students learn about because we tell them look, here's how it's done. Figure it out and learn all about it and apply. I find that obviously some of the immigrants and some of the kids who are kind of from a middle class or semi-middle class but teetered academically can usually pull it together. They have enough drive to do it. Because there has to be a little drive there or you would never do it because it's a pain in the butt, filling out all those applications, right? So I talk about personal there, that's what I have done. I have always reflected back. I tried to take my own personal experiences and my 'how to' steps of awakening that I went through in life as I think back and I've tried to say alright, how can we communicate these things in a more formal, systematic way to our students.

Nabhan taught a full load of five anthropology courses when he began teaching at his institution, but he now teaches one section per semester. Because the students in the class are diverse and range in abilities, Nabhan does not favor disparaging student preparation. He thinks it is still an obligation to teach them from where they are. Even when students requested study sheets, Nabhan forces them to keep up with readings, lectures and class discussion by quizzing them every week rather than using a midterm

and final exam assessment. Students do not know whether questions from class discussion, assigned readings, or a mixture of both will appear. Although students can challenge him regarding the context of the questions, as long as most of them have understood what was asked, the questions stand as given. Students who lack the skills are encouraged to catch up to the other students in the class. Critical thinking is not an option; it is a requirement. Any point in the reading or lecture is open to question. He discourages those who accept the content of the course without skepticism.

Because the war in Iraq has been of great concern, Nabhan anticipates questions that may be asked by students, colleagues and community members and prepares handouts that address issues they may not have heard about in the mainstream media. These handouts are optional for students and are not part of the course content. He says while some give him blank stares or are unresponsive to his approaches, many class discussions are ignited and students tell him after how much they appreciate the opportunity to have a dialogue on a controversial issue.

> In the Middle East class, I have to deal with Arabic students, Muslim students and non-Arabic students. Some Arabic students think they know all the answers so they are half the problem. And the others feel they are left out because they don't have any clue to what we are talking about. So I am dealing with the stereotypes of this group and the presumptions of the other group. And I tell them from day one, my biggest dilemma is what you bring into the classroom because you bring in narrow views of this subject. The Arabic students need to realize that the Arab world is a huge place and the Middle East is a big, big, place. And it's got a long history.

> Well, they come from a little version of it where they traditionally did things one way and have only been told so much...So I am bursting their bubbles because they walk in with an idealized version of their community and themselves. I'm trying to show the Muslims that Islam is much, much broader than they think it is. I am trying to show the non-Muslims in the class that Islam is as broad as it is and its faith. The image has been high jacked by proponents all over the place including our media. For example, we might hear that there is no singing and dancing in Islam. And then I show them a movie of Sufis and that's all they do is sing and dance. Are those people less devout than...well you know...less devout than you? They seem to be pretty devout to me. They are the ones who have always brought converts in Islam.

In terms of student success, Nabhan says he has had a rash of students lately who have to make appointments that conflict with his class. On the other hand, he believes overall, the power to succeed resides in the motivation of the student and has seen success come from overcoming all kinds of handicaps, immigrants and others. To illustrate, he cites examples of mothers returning to school yet also working 50-hour weeks.

> It's like you are climbing a certain kind of mountain. It's rugged and has sharp edges here and in other places. It is a different face you are climbing—higher but some parts are easier. It is the peculiar challenge of the face and that challenge keeps getting more intense because I think everyone says that every year they seem to get worse in their preparation

> for coming to college. So it's a challenge and you want to despair and there is a danger of falling into that circle, which is inevitably filled with colleagues who will say well you know they are all dumb asses and if they were smarter, I could do my job. Well no, wait a minute. Your job is to deal with this mess that is in your classroom. And what I mean by mess is not the students, but the mess of unequal educational backgrounds, linguistic and grammatical abilities, reading comprehension abilities and so on. They have been thrown together by open enrollment, but I have heard faculty at the four-year institutions complaining about the same thing.

Amar Nabhan believes that when all is said and done, thinking and dialogue result in real knowledge—not just the regurgitation of facts, but learning to deal with ideas that disrupt your way of looking at the world. He says he tries to drop a "bomb" and wants the students to lob it back, and they often do. As a result, he thinks he has learned a great deal from them as a result of the surprises of class discussion:

> You can teach people the basic facts but I don't think that's where the quarrel is. As a good teacher, I would say, a teacher is a person who listens and I do an awful lot of talking, but what I mean by listening is that you listen with your heart and say you could be wrong.

CHAPTER V

PROLOGUE: MIN(D)ING INTERPRETATIONS

Every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.— Albert Einstein

Like all dissertations, the core of each chapter began with an idea born from the scholar's theory, practice, and experience. I added layers of research assumptions that were constantly examined, refuted, reviled, and revised in an attempt to make sense of what comprises a world in education even the "best" community college teachers find paradoxical. Working with the research subjects to learn more about their lived experiences and what keeps them so vitally connected to what they do, gave me the opportunity to learn directly from those who share my passion. Given my study and belief in what can be learned through the many avenues explored via qualitative methods, I most heartily embrace and support this work. There are so many stories to be told, and so much to be learned if you can only teach yourself how to listen. Many times, I was overwhelmed by the task, and many times I became impatient with the process. Fortunately, the voices of the exemplar subjects, the human hearts of the study, kept the work alive so I could make the journey.

I confess the three research questions guiding this dissertation have led me to deep consideration and appreciation for "new" questions that connect to what I have already asked. The stories in Chapter IV reflect that the explorations and discoveries

made by the research subjects is a way of learning how to teach that is never complete. All of them were continually engaged in professional change and in general, were comfortable with adapting their practice over time to new students and situations. As their narratives demonstrate, their teaching mirrors the context in which it takes place. While their words reflect how much they care about what they do, the work is far from "perfect." Consequently, if we are interested in learning about how to improve teaching by reading about "excellent" teachers, it seems reasonable to consider that we may need to reexamine some of our ideas about what it means to be good in the first place. Sure, many readers would agree that enthusiasm and knowledge of the subject, for example, sound like important measures of quality, but neither may be evident in some of the scenarios I wrote about in the previous chapter. So who is a good teacher? What is good teaching? What criteria do we use to guide our interpretations? In addition to inviting readers to examine their own assumptions about the layers enveloping good teaching in light of the research questions previously posed, I have added these questions as a preface regarding the implications of theory and practice in teaching and higher education discussed later in the chapter.

What follows here seems absurdly simple at the surface level, but as a frame to this final chapter may be useful. I am, however, disturbed why it may be so complicated to explore these questions I have just asked. There are inherent traps people set for themselves when they become distracted by their interpretations of policies, barriers, and miscommunication. From my own experiences, the simple becomes complicated when we come up with more reasons to say why not than to keep asking the question why and see what happens when we listen.

The exemplars in Chapter IV are as dynamic in their practice as they are diverse. All of their stories show the unique paths each of them continues to take as they make their journey. Yet there are common threads, too. Readers can point to characteristics that appear to underlie each teacher in the chapter: Brad Richard's interest in writing as a medium for growth, Ethan Jameson's fascination with solving problems, or Roni Franson-Lewis' belief in raising expectations to achieve quality serve as illustrations. Despite such individuality, their narratives reflect scenarios familiar to many in higher education. Teachers deemed "excellent" by students and campus leaders alike still confront the same classroom dilemmas as everyone else, so the "Experiences of the Excellent," should have resonating power for all of us. Embedded in the ways they share their practice, and discussed later in this chapter, we may also find other ideas for thinking and talking about college teaching and learning that will help focus attention on supporting teachers rather than just saying why they need to teach better.

Susan Wilcox, who tells her own professional development story in "Becoming a Faculty Developer," (2005) says that there are realizations over time about faculty teaching practices and how they might want to share it. The central question she explores with faculty and encourages them to write about in professional development sessions is "Who are you as educators, and how does your practice reflect that commitment and identity?" This essential question regarding authenticity may be asked of education majors and graduate students, but is often cast aside once teachers enter the profession, becoming obscured by other demands, many of which are evident in the research subjects' stories. Given the task of teaching those who are often under-prepared and underserved, the essential question might become: can you keep up and not lose heart?

The authentic voices of the exemplars reveal that while the primary answer is *yes, positively,* there are also many less bright and shiny moments that speak otherwise.

David Hansen (1995) addresses some of these elements of authenticity in *The Call to Teach*, noting that the individual teacher is not simply a product of the social contexts that affect him or her. His in-depth description of several teachers shows vastly different styles and philosophies underlying the work of his subjects, their ability to be appropriately self-critical, and the connection and commitment they have to their students. Viewing teaching as vocation and service, Hansen warns readers not to romanticize the vocation or see the teachers as heroes, but says through his experiences during his career of meeting thousands of teachers, their dedication to students and wanting to be better teachers were remarkable themes. Teachers he found to express negativity appeared to be poorly prepared or overcome by the demands of their work. One possible consideration here might be that "good" and "bad" teaching are framed by how *we interpret* the demeanors, behaviors, and self-concepts teachers have of themselves and their students. Hansen points out that most, if not all, teachers care and want to teach well. If this observation contains the grains of truth, and the majority of teachers want to succeed, the path should be one that fosters the teacher's sense of self and discovery about what he or she is learning about the convergence of theory and practice over time.

Belle hooks, who continues to advocate the power of the spirit to heal and invigorate all human discourse, recalls some of her earlier experiences as a student in the academy were negative, denying the whole person (1998, 2006). Citing the work of

liberatory educator Paulo Friere and Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh among her "exemplary" teachers, hooks views the pedagogical rooted in nurturing the souls of students:

> To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for all our students is essential of we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (1998, p.23).

But who cares for the souls of the teachers, and are they nourished so they continue to learn about themselves and their teaching practice? In "Images, Transformative Learning and the Work of the Soul" (2001), John Dirkx believes that the negative frames we derive from difficult experiences may be reinterpreted as creative possibilities. Although teaching and learning situations are often fraught with what appear to be obstacles, looking beneath them, we may see the unconscious urges and emotions of our personal experiences with which we grappled during much earlier learning experiences. Dirkx (2001) writes, "...what adults learn is fundamentally grounded in the way they think about themselves and their worlds, opening possibilities for transformation and creating dramatic shifts in one's consciousness" (p.15). Teachers are encouraged to experiment with their own struggles and cues. If learners are encouraged to explore their emotions and the meanings of these emotions as personal, symbolic images, they may emerge from the process with a stronger sense of self. While a great deal has been said about an interest in shifting our paradigm to focus more on

learning, thinking through the teacher's quest to learn and the kind of experimentation Dirkx suggests needs further consideration.

In the larger sense, we are all teachers and learners in the same body, and we are all engaged in the process of figuring out what it means to live in the worlds we inhabit. The famous scholar Joseph Campbell, celebrated in the popular Bill Moyers' series and book, *The Power of Myth* (1991) says during one of the interviews that he has never met an "ordinary" man, woman, or child, and that each of us has the potential for understanding and illuminating the essence of who we are, and in so doing, expressing the eternal as it is revealed by our personal experience. "Life is without meaning. You bring the meaning to it...being alive is the meaning" (Reflections of the Art of Living, 1991, p.16). The art of being alive, then, is both a conscious and unconscious interplay of how each one of us chooses to pay attention to our inner and outer worlds.

However, it is difficult to "allow" the presence of our personal worlds and symbols no matter how rich they are, perhaps because they are so very personal and our "literal" higher education experiences make it clear that our professional selves are charged with taking care of business. How many teachers and students have wondered what the "other" was thinking during the course of a lecture or discussion? In addition to random thoughts about meetings, classes, bills and what we were having for dinner, were we imagining what we were really like as learners? Were any of us afraid, excited or inspired? How could those responses have affected our learning and perhaps changed what was going on in that class? Although these are rhetorical questions, concerns about the level of engagement in higher education continue to increase (Botstein, 2005). Perhaps some of these problems are due to creating a limited playing field in the

classroom where one side teaches, the other side learns, and there is little discourse that accounts for any other mental events that occur along the way.

What else might be happening? How each of us, teacher, learner, and reader "figures it out," is the journey we take, and Campbell says, "You become mature when you become the authority for your own life" (*Reflections on the Art of Living*, 1991, p. 162). He shares a story from the King Arthur legends, where the knights all enter a forest by themselves with only their inner guides to lead the way. Each returns from his quest with a singular gift that has not been seen before. During their adventure, the only mistakes occur when they attempt to follow another's path. Campbell connects this insight to the work of Carl Jung, pointing out that each life contains the completion of a whole self, so as we carry on with our individual lives, we are also fulfilling our own destiny by connecting with life itself. The difficulty of expressing our meanings more simply and authentically is because as we realize who we are, we also see that others may not be as appreciative of authenticity and our gifts.

Campbell (*Reflections*, 1991) suggests that in this context we have three choices. We can stay on a metaphorical level, in the woods, so to speak, and cut ourselves off from sharing our gifts with our communities; we can use what we learned of ourselves and deliver our gifts aimed to give others what they want; or we can carefully give a little of what we have learned to those who might be ready to receive it. These choices are made in each moment and if we think about them in terms of how they play out in classrooms, conferences, committees, and communities, illustrate how hard it is to help ourselves and each other.

One possible way to build bridges between the kind of choices and professional settings mentioned here might be to consider that choices and settings appear to be different, but they are made and inhabited by a person. As Parker Palmer voices, "Who is the self that teaches?" (1998, p.7). As I pointed out in the Literature Review, Palmer observes, reflects, and narrates his experiences as a teacher and learner in the same body. His analysis does not delineate between his teaching and his reflections of other teachers and the work. He believes teaching reflects the essence Campbell and others are talking about, the connectedness and interplay of the soul: "In the undivided self, every major thread of one's life experience is honored, creating a weave of such coherence and strength that it can hold students and subject as well as self" (p.15). This is not to say, as I pointed out earlier, everything is a golden moment by any means. Palmer shares his own experiences that most colleagues would find dismal, including a few of his own incarnations of our favorite everyman, THE PROVERBIAL STUDENT FROM HELL and THOSE YOUNG WOMEN WHO WILL NOT STOP TALKING MAKING IT CLEAR THEY HAVE NO INTEREST IN YOUR SUBJECT MATTER EVEN AFTER YOU TALK TO THEM NICELY.

Palmer (1998) advocates the need to talk about these events and our reactions to them in a safe, connected environment and calls this space the community of truth. From discussions I have heard, I think we are still busy arguing positions about our interpretations of "good' and "bad" teaching, rather than participating in the kind of listening that might lead to a discourse that builds instead of refutes. The following artistic example offers readers an account of narrative truth that is told outside of the kind

of safety Palmer desires. The reality is that life is not always safe, yet we create safe space when we risk telling our truths authentically and defer from judgment.

...In the paper

In the eclipse

In every line

In every color

In every joy

In my chest

Outside, inside

In the inkstand---in the difficulties of writing

In the wonder of my eyes,

In the last

Lines of the sun (the sun has no lines)

In

Everything. To say everything is stupid and magnificent.

This poetic fragment comes from *I Painted My Own Reality*, a small book (Kahlo, n.d) excerpting journal entries and commenting on the legendary artist and activist Frida Kahlo, whose work came to world attention through her mentor and husband, Diego Rivera. The intersections connecting her art and life offer an experience driven by self: unique, frightening, intense, and deeply evocative. Injured early in life as a bus passenger, Kahlo spent months, even years, throughout her life bedridden and in pain, emotionally and physically, losing her leg and eventually her life due to the accident. Yet she refused to be a prisoner and used her injury as the root of her artistic

experience. She had a mirror attached to the canopy of her bed so she could paint herself as subject. In one self portrait Frida lies covered and sleeping in her bed while a smiling skeleton decorated with flowers lies in a similar position on top of the canopy. Another painting shows a nude, miscarrying Frida on a hospital bed, attached by an umbilical cord to two disturbing representations floating above her. One is her broken midsection perched on a stand; the other a male fetus. Many photographs show her using mirrors in execution of her art, and this technique provides insight into the dance of personal metaphor and social landscape comprising Kahlo's art and life. These images form and inform her life story, the threads of a narrative she never hid from the public, no matter how intensely she suffered.

What she saw was what she painted, wrote and said was her being, her undivided self. This version, an interpretation created and controlled by the artist, diminishes our evaluative judgments and permits a more holistic view. Frida Kahlo's life and art punctuate a story many often choose to see as the stuff of extremes and drama, but we could see another possible element that could be connected to considering "the self that teaches." Besides the two paintings described, many other paintings and photographs show a confident, calm Frida, bordered by bright flowers and exotic birds. As John Dirkx points out in "After the Burning Bush: Transformative Learning as Imaginative Engagement with Everyday Experience," (2000) our days are filled with tasks that are boring as well as containing the moments of turmoil; they cohabit in each of us and unify experience. In one letter Frida writes:

> Since I came back from New York I have painted about twelve small paintings, all small and unimportant, with the same personal subjects that

only appeal to myself and nobody else. I send four or five of them to a gallery here in Mexico, the University gallery, which is a small and rotten place, but the only one which admits any kind of stuff, so I send them there without any enthusiasm, four or five people told me they were swell, the rest think they are too crazy. (Kahlo, n.d. p.40)

Selma Wasserman's *This Teaching Life: How I Taught Myself to Teach*, (2004) shows many such "everydays." She points out that effective, confident teachers are open about assessing their practice and take responsibility for what they are learning as they work with students. It is okay to make mistakes, and teaching is difficult no matter how long one has been engaged in the work. Like Parker Palmer, her work does not differentiate between theory and practice, and she records her work in the classroom and with other teachers over a long period of time. Further, like Palmer, all is not "good."

How many times did I search within myself to consider if what I was doing was right? Was enough? How many times did I contemplate alternative plans? How many alternative plans did I try? But never, not for a moment, did I give up my belief in an approach in the children's right to choose, to develop autonomy, thoughtfulness, caring for one another, and emotional health. I knew that what I was doing was right, but I had no idea it would take so long in coming to fruition, and I would feel so defeated in the struggle. (2004, p. 105)

Wasserman admits that it is hard for teachers to give up their need for control, and perhaps this also has something to do with the differences of opinion about the quality of teaching in higher education. She suggests growth can be achieved by careful self

examination of one's self in relation to his or her sense control issues and achieving an authentic sense of personal power. The rewards of the task are inherent in a teacher's willingness to investigate the core of who he or she is: "That is quite a simple paradigm for a lifetime of serious study, for giving up behaviors that are no longer productive and replacing them with a new set of behaviors that are more in accord with one's personal values and with who we really want to be" (2004, p. 121).

Can teachers engage in this work in a way that replenishes their sense of self and connect their experiences, "good," and "bad," to a practice that nourishes their students and workplaces? One opportunity for connected learning in the authentic context of the narrative account of everyday life is discussed by researchers at Valencia Community College (Lloyd, Pfahl, & Castellano, 2000). A group of faculty and administrators was encouraged to learn how to tell, share, and interpret their stories as a way to transcend versions of their organizations that may have blocked their growth. In their findings, the researchers point out that the stories' meaning and how they were shared and interpreted by participants lies in the stories themselves: "Each story provides a context for the others. Through the process I discovered that the one analytical key to unlocking the meaning of the data is to continually interpret narrative flow as it happens, moving from one story to another in much the same way as a painter changes colors on a brush. The stories are there; the artist to foster their emergence from the interview text" (2000, p. 39). In this sense, by talking about what is happening in our own ways and sharing our experiences in the context of stories told by our colleagues, we may find new paths, new questions and take heart in the authentic processing of experience rather than arguing sides.

It has been my intention throughout this research to learn more about teaching from teachers and to avoid interpretations that might filter impressions rather than invite the reader into their lives. I hope also, the discussion here leads us into sharing more of who we are and listening to each other's realities instead of using our interpretations as weapons. Finally, although the teachers in the dissertation are surely exemplars and helpful examples, they would be the first to concede how hard it is to teach well, reputation or not. Creating our definitions should lead to dialogue, and developing our narratives may help us see ourselves as part of a bigger, richer, and more synergistic picture.

Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

> My own reasons for teaching are relatively straightforward. I was a community college student; not only did I benefit from the experience, but also my life has been altogether shaped by it....I do not know how many instructors began as I did, a student in the very community college where I now work. However, students are still the reason so many choose to teach in this setting....Although teaching has its challenges, it also brings significant rewards. If I learned much as a student, I have learned even more as a teacher. Students have not only offered me fresh insight and

> nuances into the subjects I love, they have taught me about myself as a person. (Stewart, 2004, p. 1)

The opening of Deborah Stewart's book *Effective Teaching: A Guide for Community College Instructors* (2004) shares her story, one that begins as a child of a single parent and the first to attend college. At first, so many barriers appeared that Stewart delayed college, but once she began her community college instructors encouraged and supported her entrance to academic life. Currently a Dean at the same college, Stewart discussed asking faculty what their reasons were for teaching there. In addition to citing how much they wrote about how they enjoyed providing positive learning experiences for students and feeling connected to them, they also said they wanted to make a difference, "even a small one, in someone's life. They also wrote about students who inspired them to be the best kinds of teachers, ones who teach with passion and empathy, who feel bolstered in even the most difficult circumstances by their students' trust" (2004, pp.1-2).

Stewart's comments in both cases point to the recursive relationship evident in my subjects' stories, linking past and present experiences of teachers and students. The faculty I studied harnessed past experiences as students with their teachers, and bridged these moments, shaping their present professional relationships and practices. Thus, Nicastro's assertion, from Chapter IV's introduction, stating the importance of learning to teach from who you are, shows the importance of autobiography as evidenced in teacher education literature (Pratt, 1998; Taylor, 1990; Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole, 1999). Further, in the case of this study, the stories point to a way "to be" a teacher that just "is." Perhaps Nicastro's motto does not really need to be learned so much as lived; however, it

was used to preface the exemplar narratives in the previous chapter as a way to frame teaching via the essence of whom the teacher is rather than what is taught.

In addition to learning about the relationship between who the teacher is and how he or she understands teaching, there is the matter of where and how. As a researcher, I was interested in how my subjects and their teaching might be affected by the challenges presented by the community college context. For example, I pointed out earlier in this study, especially in the Review of the Literature, that the preponderance of literature about institutional weaknesses (Cohen and Brawer, 1996; Eaton, 1994; McGrath and Spear, 1991) and teaching and social inequities (Grubb, 1999; Rhodes and Valadez, 1999; Zwerling, 1976) may form the basis of people's perceptions and assumptions. In light of the quandary presented to the teaching mission, as a community college faculty member, I wondered how the best community college teachers took on the serious task of addressing these gaps.

Therefore, the main question for my research was grounded in my interest in going straight to community college faculty to ask them. Given the classroom difficulties represented in the literature and experiences discussed by colleagues, my own included, I wanted to find out about teaching from those with reputations for being among the best. My assumption was that by listening to their stories in depth, patterns might emerge to enrich the overall picture of teaching and learning in today's two year college. In addition to the comments in the Prologue about the relationship between teaching, learning and professional development questions and concerns, the following presentation offers further explanation of the process I used to analyze their interviews, a discussion of the

themes that emerged from the analysis, and some implications for future research and practice.

Themes of the Research Subjects

> *Acquire new knowledge whilst thinking over the old, and you may become a teacher of others.—Confucius*

Being: An Iterative Path Bridging Past and Present Stories of Learning

While subjects in this study were focused on discussing interview questions in terms of the present, their responses showed that memories of who they were and how they thought about their own learning have greatly influenced their practice. Although Lawler (2003) has pointed out that teachers do not always have the time to reflect on their own learning, the exemplars in this study often discussed how their current teaching and learning modalities were based on perceptions of their own learning curves in K-12 and college. In terms of the present, all of them said that they continue to learn from their students and that is what informs and stimulates their teaching.

As a researcher and a community college colleague, I also observed that the subjects' sense of who they were did not become threatened by not being good at something or not knowing something, even if it took a long period of time to develop proficiency. Their stories of learning show that what it means to "be" an exemplar develops throughout one's life; the participants in this study confirm that interested faculty can get better no matter how long they teach. For example, Brad Richards and

Pam Nichols both discussed how they strove to improve their writing weaknesses and continually use technology and new techniques as part of their practice. In other narratives, acceptance or perseverance led to success. Ethan Jameson's account showed that he was not aware of his better sense of fit as a community college teacher at first, while Doug Erickson continually applies himself to learning new software and technology applications every semester.

Despite very different people and very different approaches in the classroom, the unifying characteristic appeared to do with the exemplars' continual interest in improvement as a natural extension of their "being." Based on their interviews, it was impossible to separate teacher from technique or teacher from the person. As a researcher, I had a sense from our interviews and their data that what I saw was what everyone got: students, colleagues, partners, kids and neighbors. Given concerns about the need for community college faculty to develop a distinct professional culture and role as noted in the Literature Review (Cohen and Brawer, 1996; Martí, Kutnowski, and Gray, 2004), the participants in this study, identified by their campus leaders as exemplars, are apparently great teachers but "lack" in this area, unless stakeholders might like to redefine that image.

Again, the participants' memories as past learners were useful in extracting ways to communicate the steps they had taken as students to their present students. A mini-lesson, handout, or a tool could be developed from the exemplar's own learning experience. Perhaps because of the role their own pasts continue to play, they are able to connect or bridge their stories with those of their students and make a stronger connection than others teachers might. Their comfort with learning from both the failures and

successes of the past may also be why their narratives showed an ability to take risks, collaborate and even and confront, such as the cases of Roni Franson-Lewis and Amar Nabhan demonstrate.

Being What Others Think You Should

To some, both the notion that life is the process of learning about yourself and the sage advice "just be yourself," are clichés. However, I think faculty are not given the chance to address matters of identity and how notions of self inform their practice very often and may affect a person's level of comfort with being him or her self in an institution. Even though this study has pointed out that students and faculty remember their teachers in terms of who they were and how inspiring they were rather than their teaching techniques, little accord is given the teachers and the story they bring to the classroom in a higher education setting. Do hiring committees, department chairs, deans and mentors assume that all teachers have a fundamental knowledge of who they are and how this sense of self enters their practice? Most likely, they are not concerned or may be interested only in how well the faculty member "knows" his or her subject matter. The narratives of the exemplars offer ways to see how cooperating with the institution but resisting others' definitions of "to be," may produce both the resilience and stellar teaching practices that are ultimately vital to a community college's health and well-being.

While literature shows that faculty are socialized in terms of institutional role (Cohen and Brawer, 1996; Fugate and Amey, 2000), notions about identity and self are

often seen as tertiary concerns (Brookfield, 1995). Cohen and Brawer published *Confronting Identity: The Community College Instructor* in 1972 and the book strongly argues that community college faculty must understand the "to be" question so that they can make better choices about their teaching practice and understand how their perceptions about themselves parallel the community college's quest for identity in the larger sense: "If the college has being, identity, ethos, independent existence—then it must be seen in terms of the people who operate in it, contribute to it, draw satisfaction from it, and who consequently, become the institution itself" (p.8).

Cohen and Brawer (1972) go further in the book and contend that given their status at that time, both junior college and faculty identity are "inchoate" (p.12), although current literature also suggests that two-year colleges either do not know enough about what they are or are too many things (Garland, 1994). I would suggest that this lack of clear connection between organization and a faculty member's personal sense of being may account for some of the reason why fragmentation and isolation *are* evident topics in research on teaching and on community college teaching in particular. As Parker Palmer (1998) has pointed out, teachers can even use the academic freedom card to keep an office or classroom door closed. Other researchers (Alfred and Linder, 1992; Kort, 1992) have said that lack of engagement by community college faculty is due to not knowing much about how to teach, perpetuating isolationism. However, their suggestion is not to learn more about how faculty see themselves and the teaching stories they bring to their campus, but some critics see something else: unprofessional faculty in an unprofessional culture, a response that according to Spear, Seymour and McGrath (1992) amounts to faculty hiding out:

> Communally, community college faculty inevitably form as a confederacy of equals—equally disconnected from their original disciplines, equally fearful of atrophying, and equally afraid of being found out. What passes for professional development activities—various settings in which faculty take turns talking, or 'collaborating,' 'valuing' one another (since deep down hey know no one else does [authors' aside]) swapping suspicious claims to expertise along with anecdotes and reassurances—these kinds of activities attempt to counter the social and affective aspects of isolation and disconnection but ignore the cultural and intellectual, the professional aspects. (p.27)

This sentiment may be communicated to faculty, exemplars or not, and I would argue that this philosophy is judgmental at least, harmful or alienating at worst. Yet, teachers are continually challenged in terms of the "to be" question. They are urged, even threatened to become more than what they were when they started their careers. Stakeholders assume they will understand and adapt to new pedagogies, reward systems, learning styles, and assessment models (Miller, 1997). Those who express negativity or unease are often thought to be unenthusiastic, Luddites, or both. If fragmentation and isolation are not results, I might suggest that stress may well be.

However, the exemplars represented in this study were able to take experiences most would find daunting and better left forgotten and use them as tools for learning and change. When exemplars told stories of negative experiences from their college days where they were either criticized, ignored, or faced challenging life changes, it was

apparent that these incidents had a galvanizing effect rather than a diminishing one. Subjects reported they became even clearer about who they were and what they wanted, usually not all at once during one critical incident as some have researched (Schöen, 1983). Rather, their notions about who they were and what kind of teachers they wanted to be were not affected by others' perceptions. Their memories of who they were formed another narrative. Recollections reflected not only acceptance but growth--decisions about how to use what they were struggling with and make it a teaching tool that could be adapted in numerous ways no matter what new technology, pedagogy, or policy showed up.

The narratives in Chapter IV also show examples of faculty who independently seek out opportunities for professional development and lifelong learning. The data showed they are comfortable with who they are at their institutions and do not wait for orientation or contractually required in-service days for professional development. Their interview data pointed to self-selection of many different opportunities: conferences, community service, consulting in business and industry, publication and constant travel being a norm for this group. Potential implications for professional development in light of these findings will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Bridging the Past and Present: Helping Students with the "To Be" Question

As noted in the previous section, the participants showed that their growth came from both "positive" and "negative" school experiences, so this group may demonstrate the importance of resilience—the choices learners make in the face of support and

apparent opposition. In terms of bridging past and present experiences, especially in terms of what it means to be an exemplar in a community college, the potentially negative moments of learning may have helped the subjects develop the ability to know when it is appropriate to be confrontational or empathetic in the classroom. For instance, Amar Nabhan, an Arab-American, said that much of his time in the classroom and on campus was spent trying to help students dispel myths about students of other groups. He also made efforts to find articles from non-mainstream media to help students and colleagues understand the Iraq war and more beyond stereotyping Arabs as terrorists. Given that many faculty may shy away from sharing political views or confronting those who may not know enough about other groups and ideas, Nabhan's encounters may offer alternative ways to handle such conflicts in a way that promotes knowing rather than benign ignorance.

However, Doug Erickson's experiences show that the ability to be critical and compassionate is important. Many students in community colleges have had their own experiences attempting to overcome adverse moments with teachers and other students prior to their attendance at the community college. Erickson's memories included having or knowing K-12 teachers who hit students and were frustrated and angry. In his interviews, he talked about seeing the community college environment as the opportunity to give students who felt disenfranchised but whom wanted to be there a fresh start. He also shared he was discouraged with a colleague from another community college who closed his classroom door at the moment class began, barring latecomers. Erickson said it was "common sense" to be compassionate with students who might be late to class or behind with assignments and pointed out that students may have had difficulty getting out

from work on time or getting a babysitter. So Erickson understands that the "practical" part of attending college is helping students learn the process of how to overcome adversity.

On the other hand, dealing with adversity also means that students need to be confronted on occasion. Roni Franson-Lewis said many faculty are afraid to confront fearful, angry students. Franson-Lewis's account, however, of her confrontation of Anna, a negative student upsetting members of her peer group, definitely made a difference. Although Anna's immediate response was negative, eventually, her performance in the classroom improved, so much so that Anna became one of the Program's most successful graduates. Erickson and Franson-Lewis both discussed their concerns about what it was like to share who they were with learners who may have been marginalized in previous experiences and need help figuring out how to bridge their past experiences and overcome the many barriers to present learning. The previous examples reflected in the narratives and data provided by the subjects shed some light on how community college faculty reach out to the diverse learning needs in the classroom. In addition to the need to understand the various paradigms shaping adult learners young and old, many in the classroom may have been emotionally damaged from their previous experiences (T'Kenye, 1998).

Believing

There are studies that point to the significance of helping faculty understand how their beliefs about how their students approach learning in a discipline affect the way the subject is taught (Karaagac, Kereem and Threlfall,

2005;Whelburg and Chadwick-Blossey, 2003). However, while there is considerable literature available on teacher beliefs in adult learning and the K-12 level, little work has been done in a focused way on community college faculty. Previous findings shared in this study show that there is a great deal on what *others* think about community college faculty, but less is available asking two-year teachers what they think other than some of the authors previously cited (Cain, 1999; Grubb, 2003; Seidman, 1986). Based on the responses of the participants here, in addition to beliefs about their colleagues, beliefs about their practice dominated interviews and were accompanied by exemplars expressing firm beliefs about the potential of their students, similar findings to the responses shared in Roueche, Milliron and Roueche's *Practical Magic* (2003).

Although some literature has pointed out that teachers tend to retain their previous beliefs about learning even in the face of new evidence or ideas (Taylor, 2002), perhaps in the case of the exemplars studied here, readers might see a way to form a useful bridge between prior beliefs and present learning. Subjects in the study appeared to use their experiences with adversity to communicate with students and colleagues. The participants demonstrated very strong beliefs about their students, their colleagues and their organizations. In addition to being pleased in having selected and attained full-time community college positions, they are also comfortable with the challenges presented by under prepared students.

In terms of their classrooms, despite the many concerns appearing in literature about students' abilities, preparedness, and the ever-expanding missions of community colleges, the exemplar faculty all expressed strong beliefs about student success. While

failure is always a concern, helping students succeed is not only an obligation, but remains the core of their work. Further, all of the participants expressed beliefs about remaining open to change rather than resisting it on the outset despite their exemplary status or experiences with students. They believed in trying multiple ways to reach students and listed many reasons why community colleges were great places to teach despite the continued pressures to do more.

In many cases, evidenced in the exemplars' stories in Chapter IV, their beliefs about who they were and what they learned translated into taking risks that others might not choose. These risks involved taking students and colleagues to the mat and in other instances served as clarifying experiences. Other times, as expected, there were occasions when exemplars frankly admitted moments, people, or choices failed or they chose to keep silent. In their interviews they brought up occasions where students they cared for dropped out, and relationships with colleagues became conflicted. None of them expressed burnout or complete discouragement. However, they were conscious that their practice involved situations with students and colleagues that required case-by-case, day-by-day choices. The following motifs of relating to students and colleagues examine the subjects' responses in more detail.

Students: Set the Bar High but Look and Listen to Them

As I pointed out in the introductory findings on exemplar beliefs, the views of the participants in my study parallel those of Milliron, Roueche and Roueche (2003) who also studied the underpinnings of excellence. Milliron et al., point out that the focus group of community college teachers they studied believed that students could do well and expectations needed to be high. Further, they said many of their participants

> ...turned the issue of belief in high expectations inward and argued that before faculty can expect the best of students, they have authentically to give their best...put forth the effort necessary to succeed, walk your talk, and model success strategies for students—or your high expectations will backfire. (2003, pp.37-38)

One might ask what kind of beliefs turn into actions necessary to create optimal conditions for student success. Exemplary faculty in this study indicated that coming to terms with their pasts as learners and sharing this with their students was one important factor in connecting with them. Another success strategy these participants used paralleled the modeling suggested by the previous findings of Milliron, Roueche and Roueche (2003). The data that emerged from my interviews also showed collaboration—teachers connecting with students to find out how to learn together. Again, the "to be" question comes into play. All of the subjects commented on sharing their biographies with their students and getting students to share their lives with them. These subjects show that great teachers not only models learning, but they also collaborate with students in the learning process. These collaborative efforts also revealed that the subjects spend

time paying attention to body language and listening to students as they struggled to understand assignments and tasks.

Brad Richards' story about helping his students understand and respond to a poem shows a teacher who is intent on hearing students' concerns and assuring them that the path to understanding their reading is to focus on what they *do* know. In another example he worries about the success of the female Muslim student he spoke softly to in a writing exercise, noting that she could be "crucified" in another class. While he tried to create optimum conditions for her success, she may be subject to any one of a number of negative "constellations" in a universe where stars rarely align.

On the other hand, Roni Franson-Lewis pointed out that obstacles to student achievement were not always insurmountable barriers. She believed that students who were not retained in the vet tech program and had to wait a year before returning could be encouraged to do better despite their failure. Further, by monitoring her students' learning styles and listening to their concerns about passing exams and learning lab applications, Franson-Lewis designed other learning opportunities. However, the main belief she expressed in terms of students' success is that she teaches both her students and her colleagues that by focusing on perseverance and quality, success is not just expected but attained. Amar Nabhan also kept the bar high. While he expressed that some students in the Honors Program may not be motivated to fill out applications or students in the Middle East class may not be responsive or keep up with the readings, he pays careful attention to what they do know and reconfigures assignments to encourage critical thinking and strengthening their skills.

Believing and Two-Year Colleagues

Given large teaching loads and other professional responsibilities, colleagues often lack the opportunity to talk with one another about their daily lives as people and teachers. Although K. Patricia Cross (1998) among others (Rouseff-Baker and Holm, 2004; Stewart, 2004) says that good practice is fostered by student-faculty contact in and out of the classroom, less attention is paid to creating innovative opportunities for faculty-faculty contact and collaboration outside of formal committee structures. The combination of little informal collegial communication and traditional agendas may lead to professional stagnancy. Cain (1999) found that as faculty aged and took on more institutional responsibilities they believed they were beleaguered by these tasks, so he asserted faculty were experiencing powerlessness as a result.

However, efforts to provide opportunities for two-year faculty and staff to share their beliefs about their work outside their organizations do exist and reflect some of the themes presented in this dissertation. Based on the work and assistance of Parker Palmer and the Fetzer Institute, for example, the Center for Formation in the Community College was developed (Staff and Organizational Development, 2003). The Center offers retreats designed to "...foster communities of the heart" and help faculty and staff explore the inner self, investigate their deeper learning, and foster their own growth and that of their community college (Center for Formation in the Community College, n.d.). "If we want to grow in our practice," Parker Palmer writes, "we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from who we can learn more about ourselves and our craft" (1998, p.141).

The exemplars' beliefs regarding their colleagues showed that greater access to the kind of community that Parker Palmer describes might be very helpful in creating mindful, energizing relationships between two-year faculty. For example, Ethan Jameson was concerned about polarizing comments made by faculty and administration regarding faculty evaluation and professional development; Doug Erickson regretted having to work with a colleague who avoided students in the technology lab by remarking that he was not there to "baby-sit"; Pam Nichols was concerned that colleagues assessing student portfolios showed more awareness of the reasons behind ESL student writing errors than mistakes made by African-American students. On the other hand, on the positive side, Ethan Jameson also said that he not only believed that his colleagues had not only different but completely viable ways of teaching and assessing the same math concepts and enjoyed learning from exchanges in department meetings and by sharing course materials with them. Other than her concern about teachers fearing confrontation with students, Roni Franson-Lewis was the only participant whose remarks about colleagues were all positive, perhaps because she develops and assesses the curriculum and the teaching, working with a fairly homogeneous group of people who are mostly graduates of that campus's program.

However, readers may also recall Brad Richards' discouraged view of faculty who had lost curiosity in their work or may have thought it beneath them to teach under-prepared students. Amar Nabhan also pointed out that he had heard colleagues talk about how difficult it was to teach "dumb" students. Other exemplars talked with me about colleagues who expressed disdain for teaching or participating in their organizations. As a researcher, I was concerned that while there was some informal dialogue between

faculty about teaching, there was little evidence of a mechanism that encouraged either such dialogue or collaboration in a sustained way. If faculty cannot talk regularly about what they believe, misunderstandings about one another's practice and growth may occur. This possibility may be one source of why improvements in teaching are difficult to achieve and perhaps measure. The exemplars I studied reported that they usually enjoyed opportunities to work with other faculty in collaborative projects, but those opportunities were rare.

Believing and Four Year Colleagues

In addition to a lack of opportunity for conversation between two-year colleagues, outside of the occasional professional conference or relationships made during graduate school, two- and four-year faculty rarely have the chance to share their teaching experiences. As a result, the beliefs of the community college exemplars here may reflect fewer on-going encounters than the preceding section on beliefs about their two-year colleagues. Given the increase in two plus two programs designed to make transfer issues more seamless for students, faculty from both sectors would benefit from dialogue about their teaching and the students they share (Tobolowsky, 1998). Both groups of faculty are also linked in that their pedagogical practice was generally developed on-the-job. In general, they are hired for their subject knowledge and in-service sessions, mentoring, and faculty evaluation may be the only types of learning experiences they may have had about how to teach. For example, graduate students have reported that they would like

more support for their teaching, but they were told that research was more valued (Nyquist et al., 1999).

Although two- and four-year faculty members have similar preparation in their graduate school subjects, perceptions about each other's work may change once they are hired at their respective colleges. Jameson's quotation at the beginning of his story in Chapter IV suggests that there may be some double messages involved when university faculty say "how nice" it is to teach in a community college, and that status remains an issue in some people's beliefs of the value of community colleges. Amar Nabhan expressed in his interviews that it was unlikely that faculty at prestigious universities and colleges paid attention to community colleges and expressed a preference as Director of his college's Honors Program for encouraging students to transfer to four year colleges with elite status.

In contrast, though, both Ethan Jameson and Doug Erickson pointed out in their interviews that they were not only comfortable teaching at the community college, they preferred it. Jameson's recount of being a college student also suggests that while the intellectual rigor of the Carnegie I research university may be valuable, the experiences Jameson had with excellent teachers had at least as large an effect. Erickson said in his interviews that he appreciated university faculty who related well with the students and wore jeans, among other characteristics. He also said that there were university faculty members who periodically hid from their teaching responsibilities in order to get publications, so he believed that university students did not always have access to good teaching.

Roni Franson-Lewis was the only participant who reported having university support for her teaching and professional growth after she began teaching at the community college. As her story shows in Chapter IV, Franson-Lewis claimed she was not a good teacher when she started at her community college and her learning trajectory ignited when she began her graduate program; so her teaching was informed by university colleagues. These kinds of responses indicate that conversations about good teaching should not just be on our campuses but across the higher education system. Not only might perceptions shift from encouraging more frequent dialogue about teaching, but both two- and four-year faculty may find new ways to collaborate. These kinds of possibilities might lead to interesting changes and improve student success and academic achievement in terms of the transfer process. Overall, however, the exemplars did not report having a great deal of contact or opportunities to collaborate with four-year colleagues even though their campuses, with the exception of one college, had four-year college extension programs on site.

Doing

> To teach is to engage as a person as well as a professional. Teaching is not a professional act divorced from the personal. That is not reality...I value being reflexive; I spend a lot of time thinking about my teaching, about my research, and about who I am and what I do and why I do what I do, and its impact...Doing is how I define my work. It has had a very

powerful impact on me as a person and, hopefully as a teacher. (Trapedo-Dworsky and Cole, 1999)

Ardra Cole's quotation here shows the difficulty of unraveling the relationship between teaching, research, doing, and the narrative the self tells about the work. Yet, it is also apparent that the recursive nature of the person and the work is expressed by the joy taken in the doing. Walker and Hale (1999) identify several competencies as part of the faculty skill set. In addition to listing elements such as pedagogical knowledge, class leadership and management skills, they point out that the skills exist in a context of autonomy: setting goals for themselves, being fully present in their institutions, and connecting to support. These factors make for a faculty member's well-being and vitality.

Choosing What They Do

The exemplars in this study demonstrated in their stories how important it is to energize themselves through their choices about doing and its connection to their practices, so Walker and Hale's (1999) version of the synergistic successful faculty member and his or her approach to work fits those studied here. The ability of great teachers to go the extra mile is a cliché, but the faculty in my study clearly do not rest on their laurels. All of the exemplars discussed several projects that demanded their attention in addition to preparing, presenting, and assessing material for classes. While most of them reported spending a great deal of time in conference with students and providing supplemental instruction or mentoring, none reported being burned out. Two of the six

were consistently publishing, three are directors or department chairs, and all of them work on projects with colleagues at their institutions. The projects range from interdisciplinary teaching and professional development to community charity projects, along with committees, union meetings and department initiatives.

In terms of making choices about work responsibilities and what needs doing, although community college contracts stipulate that additional duties are often required, these exemplar faculty members prefer to go beyond contractual responsibilities. Contrary to what some might think is the idealistic zeal of a "younger" hire, this group represents teachers who are not gung ho "newbies." Five of the six have taught full-time for twenty years or more. They are often tired but are never bored. Most made it clear they chose to take the initiative in creating projects connected to their practice by leading efforts to initiate student communities, designing study sessions and websites, bringing in speakers, or heading conferences. In terms of technology and new pedagogical approaches, they tended to be early adapters, but selective in terms of the tools they chose. For example, Pam Nichols revealed in her interviews that she does a great deal of work with learning styles, especially kinesthetic techniques to get students moving and involved with their learning, but she has not done much with integrating music in the classroom.

Brad Richards' story shows that as he moved from writing books to writing lab manuals and finally to online text associated with the changes going on with technology and composition pedagogy, he adapted his prose and the tools he chose to emerging technology. His new textbook for developmental writing includes software and online support through the publisher's website. Richards also goes to teachers' conferences to

give sessions sharing his pedagogical approach and of course, inviting conference participants to write with him. What do community college faculty have to do?

In his book *The Learning Paradigm College* (2003), John Tagg investigates some of the tensions evident in the shifts from colleges trying to move from an instruction model to one that focuses on accountability. Used to providing data about number of FTE's, computer labs and books in learning resources centers as a means to define and account for their existence to stakeholders, community colleges are asked to be something else, self-reflective and evaluative. They are also being asked to identify current gaps in service and to improve, arguably with fewer resources and more demands. Tagg says that he is hopeful this can be accomplished and offers evidence of community colleges that have taken positive steps in this direction. Overall, he believes that the things community college teachers ask students to do should be things that faculty must do first:

> Part of performance, as we are using the term here, is the attempt to bring tasks to completion. Is it possible to imagine not trying to finish a task if you are pursuing the task for or its own sake? We may not finish the important tasks we start. But it is never a part of our initial design to do only half of the envisioned job. We will drop tasks pursued for external rewards whenever the rewards disappear. How often do students go back and complete a partial paper or project after the grade is in? But if we are doing the task because we want to do it, we are doing it because we want to get it done, to finish it. Performance is the medium of action for doing what we choose rather than what we must. (2003, p. 163)

It may well be worth asking whether much of faculty performance or the tasks teachers do in and out of the classroom are based on activities and experiences that they have chosen or even created. Again, there is a consistent call and concern with the need for better teaching and pedagogical practices (Gillet-Karam, 1992). But in general, these demands are not supplemented by asking teachers about their experiences in the classroom and what resources they might like to develop in connection with those experiences (Murray, 2002), similar to the choices the exemplars made.

If community college stakeholders desire change in areas like professional development and student outcomes assessment, it might be helpful to consider new ways to stimulate conversations about how to do things differently. Further, those conversations might be improved by making it clear that new learning models will be implemented. Twombly and Townsend (2001) make it clear in their findings chapter on the future of community colleges that the stakes are high in terms of the public's expectations of two-year colleges. Leaders are grappling with a global economy, the need to educate an even more diverse population of learners and abilities, coupled with accountability concerns. Internally, then, the group charged with the enormous task of teaching and learning on a day-to-day-basis needs to be encouraged to put themselves and their practices at the center of the institutional mission.

In connection to the possibility of creating an environment for faculty-driven initiatives, the exemplars in this study reflect many of the techniques listed in research on effective teaching. However, what they do and the kinds of choices they make often occur independently and the opportunity for teachers to share their practice with colleagues may be diminished due to other responsibilities. Further, although the topic

needs to be explored further, there are some disengaged, crabby faculty out there, just as there are students. Colleagues who may have heard about "great" teachers on campus may assume the activities of their energized colleagues and students to popularity or grade inflation elements, which were not evident in my exemplars' interviews and correlate to the findings of Roueche, Milliron and Roueche (2003). For example, one colleague from another state told me at a national conference on teaching and learning that he was relieved to be at a session with a group of community college teachers who were excited about teaching and their classrooms instead of complaining all the time.

There are several components of good teaching evidenced in the participants' stories, but their narratives show how important it is to learn about the teacher who implements the tools and tasks. In-class writing, scaffolding academic skills into smaller pieces, providing examples of how learning is used in other contexts, using technology and critical thinking to provide students with opportunities to apply what they are learning in school with how this knowledge will serve them in other contexts, are pedagogical elements appearing in research and in the participants' stories. However, as Bain (2004) points out, an obstacle to understanding what leads to good teaching is the idea that it is a matter of technique, or that there is a "best way" to teach. Again, an emphasis on accentuating the high of teaching without the lows may also cast an unrealistic view of teaching and we may think "great" teachers get "great" results all the time. This may be another reason why we need to learn more about exemplars and ways they think about teaching.

Further, when stakeholders talk about good teaching, several areas of knowledge become apparent: knowing the college and curriculum, knowing the students and what

impacts their learning, and knowing how to plan, present and assess the course being taught (Stewart, 2004). This is in addition to one's knowledge of a subject area. Reviewing this list shows the complexity of doing. While the components can be defined and explained, what good teaching looks like is better understood in the context of seeing good teachers in the act of synergizing the tools, tasks, techniques, and knowledge of the subject and student. Readers should then see that exemplars have much to offer in terms of providing a richer picture.

Doing More

The exemplars studied here show that their practice is based on continuous, persistent attention to their own growth and that of their students. Although there is no single reason why each exemplar decided to "go the extra mile," their interviews show that they do and as Tagg (2003) noted, their efforts may rest on the intrinsic value element provided in his quotation. One reason for the growth in the exemplars' practice pointed out earlier in the chapter may be that they all remained connected to who they were as students, perhaps strengthening their relationships in their own classrooms. That version of their narratives remains in their minds and is expressed through their beliefs about their students, colleagues and organizations. The narratives showed that as they need to adapt and grow as teachers, they implement the tools and harness the persistence they developed as learners. And to borrow from Tagg's previous work with Robert Barr (1999), as we continue to appreciate the notion of the paradigm shift between teaching to learning, or embrace O'Banion's (2003) belief that a dichotomy between the two does not

exist, we can see how the iterative nature of being, believing and doing is a recursive process, not a step back to having to learn it all over again.

One exemplar who under other conditions might appear "forced" to improve performance was Doug Erickson, the CAD instructor. Technology continues to change so rapidly that Erickson talked of still burning the midnight oil to learn a new software program or have an application ready to share with his students. Yet, he also remarked often about how exciting it was to see the developments and how it made his work interesting. His attitude in interviews reflected the excitement of possibility rather than the pain of overwork. It is also clear from his interviews that Erickson, while disillusioned from high school teaching and working in the private sector, is not "hiding out" in the community college, nor is he waiting for the money tree to magically appear. Erickson works aggressively with the local companies to access resources whether they are donations of technology or willingness to use student interns. As a result, he has been able to influence perceptions of his college and program positively despite competition from two universities in the immediate area.

Another faculty member "forced" to do more is Roni Franson-Lewis. While her story shares a great deal of information about student success, part of that motivation, both in Franson-Lewis and her students is externally driven, like Doug Erickson's work. The veterinary technician program on her campus existed for quite a while, but its low rankings affected student achievement and the program's reputation. By aligning faculty, student, and program performance outcomes to the professional testing measures, outcomes improved. It is apparent from her story that Franson-Lewis works hard to adapt

instruction to meet these outcomes, and she has seen the rewards of these efforts in terms of accreditation and assessment of her program.

Doing More Step-by-Step to Meet the Needs of the Under-Prepared

Exemplars in the study talked about ways to manage and perform their teaching tasks by using techniques that supported or served as scaffolds for what students had to know to succeed in the class. In her chapter on "Helping Students Learn" (1993), Barbara Davis advises teachers to prepare students to connect what they know to new information in the course. She points out that not only do students learn differently, need different amounts of learning time and develop cognitively at their own pace, activities and assignments can be organized in ways that promote independent learning and critical thinking.

Another exemplar committed to improving his practice and providing scaffolding opportunities is Aram Nabhan. In our interviews he often expressed how frustrated he was during his own search for an appropriate academic community with a strong reputation. As a student, Nabhan was just expected to figure out his learning opportunities for himself. As a result, he expressed a sincere interest in serving students who may have been marginalized by their culture, ethnicity, or class. Both his Directorship of the Honors Program and his class in Middle Eastern studies were organized in ways to circumvent the barriers he faced himself.

For example, students needing assistance with bureaucratic hoops of applying for scholarships not only receive guidance from him on campus, but he sends out email

explaining how to work through the many steps in the process and encourages students to get his assistance in reviewing applications. Many of them have not set foot outside a fifty mile radius of their home, so not only is attending their local community college frightening, but the idea of transferring to a university far from their home often seems impossible. The choice of tasks connected to making college dreams come true reflected in Nabhan's story, makes it clear that trying to improve his practice continues to be based on working with students from where they are rather than disparaging their lack of preparation. Of the six exemplars, Nabhan believed that student success is realistically best served by high status colleges and he makes considerable effort to help students transfer to these institutions and reap the same benefits as he did.

Nabhan's interviews showed that he wanted students to be enfranchised rather than marginalized by these high status schools and in the community classroom. In terms of his practice, Nabhan's comments focused on the persistent theme that students have the right to know, under-prepared or not. He continually looked for new ideas and methods of presenting difficult ideas and creating the opportunity for dialogue rather than accepting that students have nothing of value to say because of what they do not know. Students were encouraged to ask questions about the phrasing of tests, how and why ideas were presented in class, and how their personal experiences with the people and ideas of the Middle East related to course material. On the other hand, Nabhan designs the course to keep students reading and thinking throughout. They do not always know, for instance, how much of the assigned reading and how much of the lecture material will be on a quiz or test.

Pam Nichols also modeled some developmental scaffolding techniques designed to help her students not only write successfully in her course, but read, study, and take notes in preparation for writing assignments. Since she pointed out that many of her students had not read an entire book before attending her class, Nichols developed small goals and tasks to help "break it down for them," a phrase she used often. She helps them time how long it takes to read a page and calculate the actual time they need to read a chapter. She told me that she helps students organize folders with their course material and schedules so they can keep up. In addition to showing them how to take notes, she writes out the notes from class discussion and goes over them with the students and asks if ideas need to be added as a way to model how the notes from class sessions connect to themes and ideas for assignments. Nichols also designs word games so students can apply the new words they are learning from their books. She says that these activities have led to better retention in her classes and that the concepts stay with students longer.

Themes Conclusion

The recursive process of being, believing, and doing in regard to community college teaching is difficult to understand in terms of separating their layers. "What makes teaching in a community college complex," Starr (1994) writes, "is that a teacher's role is dynamic, not fixed. It must constantly be adapted to reflect changes in the students and the society" (p.174). The exemplars contributing to this dissertation showed numerous ways this statement will continue to resonate with community college faculty. Furthermore, these participants' stories provide authentic contexts for understanding how

great teaching must be achieved through paying attention to the ways that teachers daily make meaning of being, believing and doing.

Implications

The following section on implications for further research and practice offers a bridge connecting the stories of the exemplars designed to offer stakeholders ways to think about the relationship between excellent teachers and how their stories can be implemented to further inform our notions of teaching excellence and the community college. While I realize the notion of understanding and supporting exemplary teaching practice on each campus may sound idealistic, community colleges might want to consider how all faculty could truly serve, enhance, and perpetuate the heart of the teaching mission. Furthermore, while it is important to call for improved teaching and accountability, we might also want to add we are a movement of *teachers* connecting ourselves in a purposeful way to our practice and the needs of our colleges. Mandates, initiatives and suggestions for how to make them happen are abundant. However, the exemplars studied here remind us that the stories of how teachers help students achieve their college dreams also have resonance.

The changes necessary for excellence require difficult paradigmatic shifts. In his article, "The Case Against Teaching," Larry Spence (2001) argues that changes needing to be made to teaching are difficult, "Because parents, reporters, citizens, children, politicians, and professional educators share an unshakeable image of what teachers and students are supposed to do" (n.p.) His arguments deflate concepts of teaching and

traditional improvements, suggesting that teachers need to create new models of learning experiences. While the faculty described in this dissertation teach traditional and on-line sections of courses, their approaches to working with students and different modalities begin to show the importance of who excellent faculty are, what they believe about their work with students and colleagues, and how they do it well on a continuous basis and create such models.

Being

> Usually the teachers who have the most to say about what could be changed are on the line working in five to six sections a week with from 120 to 150 students back to back on MWF with a tremendous responsibility and pressure to get things done...Most colleges function under a major cultural flaw in the way that we work with people and students; many professionals have not reclaimed who we are as people. We basically screen each other out from real, fundamental communication. (Elsner, cited in Schett, 1997, p.21)

There it is again: "reclaiming who we are." A great deal of the content in this chapter concerns analysis of the exemplars' stories and offers some elements attempting to shape potential meanings from those stories. However, it is also useful to consider what community college stakeholders can do because we are never far from considering these interpretations in terms of what I have called the "to be" question. I propose that

those interested in community colleges think about what it might mean if we said we were interested in creating ways to be exemplary, despite the continual stress of being so many things to so many constituencies. This proposal means that I am not suggesting "pretty good," or "more effective." These phrases allow for amelioration and may obscure what we connote as excellent. O'Banion (2003) states that, "At the core of their being, however, every faculty member in a community college wants to be a better teacher (p.4)". Community colleges are being asked to be more evaluative and productive learning organizations (Beno, 2004; Burke and Minassians, 2004), but it may take considerable effort, patience, and a willingness to participate in understanding who we are so we can figure out how to bring out the best in ourselves. Then we may be able to actively work together, strengthening the connections between good teaching and encouraging teachers.

Consequently, an immediate implication grounded in the research here would be to integrate exemplars more fully into the daily lives of everyone on their campuses. Institutions may want to see if their best faculty, for example, are directly involved in innovative campus efforts like cross-disciplinary projects, learning communities, writing across the curriculum, institutional assessment, or online courses. Informal opportunities might include guest appearances in each other's classes or opportunities to shadow in non-teaching areas. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the participants not only have reputations for saying yes to many innovative activities, both formal and informal, but reported that they enjoyed those opportunities even though those possibilities were infrequent.

Another issue connected to communication concerns the lack of dialogue and the perceptions exemplars had about their colleagues. For example, the participants seemed somewhat surprised and pleased to have been nominated by their campus leaders as exemplars. While they all had received previous honors, they did not refer to ways of seeing their impact on campus as excellent teachers in their interviews. They all had assumed many tasks and roles on and off their campuses, but they shrugged off the notion of how who they are impacts their academic and professional culture. Although no one admires a puffed chest, I wonder if there is a tendency that teaching excellence may be overshadowed by the challenges presented to the community college.

Even so, it seems peculiar that community colleges are valued for teaching students who could not attend elsewhere but have not found better ways of learning from the excellent teachers who play an important part in this mission. While emphasizing student learning and outcomes is a meaningful way to redirect curricula and measure quality, focusing on the identities of excellent teachers on a campus might be a useful way to connect teachers to the community; given that there are negative stereotypes associated with community colleges, increasing the visibility of these faculty may improve some of these perceptions. In terms of the value of their narratives, a recent article (Martinez, 2006) noted that while colleges need to get the word out to their communities about new initiatives, student success stories are still one of the most important ways communicate the value of community colleges. Many community college websites and newsletters highlight this feature and promote their graduates and the contributions they make to where they live and work. In order to link teaching and

learning with student success, colleges might also consider sharing the stories and work of their best teachers.

To illustrate, three of the six exemplars included here attended community college and explained how their years as a two-year student shaped them. In the narratives I shared in Chapter IV, it is easy to see how the exemplar's story might be a useful one to share with the public. Another possibility, especially given the rise of two plus two programs mentioned previously, teacher education programs, and high school dual-enrollment/middle college or tech prep tracks of students at community colleges (Woullard and Coats, 2004) might be to provide opportunities that allow exemplars to visit or speak with these groups on a more consistent basis than the occasional pilot project. In this study, the projects and experiences discussed by participants were rarely visible to the public and even the student body at large, with the exception of Doug Erickson who works often with area companies, and Roni Franson-Lewis, who has professional affiliations and performs community service with her students. For example, Pam Nichols' students rave about her, but others might benefit from meeting her.

Even though all campuses have great teachers, they may benefit by increasing involvement of exemplars with teaching and learning initiatives on their campuses. It would be a loss to deprive others of a chance to share ideas or learn from exemplars about community college teaching the way I did during my research. Campus exemplars, along with their colleagues may also not be included on hiring committees, given opportunity to help develop questions for the interview process or be asked to evaluate candidates (Grubb, 1999; Twombly, 2004) in terms of their teaching and learning practices. In this study, all of the exemplars attended or assisted with professional

development on their campus, but few reported the opportunity to help develop these activities or participate in debriefing or other sessions geared toward collegial communication. Roni Franson-Lewis, who served as the Director of the Veterinary Technician program, Ethan Jameson, who served as an Interim Dean and Department Chair, and Doug Erickson played key roles in the advancement of faculty and student learning and hiring on campus, but Jameson and Erickson both said they faced organizational constraints.

Lewis, who had the most control of a program's content, faculty, and policies not only seemed the most satisfied during her interviews, but having been empowered to make changes, had measurable improvement in student outcomes. Given that professional development programs have been subject to question (Ford, 1999) and their overall value debated, some might agree that change would be beneficial. This issue poses a conundrum. Do colleges really want excellent teaching? One problem with changing professional development and hiring practices may be tradition. Teasdale's (2001) recent study described the history of professional development on her community college campus over a forty year period, noting that professional development was offered because it carried on traditional values of the college. It was offered as yearly in-service because it promoted social contact, met the requirements of accrediting agencies and reflected a positive image to the community. However, the way the sessions were offered had not changed much in that time span. Teasdale's suggestion for improvement in this case is one that appears often: aligning faculty goals with the mission of the college (J. Palmer, 1994). What results might a community college expect, however, if it

aligned *its* teaching mission directly to its best teachers and requested their assistance? In other words, what if decision-makers connected the mission to "being" through its best?

If this approach was used to develop teachers, align curriculum, and establish policies suitable to learning, it makes sense to start by asking the teachers who are exemplars how to form these connections. The subjects for this study did not seem to mind attending professional development sessions, but it was clear that they made their own choices about how they wanted to develop their practice as evidenced by the initiatives reflected in their stories. Most actively attended conferences and awareness of current techniques and innovations in technology were important elements of their work. In their interviews, it was also clear that the sense of who they were on their campuses and their interests in professional growth had little connection to these kinds of programs or even perceptions of their campus; such responses might correspond to the isolationism and fragmentation reported earlier. Further, in light of their exemplar colleagues, there may be faculty functioning as "lone rangers" on their campuses, isolated from teachers in other disciplines without adequate access to new pedagogies. However, in terms of this study, community college campuses of all sizes, from all places, have "best" teachers who took the initiative and figured out ways to improve their practice. These exemplars, and others, could serve as valuable colleagues and campus leaders of teaching and learning.

The Lack of Shared Beliefs

While it is not difficult to find convergent themes about the issues facing community colleges, finding out what faculty think about them, how they have come to believe about their community colleges, and sharing beliefs about teaching with colleagues is another. Although most faculty may be connected to their environments by technology, or debating campus issues in governance meetings, these forms of communicating are only some of the ways they can share what they believe about their jobs, their students, their colleagues and their institutions. Based on some of the reactions expressed by the exemplars in their interviews, teachers need even more venues to explore their beliefs about their work and what it means to teach at a community college. What evidence we have in the literature often reflects faculty members' contradictory notions of their organizations as the preface of W. Norton Grubb's *Honored But Invisible* (1999) points out in two quotations offered by faculty:

> We have a tradition that is honored, I suppose as much in the breach as not, but we do have a tradition as seeing ourselves as the teaching college...But I think, that at least, the tradition is there and it can be called upon when the occasion warrants.

> Community colleges are invisible, right? I mean, many people don't see community colleges. They're not institutions like the university; they're looked on as kind of very low-status. Teachers in community colleges...really need to think how they feel about being at a non-

> prestigious institution where many of the students are under prepared. They're going to have to think about why they chose that piece of the vineyard. (Grubb, preface, n.p. 1999)

These quotations offer two beliefs of what community colleges are and of course, the way they are valued. The first quotation is offered by an English instructor, the second by a remedial/developmental instructor. The two beliefs are contradictory portraits. One offers the "noble tradition" of teaching, despite negative circumstances, in some kind of amorphous "carrying the torch" kind of way. The other view is that of a teacher who on some level is guilty of low self-esteem and needs to examine his or her "true" motives for teaching at of the community college. Given the enormous variety of two year colleges, there are probably many more ways community college faculty express their beliefs about what it means to teach there. Interviews with my study's exemplars showed that they were aware that others had negative beliefs about the value of community colleges and the quality of education. Yet, the exemplars' beliefs about their organizations, students, and colleagues showed that honored or invisible characterizations were just that—ways of expressing beliefs. While these beliefs become part of the value assigned to community colleges, I think it is also important to remember the beliefs exemplars shared about what mattered to them. Status was only a concern for faculty engaged in improving the reputation of their programs like Franson-Lewis and Nabhan. They were not interested in the status of their institutions, but they did care about how well their programs worked to help students succeed. Interviews with the others and their narratives show that the beliefs that mattered most to all of them focused on students. Given that Grubb and others (Eaton, 1994; McGrath and Spear, 1991) have

charged community colleges with a failure in this regard, exemplars may reveal a key for understanding what faculty mean when they say they teach. Exemplars cited learning opportunities, conferences, communication in the classroom, funding for tools, technology and other forms of support revolved around their primary belief in serving under-prepared students and the teaching mission.

Doing Exemplary Work

The faculty participating in this study showed how their choices to say yes to many opportunities added to their professional growth and teaching repertoire and they reported being energized and wanting to learn more as a result. However, while they said they were concerned about times when a class did not go well or a class of students who were difficult to work with, none of them said they were focused on teaching well because they were mainly concerned about evaluation or improving their skills *per se.* Instead, all of exemplars expressed concern about the same issue mentioned earlier: whether or not their students were learning. All reported adding to their repertoire elements that they thought would help students understand their courses and learn better; their efforts were consistently connected to figuring out how to reach students most effectively. Although research is reported about the importance of documenting student outcomes (Beno, 2004; Serban, 2004), little has been suggested about the ways assessing faculty performance in the community college might change if at least some of the criteria focused on helping all teachers share best practices.

If the examples provided by the exemplars are any indication, excellent teaching, as opposed to effective or pretty good might require stakeholders to embrace change instead of just talking about it. While Cain (1999) suggested the need to empower faculty in terms of the teaching mission, I think it would also be useful to ask teachers with strong teaching records to assist more directly in the matter of formulating new questions about ways learning takes place. These teachers might also lead opportunities for observing, describing, and creating possibilities for experimentation with exemplary practices. If O'Banion's (2003) statement is true that all community college faculty want to be better teachers, providing formal and informal opportunities for the best teachers on campus to create collegial experiences for learning might have a synergetic, even transformative effect. O'Banion states in the same article (2003) that champions of innovation are disconnected from one another and their efforts need to be channeled into a unified force.

Another consideration about what excellent teachers reveal about their practice is the interest in changing the role of the teacher to that of a learning facilitator. Despite the jargon associated with this phrase, Krakauer (2005) says that the shift in paradigms from teaching to learning means that instructors will become more of a coach and inventor: "A learning facilitator must have excellent interpersonal skills to relate to individual learners, design curricula to maximize learning, understand the learning process and evaluate to what degree a student's learning outcomes have been achieved" (p.189). There is evidence that when faculty are adequately supported and empowered, shifts like these can occur. This is certainly the case for Franson-Lewis and improvements made to the vet tech program and Brad Richards' on-line, textbook and writing seminar designs.

Conclusion: Creating an Exemplary Culture

The thing always happens that you really believe in and the belief in a thing makes it happen. Frank Lloyd Wright

Most people are fascinated by excellence, but fearful and critical of it, too. Sometimes we even sabotage our own attempts to improve by cheating on our diets or not finishing a project on time or at all. We have a lot of complaints about *being*: we are overscheduled, stressed, and hopelessly imperfect. In terms of *beliefs*, we sometimes hang on to our failures and forget our successes, less mindful that the heart of one's teaching practice yields an interplay of the multiple meanings and interpretations of events. Perhaps in light of increased missions and doing more with less we believe excellence should be left to someone else. However, it might be useful to use the stories of exemplars as ways to make sense of teaching and learning and devise models and practices that are appropriately fit for community college professionals. The main components might look like these brief findings from the exemplars in my study:

1. Excellent teachers remember their experiences as learners and use their experiences connect with their students.
2. Excellent teachers are comfortable with taking a lot of time to learn something new and stick with it.
3. Excellent teachers take risks and come to terms with failure when they have to.
4. Excellent teachers create projects they value and enjoy being busy.

5. Excellent teachers pay attention to new pedagogy and technology, but choose carefully depending on what is valuable to their practice.
6. Excellent teachers resist others' definitions of who they are and what they do
7. Excellent teachers appreciate who they work with and what they do.

This list is far from exhaustive and looks very much like Pratt's (1998) description of traits of what he calls the Master Practioners (p.93-4). Much more needs to be done to understand how exemplary teaching comes about and its variances in the classroom. While the narratives studied here cannot and should not be reduced to a list of elements like this, all faculty might respond to the positive sense of excellence and feel encouraged to take the kind of risks an exemplary practice and culture require.

Howard Gardner, in *Changing Minds* (2004) posits that it is not always necessary or desirable to change one's mind, but those juggling to achieve a balance of happiness and ethics these days might consider what Gardner calls "goodwork." The test of whether one is a "goodworker" involves what he calls mission, model, and mirror tests. The mission includes considering whether one's work is consistent with one's principles, modeling includes connecting with those who represent one's ideal, and the mirror test is the one we all face and question—the consistency between one's self with one's life and work. In essence, Gardner suggests that mental revision requires altering the mind's content and our representations. To do so, we need to be reflective and that requires a

great deal of time and effort. Teachers who are encouraged and empowered to share their practice in transformative connective settings could help us engage in these tasks.

A great deal of research is devoted to a lack of excellent teaching rather than paying attention to good teachers and what they could contribute to creating an exemplary culture on their campuses. The absence of literature in this regard cannot be replaced or replicated by endless lists of teaching techniques. What the exemplars in this study demonstrated was that they were ok about themselves and their practices in these unpredictable places. None of them spoke to issues of status or working under the kind of conditions depicted as marginal. They were not shadow figures in second best organizations or advanced high school teachers. All of them had made a clear choice to be at their community college.

Over the course of this project, I have come to think a great deal about my responsibility as a community college professional and have come to believe that if faculty do not actively write their stories, they will be written about, and their silence *will* define them. While expanding the boundaries of community college research should be imperative, faculty have a hard time connecting with each other. Students and committee responsibilities remain the priority. For example, in our most recent telephone conversation, Stephens, the exemplar presented in the first two chapters of this dissertation, retired shortly after his interviews took place. Despite decades of presentations, awards, seminars, and mentorship, not to mention his reputation as an excellent teacher, the many experiences and his professional development throughout his career have not been documented other than in this dissertation. More needs to be done to capture the everyday lived experiences of all community college teachers.

Finally, the context of what it means to teach in the community college environment might benefit from further attention, especially in light of the changes many hope are or will take place. There remains the occasional yet persistent view that community colleges are a poor cousin to their four-year counterparts, inhabited by those faculty who could not hack it in the "real world," or lacked the credentials or the scholarly talent to teach in a "real college." Sometimes that perception attains ascendancy. For example, when I began the research for this dissertation, a community college faculty member from another campus told me that she thought many faculty would not want to read about exemplars as this identity did not relate to them. I jokingly said that perhaps I should research "shitty teachers," because like the community college exemplar whose reputation is usually well known by students and colleagues, those teachers are well-known, too. This reveals only a small piece of the polemics of community college teaching, but in some ways faculty mirror the marginalization that goes on with community colleges. And if we do not begin to talk about the complexities of our work more openly, we will keep being written about, often in a light that is not very positive. The critically reflective process (Brookfield, 1995) happens when teachers discover and examine their assumptions by viewing their practice. I believe that we are constantly influenced by the beliefs and teaching of our colleagues and in the long run, our commitment and willingness to grow will outlast our frustrations.

As the interest in community colleges and the role they play in shaping society's future continues to grow, so will the many concerns stakeholders have brought to the higher education table. However, if we are interested in improving community college teaching, there is a worthwhile relationship between the

exemplars represented in this study and thinking about how to achieve the standard of excellence we often hear about. By asking excellent community college faculty about their lives and practice, we may do a better job of elevating the role of community colleges and effectuating excellent teaching rather than explaining why we need it.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

You have been recognized for your excellence as a community college teacher. What does it mean to be an exemplar in the community college? How do you see yourself in this capacity? How does your reputation as an exemplar play out in your professional relationships in and out of the classroom?

Who was your best teacher and why?

How did you develop your teaching methods? Have they changed a great deal? Why or why not?

We hear a great deal about the need for passion in teaching and one's subject. How did you become engaged with your subject matter and how do you translate this in the community college setting?

When describing his take on teaching, one NISOD exemplar told me, "We struggle from the time we begin with doing this kind of work and basically have to teach ourselves how to do it. It's a mysterious process and if I can help demystify it, I would be happy to help you try." What kind of preparation did you have for teaching at a community college? What did you have to teach yourself? What are you still learning? What are the biggest advantages to teaching in the community college? What are the biggest obstacles?

Stephen Brookfield, the author of becoming a *Critically Reflective Teacher,* says that it's necessary for a teacher's survival to have a core set of beliefs about what he or she does to guide his or her teaching in and out of the classroom. How have you developed your philosophy about what you do?

How do you deal with failure?

Tell me about a couple of your greatest successes or most rewarding experiences with students. What were the key factors in these outcomes and what made them so memorable to you?

Why do you think some people have a negative perception of community colleges and say things like they are extensions of high school and aren't "real colleges"? Do you see these perceptions affecting the culture or daily life of your campus or classroom? If so, how? If not, why not?

How do you attend to the diverse learning needs in your classroom? What do you do, for example, when you see that a student lacks the basic academic skills to survive in your class?

What do you think community colleges and faculty need to do to meet the increasing demands to retain students? What do you do to retain students in your classes?

APPENDIX B

Prospective Participant Letter

Dear Prospective Participant:

Thank you for your interest in my proposed study, "Experiences of the Excellent: A Study of Community College Faculty and Ways They Think About Their Teaching." This research is designed to be an in-depth exploration of how six exemplary instructors make sense of their work as teachers in the community college setting and the stories they have to tell about this process. Through interviews with the participants, I hope to learn more about the teaching lives of excellent community college faculty and share some of your themes.

This letter is to inform you further about the research being conducted so that you are aware of the process involved, what you are being asked to do, your rights as a participant, and additional sources of information about your role provided by Michigan State University's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). At the end of this letter, on page three, you will be asked to sign and date a consent form to indicate you are willing to participate.

***If* you choose to participate:**

- **The data I gather will be kept in the strictest confidence.** You and your institution will not be identified in any research findings and will be referred to using pseudonyms. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum allowable by law.
- **Your participation is completely voluntary**. You ***may refuse*** to participate now ***or at any time*** during the research or refuse to answer questions during interviews.
- **You agree to be interviewed two or three times by audio tape only.** You will be provided with some questions to think about ahead of time and your input will be welcomed throughout the interview process. Each interview should take about two hours. You are free to decline to participate in any or all parts of the interview or withdraw from the study without penalty. You are also free to end the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions. You may also request that the audio-recorder be turned off at any time or for any length of time during your interviews. You will have the chance to review the transcripts. However, since your identity and that of your institution are confidential and are both referred to by pseudonyms, you will not be able to exclude the data you do provide. Although I am required to keep your consent forms on file for three years, the tapes will be returned to you as soon as the dissertation is accepted.

I am very excited to conduct this study and hope you agree to participate. If you need additional information, you should consult Michigan State University's website,

www.humanresearch.msu.edu. This site provides an overview of research policies and also provides further contact information. Should you have concerns about the research that you cannot share with me, you are requested to contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board:

Peter Vasilenko, PhD
202 Olds Hall, Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1047

Phone 517-355-2180
Fax 517-432-4503
E-Mail UCRIHS@msu.edu

My contact information is:

Suzanne Moore
Communications, St. Clair County Community College
323 Erie Street, Port Huron, MI 48060-5015

Phone 810-989-5590
Fax 810-984-4730
E-Mail smoore@sc4.edu

Thank you! I hope you will decide to participate. The consent form is on the next page.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Moore,
Graduate Student, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)
Michigan State University

Consent Form

Your signature below indicates you have read the letter regarding your participation and your voluntary agreement to participate in Suzanne Moore's study, "Experiences of the Excellent: A Study of Community College Faculty and Ways They Think About Their Teaching." Your signature below also indicates you agree to have the interviews audio-recorded as described above.

Signature of the Participant_____

Date _____

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